



The Giggle Gaggle Comedy Show - Lots of Giggles, Not One Gaggle
Valley Scene Magazine
By Sal Rodriguez

If I'd had known that these were kids doing comedy I might not have taken this assignment. Kids annoy me; especially those wisecracking, hyper-intelligent, cutesy, sitcom kids. I figured this was a network casting agent's hunting ground for that, a sort of recent diaper-wearing farm league. I sat with my arms crossed, ready to be proverbially annoyed by tomorrow's Raven Simone, or Joey Lawrence, or the day-after-tomorrow's Mike Myers or Molly Shannon.

I didn't want to enjoy this. I didn't want to laugh. I wanted to be annoyed! But I did laugh. I laughed a lot. Most notably at nine-year-old Ernie Lara, and seven-year-old Brooke Sikkema. Ernie's Stetson-wearing Garth Rivers sketch and Brooke's Cinderella antics in the Fairy Tale improv had me wishing I was a network casting agent, with contract in hand. These kids were good.

In traditional improvisational sketch comedy the audience is involved in the creation of scenarios. Giggle Gaggle is no exception. Audience members, particularly eager children, chimed in with their suggestions, yelling out locations and occupations, making this a fun, fully interactive, family-oriented experience.

I liked their piece called Translators, which I'd seen before on Who's Line is it Anyway? This is where two kids stand in the middle of the stage, speaking mere gibberish, as two people stand on the side of the stage, translating their mindless grunts (or perhaps they were gagging). The audience chose for the two girls in the center to be talking amongst themselves as they prepared for a "date." This was hilarious! Little Sami Fagen is a living doll, with her Little House on the Prairie-esque dress. The Audition sketch was also a pleasure to see, with great characters by John Humprey, as a Scientology-obsessed Tom Cruise barking orders to an off-stage Katie Holmes, Marquessa Bryce as an air-headed, guitar playing Hillary Duff, and Drake Johnston as...as...well, some washed-up-quasi-rasta-rock-hippie-dude. Taylor Lipman did a great stand-up monologue lamenting how, "...no one gets me." And Michelle Levinson is just too cute as she dons a blonde wig and frolics with her missing baby teeth.

Watching kids do improv, or sketch comedy, is a lot like watching kids do what they do best: play. In several instances the kids seemed to be having too much fun, forgetting there was an audience, and instead entertaining themselves with wrestling and jumping, especially the boys. However, director Jim Jackman appeared cool and confident, despite the sporadic moments of dead air. Let's face it, some of these kids were as young as five, which means there were times when there was just nothing funny happening. And, although they are incredibly sweet, I wanted funny.

There is no doubt that this show is for families. There was an air of encouragement and support coming from the audience of stage moms and dads. I felt like an oddball sitting there as a childless, single man. But we all wanted the same outcome: we all wanted this to be good. And it was good. Even during the times when I wasn't laughing I couldn't help but think of how wonderful this place was; how much I would have loved to come here as a child - the friendships that are built here; the experiences that are gathered here. Some

of these kids might go on to Mad TV, and even if some don't, what a place to come to and play, and dream. This is reflected in the group's mission statement, "We endeavor to create entertaining programs and shows for children enabling them to explore their imagination while using integral disciplines of leadership, teamwork, and individual artistic expression within the arena of a group environment." And what a treat to hear that they have a scholarship program for underprivileged kids. I can see it now - Troupes Not Gangs!

JOY Theatre, which presents The Giggle Gaggle Comedy Show, is the brainchild of husband and wife team Josh Minnick and Janiece Jary, both veteran comedic performers. Founders of JOY also include two former Saturday Night Live and Second City writers: Christine Zander and Mark Nutter, so these tiny tykes have quite a team behind the "scenes." I found myself thumbing through their program to see if they taught adult classes. After seeing what these children could do perhaps there's hope for this underprivileged kid yet.

Joy Theatre presents
The Giggle Gaggle Comedy Show @ The Raven Theatre
5233 Lankershim Blvd.
NoHo Arts District, CA 91601
Saturdays & Sundays @ 2pm.
Tickets \$8.00
www.joytheatre.com
(818) 505-9355

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