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Three local comedy grads set to show their chops

BY FRANK SHYONG

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If there were a typical mold for stand-up comics, three recent graduates of a comedy course at San Juan Capistrano's Camino Real Playhouse would break it.

Frankie Pray is an Irvine attorney specializing in employment law. Laurie Jacobs is a retired member of San Clemente Toastmasters. Walt Stevens of Fallbrook is a former pilot for American Airlines and the Navy before that.

But "if you follow some basic rules, you can take any person, put them onstage and they can at the very least appear to be funny," said comedian Tom Riehl, who teaches the six-week Students of Stand-up course and

will put his newly graduated trio in the spotlight for a performance starting at 8 p.m. Saturday at the playhouse, 31776 El Camino Real. Professional comedian Stephanie Blum will close the show.

Tickets are \$10 and are available at caminorealplayhouse.tix.com or 949-489-8082.

In the 18-hour stand-up course, Riehl starts with the basics: how to handle a microphone stand, how to enter and exit a stage, how to handle a heckler.

Later lessons delve into comic persona and developing a routine.

"Pick something you're passionate about, something that evokes an emotion that you can talk freely about," said Riehl, a Mission Viejo resident.

Jacobs, for example, likes to make fun of her diminutive size. She doesn't have the stomach for making fun of other people.

Pray's comedy is more edgy and topical, touching on abortion and Facebook's initial public offering.

Stevens, 75, riffs on old age.

The important thing is to be likable and get the crowd on your side, Riehl said.

Riehl's own comedy focuses on the parts of everyday life that irk him as a man in his 50s. He was named Best Clean Comic at the 2010 Eagle Rock Comedy Festival in Los Angeles, but he's not very comfortable with the label. He considers himself more Lewis Black Lite.

"Down here in Orange County they look at me like I'm Richard Pryor, but up in L.A., I guess (I'm clean)," he said.

But the ability to cater to audiences with gentler tastes is valuable for comics who want to get onstage more often, he said. "Nobody ever tells you, 'Can you get up there and do a really dirty five minutes?'" Riehl said.

Though Saturday's show could be seen as their big chance, the three students say they don't harbor serious ambitions to tour as comedians.

Stevens said he's too fond of being in bed by 9 p.m. Pray hopes the stage skills he's developing in comedy will

be helpful in the courtroom.

And Jacobs just likes to make people laugh. "I think everyone wants to be funny," she said. "They want humor in their life and they want to bring humor to other people."

Riehl's next comedy class starts May 29 and continues from 7 to 10 p.m. for six Tuesdays through July 3 at the Camino Real Playhouse. The cost is \$195. For more information, visit studentsofstandup.com.

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