

BACKSTAGE

Laughing Matters

October 08, 2004

They're Baaack!

By Amelia David

Fall brings a number of great comedy shows back from their well-deserved hibernations. "Eating It" at NYC's Luna Lounge, thankfully, is back Monday nights at 8:30 pm. While the show's title is a phrase that comics use meaning to bomb onstage, you'll find that these performances instead are "the bomb" and feature the best stand-ups, storytellers, writers, and sketch players in lineups comprising an eclectic mix of established comics and newcomers. The show is produced by Naomi Steinberg and Jeff Singer, who are two of the wisest sets of eyes in the business when it comes to casting, producing, and packaging comedy talent. (So I hope you've made sure they know about you!) I often look to their lineups to keep me informed. I'm always very excited when comics let me know they've made it into "Eating It," and it's a great goal for you to focus on, even if you're new to the comedy trenches. In any case, it's a show you should see. Admission is \$8 (which includes one free drink) and it's an amazing bargain for the lineups they offer. You can go to www.eatingit.com for the full scoop. There's a mailing list you should join, no matter how much you're trying to de-clutter your email.

Speaking of exciting news, a number of my Back Stage top 10 comedy picks will be featured on the new season of Comedy Central's "Premium Blend." Jon Fisch, who recently scored major points at the Just for Laughs comedy festival in Montreal, has completed his taping, and the hardworking producer-performers of NYC's "Sweet Paprika," Ophira Eisenberg and Allison Castillo, also just taped their segments. "Sweet Paprika," at NYC's Village Lantern at 8:30 pm, is as sassy as the spice it's named for and a great yet inexpensive (\$5) way to start your Friday. Recently featured at SP was a "Premium Blend" warm-up party, where all the performers worked material they were about to tape for Comedy Central. SP also consistently

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has great lineups; if you don't know the venue, it's a great atmosphere for comedy. Guest host for the warm-up party was another Back Stage top 10 alum, Christian Finnegan, whom you've also seen featured on Comedy Central and a number of hot TV and live shows lately. I was also pleased to see Debbie Shea in the lineup. Her wonderfully dry, deadpan wit showed so much promise early in her career when I booked her at the Duplex, and it's great that she's now been chosen to appear on "Premium Blend."

The "Ladies of Laughter" search held its fourth annual gala finals at the newly opened New York Improv comedy club in Midtown (www.nyimprov.com) and I was proud to be one of the judges. Producer Peggy Boyce does a great job of generating interest and future bookings for some of the best new and professional comediennees on the circuit, and this year was no exception. They gave away \$10,000 in cash prizes and club bookings, so if you shy away from judged contests because you don't think professionals enter them or there's no money involved, think again. You missed out on being seen by judges Aaron Rothman (director of development at Comedy Central), Lesley Mallgrave (vice president of casting and talent development, Oxygen Network), plus the owner of the Improv himself, Al Martin. I also use judging contests as a great way to spot new and noteworthy talent, and while I was there, I saw a real find: Dena Blizzard, winner of the new (amateur) comedienne division. This mom of three had us all doubled over with laughter as she did parody yoga poses created to tell her husband and kids just what she thinks of them. I think she has a very bright future ahead.

Winning the professional division, this column's favorite soccer mom and Back Stage top 10 alum Jane Condon had one of her best sets ever. She had the audience from "hello" and owned the room for her entire set. Later, as we judges chatted, we all agreed that the popularity of NBC's "Last Comic Standing" was bringing more TV audiences to clubs—and especially live contests. So take a tip and don't be so quick to rule out entering one if you get the chance.

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That mouthful of mirth, "Giant Tuesday Night of Amazing Inventions and Also There Is a Game," has also returned, showcasing NYC's best stand-up, sketch, character, and musical comedy (and, yes, there really is a game). The show is the creation of international pseudostar Francisco Guglioni, himself the creation of NYC comedian and Back Stage top 10 pick Andres du Bouchet. In Boliviaguay, Francisco has received the Entertainer of the Year Award a record six times (no small feat considering that Boliviaguay is an extravaganzocracy, where virtually every citizen is the host of his or her own show). This madness runs Tuesdays at 8 pm for \$5 (another bargain) at Under St. Marks (between First Avenue and Avenue A—check www.andresdubouchet.com for lineups). You can also catch du Bouchet Fridays till Oct. 15 in "Olsen, du Bouchet & Maher—3 Comedy Shows Under 1 Roof." The show is written and performed by Bryan Olsen, Kevin Maher, and de Bouchet at NYC's Juvie Hall at 10 pm (24 Bond St., between Bowery and Lafayette). This is a show du Bouchet tells me he's especially proud of, and since I so admire his work, I'm looking forward to seeing these two other performers he's chosen to work with. As I've often written here, some of my best info for finding new comics is from performers I already admire—hey, that's also how comedy bookers discover many of their venues' new finds, so I hope you're making sure your peers get to know your work.

The New York Underground Comedy Festival, which they tell me is NYC's "biggest comedy festival"—featuring 40 venues, 100 events, and 10 industry seminars—is on this week through Oct. 10, for its second year. The NYCUCF is especially unique because it involves shows in all five boroughs. The festival features a stellar list of comedy all-stars, including Back Stage top 10 alum DC Benny, Wendy Spero, Keith Price, and Back Stage Bistro Award winner and "Last Comic Standing" finalist Cory Kahaney. There's also a show nightly from Eddie Brill, who, besides being a favorite of this column, also casts the comics for CBS's "Late Show With David Letterman." You can find out more at www.nycundergroundcomedy.com.