

https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/arts/article_f64f850e-b201-11e9-aac6-fbadcac0b3a5.html

In New Orleans, a comedy scene as unique as the city -- and the danger of the front row

BY SUE STRACHAN | STAFF WRITER AUG 7, 2019 - 10:01 AM

1 of 11



The audience at No Lye Comedy's July show, *Melanated Mischief*, at the Hi-Ho Lounge.

Photo supplied by Nkechi Chibueze/Happy Black Chick Photography

Sue Strachan

Sue Strachan writes about art, movies, TV, people, parties, fashion and homes. Contact: sstrachan@theadvocate.com.

Byron Broussard got on the small stage in the back courtyard of Bar Redux, under Christmas lights that glowed in the sweltering mid-July weather, and surveyed the crowd.

It was open mic night for "Young Funny presents The Spontaneous Show." There was no telling what Broussard was thinking, but as the host — an important function for a comedy show — he was in charge of getting the audience excited for the show's performers, whom he would introduce before their sets, while showing off his own skills as a comedian.

So began a night of comedic highs and lows, as anyone who has been to an open mic can attest. But as the saying goes, "no risk, no reward!"

And with all the talent in New Orleans, if you haven't seen a comedy show in the past year, even month, there's no excuse, because there are shows every day in the week. For comedians, that is also a plus.

"When I started, about five years ago, there were maybe one or two shows a night. Now there are three or four," said Paul Oswell, co-host of Local Uproar and Night Church.

"I love that the New Orleans comedy scene is large enough that I can perform every night," said Nkechi Chibueze, of No Lye Comedy and @ComediansofNOLA Instagram. "But small enough that it has a family vibe."

I hadn't seen live comedy live in a long time but had recently become intrigued with the local scene by the simplest of things: the comedy show listings in the paper's Lagniappe section. I knew people who were avid fans and one comedian, Mary-Devon Dupuy from around town and her Twitter (@Merrydevo), but comedy shows were something I usually only watched on TV, if the comedian interested me. Why leave the comfort of my air-conditioned home?

Well, everyone needs a TV and social media break, and also a good laugh. Plus, I reasoned, it's important to support local artists and businesses.

To start a journey through comedy New Orleans, I checked the newspaper's listings along with the website, 504comedy.com, curated by comedian Geoffrey Gauchet.

On the web site, comedy comes in different categories, including open mic, stand-up, improv, storytelling and sketch. Open mic nights are the wildest of the bunch, since anyone can get on stage and perform, comedian or not. Stand-up is structured, with a host or hosts running the show, and scheduled comedians taking the stage. Improv features groups of comedians who are trained to improvise on the spot.

Storytelling is self-explanatory. And sketch comedy — short, hopefully hilarious scenes — is what they do on “Saturday Night Live.”

There are plenty of fun variations, such as Comic Strip, hosted by Chris Lane at Siberia on Monday nights, which melds open mic with burlesque.

Free association

The category on the web site that stood out to me was “Free,” because as it turns out, almost every show in the city is free. That said, comedy doesn’t thrive on enthusiasm alone, so there is a tip jar at each of the shows, and at the Spontaneous Show, if you order the rum-based “Funny Punch,” proceeds go to the tip jar.

I decided to put together a schedule that mixed genres and locations, though there were still many more shows to see. I found a diversity of comedians and audiences and discovered a scene that's varied and lively. In addition to the free admission and fringe benefits — occasional free food, easy camaraderie — many are surprisingly good.

For open mic, I went to Bear With Me at 12 Mile Limit on **Monday** night. There was a list of 18 performers, which proved to be a few too many to me, but still a good show. That was in addition to the Spontaneous Show, which has a regular slot on **Tuesday** at Bar Redux.

I really loved "Beefin' — Comedy Insult Championship," hosted by Lane Lonion and Ashleigh Branch, at Hi-Ho Lounge, on the third **Wednesday** of the month. It pairs off comedians who basically insult each other on the spot, who then get cut in subsequent rounds by the hosts and audience. In the end, there's only one left with his or her dignity somewhat intact.

Stand-up included **Thursday** night at Night Church, which according to co-host Oswell, is being discontinued at the end of August

because it was hard to have a consistent crowd, though the night I was there it was a nice size.

Weekenders

I also enjoyed Comedy F—k Yeah (also known as its more Facebook-friendly name, It's Good Comedy) hosted by Dupuy and Vincent Zambon, at Dragon's Den on **Friday**; the night I went there was special guest Todd Barry. Oswell co-hosts Local Uproar on **Saturday** nights.

