



Comedy novices graduate to side-splitting in short order

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As luck would have it, this past Saturday I snatched one of the last seats for the Camino Real Playhouse's Stage II theater performance by three recent graduates of Tom Riehl's Students of Stand-up comedy course. Having just returned home from consulting in parts afar, I didn't know if seats would still be available. I had meant to score tickets much earlier in support of one of my fellow Mission SJC docents, Laurie Jacobs, who had just completed the humor course. Nevertheless, the playhouse's website was kind to me.

Little did I know how enjoyable this laugh fest would turn out to be.

Friends, family and moral supporters of the just-starting comedy entertainers packed the intimate theater. Yes, some potential attendees had to be turned away. Word must have gotten out about the potential of these stars in the rough – Jacobs, Frankie Pray and Walt Stevens. Serendipity seated me next to Walt's wife, who was eager to see the fruits of their dedication, enthusiasm and labor, including traveling from San Diego County for his six three-hour weekly classes. He had been bitten by the comedy bug when they attended one of the playhouse's monthly stand-up shows. They loved the healing magic of laughter, and Walt took the leap. So here he was – one of the new headliners.

As the lights dimmed, the introductions by Riehl highlighted the perseverance, fear and marked accomplishments of each scheduled performer. As the spotlight shown directly on the first participant, we noticed we could see the comedians but they couldn't see us. However, the seamless connection with us, the invisible spectators, was accomplished nicely by each of the aspiring comics.

Imagine a plain conversation with your friends about diverse, timely, personal or worldwide topics by three very different personas – lots of funny stuff. "Creepy" attorney/comedian (Pray), height-impaired Toastmasters graduate (Jacobs) and wizened older ex-pilot (Stevens) transferred their specific points of verbal reckoning into tales of hilarity. The audience was very pleased. The room came alive with laughter.

To round out the already delightful evening, professional comedian Stephanie Blum closed the show. My sides are still aching from guffaws reacting to her nonstop dissertation on family life as an older mom, guilt as a way of life and weight-control fiascos. Her routine about her son's speech evaluation kept you so in stitches that at times it was hard to catch your breath.

From their outstanding novice graduation performances, Frankie, Laurie and Walt provided concrete evidence that the adage of laughter being the best medicine holds true, especially in SJC. Congratulations to each of the three novices who took the challenge and succeeded in making us laugh. It was a hoot!

To find out more about the offerings at the Camino Real Playhouse, visit caminorealplayhouse.org or call 949-489-8082.

For more about the comedy course, go to studentsofstandup.com.