

The art of laughter

Texas A&M students talk about professional comedy outlets available in College Station

BY JUAN LOYA
The Battalion

For all would-be stand-up comedians, here's a free joke to get started: Cover half of face with sheet of paper, open mouth wide as if exclaiming, "Are you ready for some football?" and remain still in that position. Instant Pat Green impression.

Of course, jokes are just the first step on the road to professional comedy. As some Aggies have discovered, finding an audience to view the slapstick spectacle of stand-up is more than half the effort involved.

Lance Lunsford, a junior political science major, has been doing stand-up comedy for a year and a half, and has found his own ways to perform in a community where stand-up is scarce.

"I had a friend in the band Kid Fantastic, and I asked them if I could kill time for them before their set," Lunsford said. "So a lot of my first opportunities were just telling jokes before the band went on to get the crowd warmed up."

"I just read that the best way to get started is to get as much stage time as possible. You have to make your own opportunities."

The outlets for comedy in Bryan-College Station are few, and potential comedians do not have the old starting ground most professionals have used to perfect their craft: the open mike.

"Austin has a multitude of places to do open mikes," Lunsford said. Indeed, most of the metropolitan areas in Texas have places to showcase amateur comedy; the Laff Stop in Houston, for instance, offers an open mike every Monday night, where any brave soul can approach the microphone and attempt to make the crowd laugh.

MSC Town Hall offers its Coffeehouse open mike in Rumours deli, where musicians, poets and comedians have an opportunity to display their talent. Lunsford said that he has attended Coffeehouse only once and had a less than receptive audience.

"The people there were ready for poetry, with their berets and laptop computers," Lunsford said. "And here I am, Joke Boy, trying to get my comedy going. It wasn't a good mix."

Faced with comedy prospects numbering nil, Lunsford decided to organize his own comedy showcase for College Station. Lunsford has started accumulating comics to participate in what he plans to possibly be a six-person comedy troupe and the beginning of a continuing scene in the local nightlife.

"My plan is to get this kicked off and start this as an alternative to the usual things to do in this town," Lunsford said. "I know a lot of people are getting sick of seeing Pat Green every weekend, and I'd like to bring something else to College Station. Something people can bring a date to and just have a good time."

Lunsford has approached members of Freudian Slip, Texas A&M's improvisational comedy group, and hopes more comedians will answer the call to arms.

Nick Cernoch, director of Freudian Slip and a junior theater arts major, said that while improv and stand-up are different forms of comedy, both have a potential audience in the community.

"If it's good, yeah, either kind can find an audience," Cernoch said. "Improv adds a theatrical element to comedy, and that's what I like most about it."

Both forms also have different methods of dealing with the heckler, a common comedy nemesis.

Since the majority of Freudian Slip's show encourages audience participation, hecklers do not usually pose too much of a problem, Cernoch said.

Lunsford, on the other hand, has sometimes used the heckler to his advantage, even to the point of supplying the jeerer himself.

"Sometimes I tell my friends to heckle," Lunsford said. "It just makes the crowd go nuts when somebody's out there yelling 'you suck.'"

Perhaps a more common problem for beginning comedians is not getting the audience to stop heckling, but to listen in the first place.

"The plus side of doing comedy here is that it's probably easier to get a small following than

it would be in a larger city," Cernoch said, "but it's also harder if you have mostly people who are just coming to the club and not necessarily to see you perform."

"It's good to be at a party and be recognized and complimented," Lunsford said.

"One night after my act this huge guy stopped me like he wanted to kick my ass or something. But instead he just looked at me and said, 'That right there, man. You were real good.' And that's a really good feeling, to hear that people enjoyed your comedy."

Both Lunsford and Freudian Slip will be participating in Town Hall's Variety Show program. Lunsford as a performer and the troupe as hosts. The program is on Friday, as part of Parent's Weekend activities.

"I knew some people who went to it last year and I had done some comedy before," Lunsford said. "It seemed like a good outlet to perform and find a bigger audience."

