

THE RINGER Backyard barbecues will never be the same after you read about the best horseshoe player in the world

DISSERTATION ON FUNNY Comedians ▶ are bred at the Second City Training Center



▶ OCTOBER 01, 2011

AMERICAN WAY

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How Sue Sees It

Though her on-screen alter ego seeks to destroy all things *Glee*, **JANE LYNCH** is singing a different tune

+

The more things change, the more they stay the same in

NOVA SCOTIA

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p. 12



I'm NOT Funny

WITH THIS COLUMN, I INTEND TO MAKE YOU laugh.

Problem is, that's much easier said than done. Writing comedy, in my opinion, is the hardest form of writing there is. I might be able to make you laugh with my oral delivery of a line, but when it comes to putting ink on paper, I'm about as dry as my granddaddy's scalp.

It's not for a lack of trying, either. For three years now, I've tried to make you laugh. And I've failed miserably. In fact, some of the feedback I've received is decidedly funnier than the column it trashed: "Your comedy writing makes Sophocles look like Seinfeld"; "I've eaten sand that's funnier than you"; and my all-time favorite: "If Don Rickles were to read this, he might kill himself just so he could roll over in his grave."

I have much professional and comedic respect for anyone who can write a funny line. They didn't teach us how to write funny in college — although I would count a headline I wrote about a local petting zoo ("Love Those Llamas") as pretty darn hilarious — and the funniest writers I know aren't professional writers at all.

Take my buddy Gavin Mulloy. He has a recklessly unfunny degree in business from the University of Kansas, and yet he's one of the funniest people I've ever met. In fact, when I met him a decade ago in downtown Dallas while I was wandering the streets lost and he was wandering the streets with his buddies who didn't seem to have his back (he had a shiner on his right eye), he answered my "Who dotted you?" question with a funny "Obviously not you, 'cause I could bury you." He didn't even have to think about it. We've been friends ever since.

Gavin knows he's funny. He's even managed to approach his position as the promotions manager at the Granada Theater in Dallas with a certain measure of comedic application. So it struck me funny that Gavin would spend that hard-earned Granada money on enrollment at the Second City Training Center in Chicago.

Second City, as you may already know, is the world heavyweight champion of comedy. Some of the best comedians of all time cut their teeth at either the original Chicago theater or at the upstart Toronto one. From Bill Murray to Tina Fey, the hallways of Second City are festooned with pictures of its alumni. (Side note: I learned the word *festooned* during a Second City improvisation one time. It's a funny word.) Ergo, enrolling in the Second City Training Center is akin to post-graduate work in comedy. (Side note: I encourage Second City to work the words *ergo* and *akin* into their improvisation.)

But Gavin was already funny. Why pay for something you already know? Like why pay for a

graduate degree in journalism when you already have an undergraduate degree in journalism? (Side note: I learned this one the expensive way.)

"I'm sure Mike Nichols, Mike Myers and Tina Fey were already funny too," Gavin told me. "Plus, there's a very competitive nature with comedy. Funny guys seek each other out, but we secretly want to be funnier, and we want to steal each other's material."

I don't. I just want to make you laugh while you're flying from Chicago to Baltimore. I asked Gavin, who regularly points out that I'm not funny, whether I should take this course so as to improve my delivery. Whom is this course for?

"Take it if you're funny and want to work in comedy," he instructs. "Take it if you are terrible at socially interacting. Take it if you are not funny but you think you're hilarious. But you? You're helpless. This course isn't for you."

Sad but funny (and true). I am to comedy what amphetamines are to insomniacs: I make an unfortunate situation even worse. Still, our Second City story is quite informative, albeit unfunny (page 28). Same holds true with our cover story on funny lady Jane Lynch, herself a Second City alumna (page 38). Perhaps these two stories, wonderfully crafted, informative and at times humorous, are proof positive that you don't have to be funny to hammer on someone's funny bone.

All that said, if you made it all the way to the end of this column — and if it made you laugh — then mission accomplished. If not, go ahead and write me and tell me how brutal I am. But, please, make your comments funny.



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