



Dave Reuben, Publisher of The Comedy Green Room

STAGE TIME chats with Dave Reuben, publisher of the top international comedy guide. The Comedy Green Room about building a resource for comedians and the impact of Internet fame on comedy.

What is the inspiration behind the Comedy Green Room?

When I launched The Comedy Green Room, there was no resource for comics to find out about each other, potential gigs or comedy clubs. As a comic, I found it very frustrating trying to expand my comedy network. I have met some great people in Canada, the US and internationally since launching the site, December 31, 2001.

What are some of the features on the site and how does it help comics?

The Comedy Green Room started with two comics – me and Kenny Robinson. At first, comics were very uninterested in joining our site even though it was free. They felt that the networking of the 80s and 90s worked, so why change. My goals were to educate and now my goals are to be the best comedy resource in the world and give comedy a positive image on the Internet. Now we have over 300 comics on the site from all over the world, every major festival, comedy clubs galore, and links to other important comedy sites such as yours.

The most popular features of the site are: “Comic of the Week,” upcoming events, festival lists, and comedy club lists. Comics use the festival lists and comedy club lists to make connections and possible gigs. Everything is about getting gigs.

What is the criteria for adding listings on the site?

The site gets about 500 email requests a day for information, listings or advice. It is a huge project to keep up to date. A request to be on The Comedy Green Room is sent to our staff. Then we will look at the performer’s website or bio. If we do not get enough information about the person, we will contact them for more details. Every link on our site has been researched.

If it is a comedy club or festival, we will look at their website and contact them for what they are looking for from The Comedy Green Room. Again a lot of research goes into each request. An independent show listing for upcoming events has similar work put into it.

What are some of the projects associated with The Comedy Green Room?

The Yuk Yuk's Great Canadian Laugh Off 2007 & 2008, including *Behind The Yuk's*. For five years from 2002 to 2006, The HogTown Comedy Festival, The Uncle Clyde Comedy Contest 2007 in Los Angeles, including "The Comedy Spotlight." We are working all the time to make affliances with projects that will give comedy a positive image through the world.

How would you describe the comedy scene in Toronto?

The competition is very, very strong in Toronto with comics all over Canada coming to Toronto to work on their acts and move up the ladder. Yuk Yuk's has their head office in Toronto and so is their flagship club. Second is in Toronto, Absolute Comedy opened a club in Toronto last fall. The Comedy Network's head office is in Toronto as well. Just for Laughs holds auditions in Toronto, so students also come from all over the country to study comedy in the city. Also the open-mic shows run seven days a week at many venues. Toronto is a hotbed of comedy from stand-up to sketch to improv.

I've read that comics tend to leave the reach the next level of success. What are some of the obstacles that Canadian comics face?

Let's use stand up as an example: You tour around Canada and get better redoing the same circuit, but there is a lot of competition for those spots. If you get lucky then The Comedy Network notices you and you get a *Comedy Now* special. If you get really lucky, then Just For Laughs picks you for their homegrown showcase.

If you don't get lucky, you just keep doing the same circuit trying to keep about the competition. So going to the USA or the UK where there is much more opportunity is an option for more exposure and more work. The only stand-up comics who made it big in Canada without going to the USA or the UK are Nike Bullard (Open Mike) and Brent Butt (Corner Gas). Both of these gentlemen got their own shows while staying in Canada.

What do you think about the current state of stand-up comedy?

I think the Internet has taken entertainment to a very strange level where you can become famous without having to pay the dues with sites such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, etc. As for stand-up comedy, there's nothing that will replace seeing an act live in a comedy club or an auditorium. And I think the public still enjoys going out to see lives shows.

Stand-up comedy may not be like the boom years of the 80s, but the public wants to be entertained and they will go out if the acts are good. The key is quality shows and then people come back. There is a lot of competition for the entertainment dollar, so comedy shows have to be focusing on quality and fun for the audience.



What are some of the similarities and differences that you notice between Canadian and US comics?

Having toured both in Canada and the US, I found that funny and nice people are nice and nasty people are just nasty. That being said, I think that stand-up comics in both countries make a mistake when their material only works in the region of the country that they live and work.

What were your thoughts about the New York comedy scene during your last visit?

Last time I came to New York, I did not use The Comedy Green Room to get spots. I wanted to see how outsiders were treated. It was very difficult to get guest spots in New York City. The only spot I could get was a bringer show, which we do not have in Toronto or Canada. So I thought a new experience, well once was enough?

Not only was the host rude to me and looked down at the comics on the bringer show, but not one comic on the show talked to me even though I tried to start conversations before and after the show. Now this might be an isolated incident, however when outsiders come to my show in Toronto, I make sure they are introduced to the other comics, give them a free drink and a good spot on the show. I have had comics from the US, Australia, the UK e-mail me to thank me for my courtesy when they are in Toronto.

What areas do you think comedians should focus more in terms of the craft and business?

I think comics should work on their writing and performing skills before they start promoting themselves on the Internet and sending out promotion material to clubs and bookers. Because if you get booked and then do not deliver, then you do not get booked

again. But more importantly, if the public is disappointed, then they will not come back and see live comedy.

If you could change anything about the comedy business, what would it be?

Better pay for club comics such as emcees, opening and middle acts and headliners. Unknown acts have to work so hard for their money and it is so hard to move up the ladder. Then if a comic becomes a nationally or internationally known act, they can write their own ticket.

Who are some of the comedians that you enjoy watching?

Russell Peters I have always enjoyed watching even when he started in Toronto; Harland Williams has always been another that I enjoyed watching and was very interesting when he started. I just saw Rich Shapiro and he was interesting to watch and to meet. Some of my favorites are Emo Philips, Judy Tenuta, Sam Kinison, Bill Hicks, Mike McDonald, Norm Macdonald, and the king of Canadian black comedy, Kenny Robinson.

I love watching unknown stand-up comics; I am like a rink rat of the open mic comedy community always looking for the gem in the rough.

What advice do you have for aspiring comics?

When you start out in comedy, get on stage as much as possible. Be nice to the other comics and if you have a good set, do not let it get to your head. Rude beginners get a very bad reputation, which is hard to get rid of.

What is next for The Comedy Green Room?

I am trying to expand The Comedy Green Room more into Europe, China and South Africa. I have been an advisor on some comedy festivals both in Canada and the US and hope to do more of that type of work. We hope to have a new design for The Comedy Green Room by early 2009 with many more exciting features.