

-THEATER-

SKETCHY HUMOR

The Long and Short of SketchFest

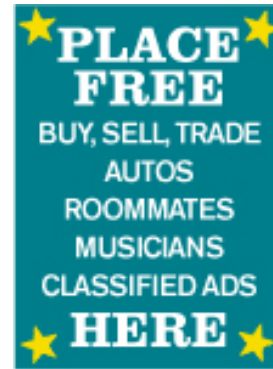
by [Annie Wagner](#)

Seattle SketchFest Capitol Hill Arts Center
Through Sept 18.

Sketch comedy is designed to be administered in small doses, and I ignored doctor's orders. Six sketch comedy troupes over the course of one weekend is probably the limit for even the staunchest humors; the groups are cleverly double-booked to encourage you to save some of the locals for next week. (I had to miss the first set of both Flaming Box of Stuff and the well-established Bald Faced Lie if I wanted to avoid seeing their out-of-town partners twice.) I overindulged, but I wasn't exactly overwhelmed. My stomach muscles certainly don't ache from chortling too hard, and I held onto my sobriety all weekend despite the dubious allure of the "SketchDen" (perfect for "socializing and networking!") on CHAC's lower level.

But then again, maybe my laughter has turned a little wanton after seeing so many other people exhaust themselves in pursuit of my amusement. I may be more prone to giggling when it's not really warranted, to smiling indulgently at adults as though they were toddlers or a pack of loose-jointed puppies. After all, there's no harm in helping someone else feel successful.

The first weekend of SketchFest was, yes, a success. The mechanics of the operation ran very smoothly, if we discount some bizarre radio interference in the mic setup.



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photo by Gordon Todd

The intervals between sets were more convivial than your average intermission, and nobody got hurt.

FURIOSO! was the first troupe I saw, and I don't know if it was fortuitous timing or something more dependable, but this homegrown duo were surprisingly funny. With only two members, these guys don't have an infinite number of directions to take their act, and in many of the details they resembled another two-man operation, Riegel & Blatt, from Los Angeles. Both troupes start from the conceit that one member is taller, handsomer, and more narcissistic than the other, though FURIOSO! returned to the premise more frequently throughout the show. Both troupes indulged in deadly sketch-comedy in-jokes about the competition: terrible improv and standup. (If there's anything more appalling than watching improv done badly, it's watching faux improv done badly on purpose.) Both produced gross-out pop songs about anatomy (during Riegel & Blatt's set, a little boy in the front row bopped along merrily to the catchy prostate-stimulation anthem "Put Your Finger in My Butt"). But FURIOSO! (performing again Thursday at 8:00 p.m.) has a definite bare-bones energy; the momentum they conserve by never pausing for the lights to go down between sets propels them beyond the slicker appeal of Reigel & Blatt.

Kazoo! (performing again Saturday at 8:00 p.m.), another exclamation-pointed local troupe, didn't fare as well. Though many of the sketches were based on tight, promising ideas--for example, the first draft of a soap opera, performed typos and all--the writing and performances rarely followed through. It's always impressive to see performers navigate a pile of overwrought, nonsense English, but unless the typos result in wacky and completely implausible jokes, the sketch remains disappointingly flat. Too many of Kazoo!'s sketches were conceptually fecund but completely lacking in spontaneity.

Two of this week's out-of-town troupes dabbled in more immediate political and pop-cultural humor, and neither

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was especially successful. New York's the Royal We opened with a mildly amusing song spoofing the color-coded terror alert system, but the rest of the performance, patterned after a session of Fox News-viewing and performed complete with commercials, was a little too thick with Bush Administration jokes and a little thin on humor. Portland's the 3rd Floor had a much bigger ensemble than the other troupes, and was correspondingly unfocused.

My favorite troupe of the whole weekend won't be performing next week, but if Elephant Larry from New York ever makes it to town again--perhaps next year's SketchFest?--don't be put off by the iffy name. These absurdist sketches, from the opening song about getting caught in a cave with a sleeping bear to the closing video *Baby! Fix That Fusebox!*, had a vitality sorely missing from some of the more pointy-headed comedy. And if the silliness sometimes stretched a little too far (one high-energy sketch about getting shot in the penis comes to mind), well, taking things further than might be appropriate is what sketch comedy is supposed to be about.

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