

Capistrano comedy class draws gags from young comedians

By [Fred Swegles](#) | fswegles@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: November 20, 2017 at 6:42 am | UPDATED: November 20, 2017 at 6:59 pm

Teacher to kid: “You think you’re *funny*?”

Kid: “Try me!”

And the class erupts.

In a public school, an exchange like that between teacher and student might have serious consequences. Not at Capistrano Acting Academy, where the object in this class is to learn to be funny.



For the last seven years, stand-up comedian Tom Riehl has taught scores of Orange County adults the basics of delivering gags through a Students of Stand-Up class. It’s offered three times a year at Camino Real Playhouse in San Juan Capistrano.

This year, the academy decided to reach out and try to groom adolescent crack-ups too. Riehl set up a new class, Stand-Up 4 Kids.

Four students – sisters Ella and Lea Davis of San Clemente, Charlie Fiorenza of Laguna Beach and Logan Ranck of Dove Canyon – agreed to give it a try. After six classes, they put what they learned on the line Saturday night, Nov. 18, presenting a graduation performance at Camino Real Playhouse.

“Just to get up there takes a lot of guts,” Riehl said.

It’s been different, he said, teaching comedy to kids. “Adults have a lot of life experiences to draw from, (Kids) are naturally funny. It’s just a matter of bringing it out.”

Ella Davis, 13, said she has had acting experience at Bernice Ayer Middle School and at a camp. Asked if she is the class clown, she laughed and said, “Not – yeah, *kind* of – not *really*, though! I’m a good student!” She said she just wants to be a performer.

Her sister Lea, 11, said their parents encouraged her to take the class. “They say I’m really funny,” she said. Asked how she makes people laugh, she said, “Just be myself!”

Her inspiration, she said, is her friends. “Whenever they laugh, it just makes me feel good because I made someone happy,” she said.

Charlie Fiorenza, 11, said he has held a longtime dream of becoming a comedian. “Ever since I was 6, I was starting to do jokes and tell people funny stuff that happened in my life and make things funny,” he said.

Logan Ranck, 12, said the class has brought out his knack for comedy. “I just got more and more used to it,” he said. “Over time, I was like ‘I think I’m starting to get it,’ and now I’m like, ‘I’ve totally got this.’

“I’m hoping to start a YouTube channel,” he said.

“Hey when you get famous, don’t forget me, OK?” instructor Riehl told Charlie Fiorenza when they crossed paths as the final rehearsal ended.

“You’re going to be the person who started everything!” Fiorenza replied.

At Saturday’s graduation, the students delivered.

Whether it was Ranck describing his farting pet, or Ella Davis suggesting ludicrous ways to die by selfie, they had the crowd in stitches. There were Fiorenza’s misadventures at the beach with rocks and stingrays, and redhead Lea Davis’ flustered experiences with the sun and freckles.

“I knew they were going to be funny,” Riehl said when it was over, “but you put some lights on them and put them on a stage, and this is what you get. I knew they were going to do well. I didn’t know they were going to do this well.”

Belisa Davis, mother of Ella and Lea, said she sees the class as a confidence-boost for sisters who are naturally funny. “There’s nothing better than learning to speak in front of people,” she said. “If they learn that skill, it’s going to help them from here on out.”

From observing the class, Davis said she was impressed with how the instructor drew from the students’ experiences to help them pick topics and generate their comedy, and how the kids offered each other suggestions to improve their acts.

“It was a cool thing to see,” she said. “I didn’t know that was happening.”

The next round of classes, kids or adults, begins at the end of February and the beginning of March, Riehl said. Visit studentsofstandup.com.