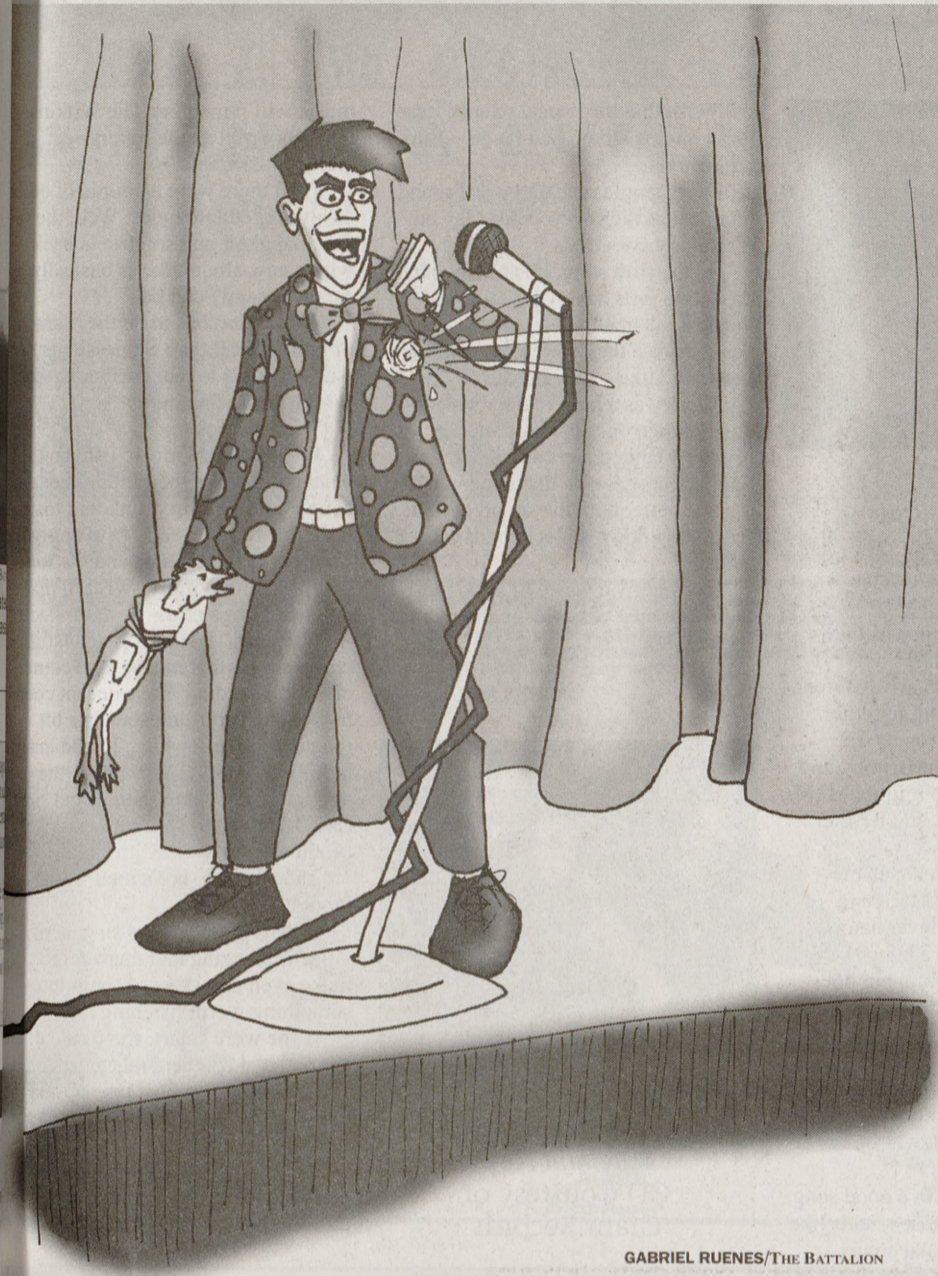
Lunsford said that he will probably gear his material toward parents and going away to school, but finding material for comedy is some-



SUSAN REDDING/THE BATTALION
Members of Freudian Slip (L to R) Doug Newell, Casey Wilson, Julia Smith, Nick Cernoch and Dominic Nuosce.

thing he never has a problem doing.

"There's a lot of funny things that we forget about when we're walking around all pissed off at the world," Lunsford said. "Sometimes we just need to chill out and appreciate the humor."



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

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