Ending my week on **Sunday** was Two Friends Improv Theater hosted by Casey Haeg and Jon Butts, featuring them, students from their improv classes, and No Lye Comedy, a collective of black female comedians, at Parleaux Beer Lab.

"There are more women, more showcases, and I think the nature of comedy scenes everywhere is to change with the times," said Dupuy, who started performing in 2014. "New Orleans isn't perfect by any means, and there aren't very many opportunities to make money doing comedy. But with more shows comes higher standards for where people will perform and who they'll work with."

"New shows are always being created and fresh new ideas and perspectives are being shared on stage," said Chibueze. "I have traveled to other cities for comedy, but I always end up wanting to come back to New Orleans because the open-mics here are what I love and am used to."

The shows provide great laughs, some groans, and some wondering about why people are laughing. Go for a week straight, as I did, and you'll get to know the comedians, including a few who seem to be at every show — Keegan Connell, I'm looking at you — so it's fun to watch them try out a joke that didn't work at one show, to see maybe if it works at another.

"It is a surprising scene," said Oswell. "It's not very high profile, as most people come to New Orleans to hear music, so comedy is still an underground event. It gives the performers an artistic freedom."

For me, it was an exhausting but rewarding week of watching comedy. I will definitely go back to some of the shows I saw, and check out some new ones. Go out, support your local comedians. Because who doesn't want to laugh?

So, you want to go to a comedy show...

1. Tip your performers! The shows may be free, but like money, comedy doesn't grow on trees. Be sure to bring cash in whatever denominations you want to tip. Put it in the tip jar. Don't rely on cash machines always working where the shows are.

2. Go solo. Comedy shows are one of the few places that going solo doesn't make you feel uncomfortable. It's a great way to sit, relax and have a laugh after long day at work.

3. Why do the shows have unique names?

"Comedians want to be original," said Mary-Devon Dupuy. And one way to make comedy troupes or shows stand out locally and nationally is to have an original name that people can remember.

4. Front row? You're in the show. Not every comedian, but most I saw, eventually tried to work someone in the front row into their act. You could tell the people who sat there on purpose — and the ones who had no idea what they were getting into. Either way, hilarity usually ensues.

5. Timing is everything. Be aware of the time when shows start. Most open-mic shows list one time in the paper, which is for performer sign-up, while a half-hour or an hour later, the show will start. I got to the Spontaneous Show at the sign-up time, thinking it was when the show started, then sat for an hour. However, it was like a warm-up to the show with all the comedians joking around with each other, creating two shows in one for me.

6. @ComediansofNola Instagram is another resource for local comedians. This account by photographer and No Lye Comedy member Nkechi Chibueze showcases the city's comedians, highlighted by Chibueze's photographs and her 10 facts about them. Her goal is to showcase a different comedian each week.

SUE STRACHAN WRITES ABOUT ART, ENTERTAINMENT, WEDDINGS, FASHION AND HOMES. CONTACT: SSTRACHAN@THEADVOCATE.COM.

You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

This Trick Can Drop Your Bed Bath & Beyond Total Instantly

Wikibuy

This Amazon Upgrade is Even Better Than Prime

Honey

See The Face Mask That Drew Barrymore Says Changed Her Life

Town and Country | Hanacure

How To Entirely Empty Your Bowels Every Morning - Top Surgeon Explains How

Gundry MD | Supplement

Finally A Lipstick Made For Women Over 40 In Mind. Doesn't Feather or Accentuate Fine Lines

Color The World

If You Like to Play, this City-Building Game is a Must Have. No Install.

Forge of Empires - Free Online Game

Our \$5 Wines Are Better Than Most \$50 Wines

Firstleaf

Earth Origins Marietta Mackenzie - Womens Casual -

\$80 - earthshoes.com

MORE FROM THE ADVOCATE

- Ed Orgeron: LSU defensive end Justin Thomas has withdrawn from school for 'personal reasons'
- Our Views: CBS should apologize to Joe Burrow, LSU after showing multiple replays of QB's behind
- Mitch Landrieu: Finally, New Orleans has the kind of airport it deserves
- More than 40 students removed from Tangipahoa Parish public schools for campus brawls
- Rabalais: Will Tua Tagovailoa's ankle be ready when LSU plays Alabama? An LSU player may provide a clue

MORE FROM OUR PARTNERS

-
-
-
-
-

