

COMEDY

Jeff Shaw:

a real standup kinda guy



That very real attitude and approach has worked wonderfully for Shaw, as the demographics of his audience will attest. "When I go on stage now I have old people, young people, yuppies, businessmen, athletes. I'll be sitting in bars with businessmen in suits who just came over for a little entertainment, buying me beer and talking to me as an equal. They're impressed by how viable I am on stage. I steer away from bullshit topics and scatological references and generic bumper sticker humor. I do have a lot of respect for everyone, and I think that comes across."

Shaw's broad repertoire covers a range of topics including his own appearance:

"A lot of women compare me to Fabio," he says. "They say, 'Compared to Fabio, you're a geek.'"

"In high school, I always wanted to look like David Lee Roth. Now that I do, he looks like I did in high school."

On college graduates he remarks:

"I've been talking to a lot of college graduates lately. They say, 'Welcome to Chi-Chi's.'"

His intellectual, over-the-top approach never gets too sophisticated or too general, creating a happy medium that really has something everyone can relate to. Among those common subjects of interest are moving out of his parents home, his ex-girlfriend, who is also his neighbor, an interesting take on the "Barney" phenomenon, his family's insistence that he's not a star because he doesn't have a sitcom.

While he goodnaturedly pokes fun at himself throughout his performance, the whole issue of having a sitcom as being the mark of a successful comedian is something that Shaw isn't all that worried about at this stage in his career.

"My main objective is to learn everything I can about being a standup," he says of his immediate goals. "At the same time, I meet a lot of people. I read a lot. I go to museums. I travel the country and try to understand life."

"If you notice, any comic of any stature — Tim Allen, Ellen Degeneres, John Mendoza — all these guys that have sitcoms now which are very popular had a lot of life experience behind them before they were able to capitalize on those opportunities."

"Unlike music or sports, where you can start learning at a very early age, most comics start when they're 25, 30, later in life. So anything that you do in life does add to your repertoire of life experience, your arsenal, if you will. So if I get a sitcom by the time I'm 35, fine. Everyone works at his or her own pace."

by Steven Batten

If you didn't know better, you might easily confuse comedian Jeff Shaw with a rock and roller. After all, his long, blond hair readily lends itself to the comparison, and it's not entirely unusual for him to break into song during his act. But that's not where the comparison ends for the North Ridgeville-born standup comic, who now makes his home in Cleveland, because it's his rock and roll attitude and mentality that sets him apart from the rest of the comedy pack.

Influenced at an early age by the likes of Bill Cosby and Rodney Dangerfield, the 28-year-old Shaw began his career as a standup comedian with a disastrous appearance at the Cleveland Comedy Club in 1986, which saw him booted off of the stage after only three minutes.

Since that humbling first experience, Shaw has gone on to make appearances on A&E's "Comedy On The Road," Showtime's "Comedy Club Network," Comedy Central's "Stand-up Stand-up" and "Night Shift With Kevin Ferguson," in addition to regularly touring comedy clubs across the country, opening for everyone from Bobcat Goldthwait to the Temptations and the Four Tops.

Shaw, who was the feature act for Dan Choppin at the Improv earlier this month, will be bringing his unique brand of comedy to Hilarities in Cuyahoga Falls this Tuesday, July 5 through Saturday, July 9.

For Shaw, the first real inkling that comedy was something he wanted to pursue came when he saw

Emo Phillips on "Late Night With David Letterman" and saw, in Phillips, enough of himself to get up on stage and give it a go.

"There was someone

tion from past legends such as Lenny Bruce and Bob Hope, but also from many other creative areas outside of comedy, from writers to musicians, to make himself

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who was weird like me, someone who was an out-cast," says Shaw. "I thought, Wow, man, I could be like that because I have a weird sense of humor. I was a big fan of him and Steven Wright. At that point all my earlier influences — Bill Cosby, Rodney Dangerfield, Andy Kaufman, "Saturday Night Live," the Not Ready For Prime Time Players — went out the window. Those were all things I was entertained by, not something I could do."

While seeing Phillips planted the comedy seed in Shaw's head, it wasn't until he saw Dana Carvey, a skinny, blond kid like himself, on "Saturday Night Live" that he decided to give it another go; this time full time. And he hasn't stopped since.

What makes Shaw different from other comedians is his work ethic. He is truly one of the hardest working comedians in the business, always seeking ways to add to and improve his act. The articulate comedian has really made himself a student of his craft, studying every aspect of his performance and drawing inspira-

as well rounded as possible. His seemingly effortless performance belies the amount of work that he puts into his craft.

One area of Shaw's act that has been constantly evolving is his appearance. As the T-shirt that he sells after performances chronicles, Shaw has gone from a wholesome, clean-cut image to a "Sally Jeffy Raphael" period, complete with the gooly red glasses to a look reminiscent of "Granny" of "Beverly Hillsbillies" fame, all of which led up to his current image, a heavy metal, "Fabio-lite."

While each of the aforementioned looks was intended to garner laughs, his current look is more a reflection of his own tastes: the result of finally being comfortable with who he is onstage.

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