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THE REBEL YELL

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# Upchurch is serious about his comedy

by Daniel W. Duffy

In the world of academia, very few formal studies of comedy have ever been undertaken. UNLV graduate student and part-time faculty member Mike Upchurch is trying to do something about this with his graduate thesis on sketch comedy.

"Hopefully I'll do a seminal work," Upchurch said. "Very little scholarly work in comedy (has been conducted) unless it's Shakespeare."

Upchurch got his comedy start in Boulder City where he spent \$1,400 of his own money to produce his own satiric television comedy "First Take" in 1985, which was "sort of like a Wayne's World thing" for cable access.

After receiving a grant and producing several commercial parodies for UNLV-TV, Upchurch traveled to New York to visit "Saturday Night Live" to talk to head writer Al Franken. Getting in contact with the people behind "SNL" was no easy chore for Upchurch.

"I got rejected three times,"

Upchurch said, until he got through to Franken to say, "Nobody will talk to me, will you talk to me?" Franken accepted his application for conversation and went out for sushi with Upchurch. He said Franken was funny and provided him with useful terminology as well as colorful quotes for his thesis. Franken instilled in Upchurch the notion that, "The important thing is that you've got to make people laugh. The only rule is that it's funny."

When asked about the current state of "SNL," Upchurch said, "In terms of their ensem-



Mike Upchurch tries to have fun with his classes.

photo by Rob Weidenfeld

ble, they are ready for prime time, but they have a problem with quality control in their sketches." He said today's "SNL" usually has only one re-

ally good sketch per show where in the past, they've had three extremely funny sketches per episode. "It's so uneven. There will be something great and then some crap in-between."

"It's hit and miss when you experiment," Upchurch explained. He added the show has "too many people on the cast. You lose that ensemble feel."

"I think 'In Living Color' is taking its (SNL's) place.

For the college crowd, 'Kids in the Hall' is more hip," Upchurch said. "The Kids in the Hall' has the best writers. They're lean."

Upchurch said that "Mon-

ty Python's Flying Circus" was "as good as sketch comedy gets. Monty Python's was a peak for sketch comedy that hasn't been repeated since. They were the experts in comedy because they did whatever it took to make you laugh."

Upchurch teaches several Communication 101 sections at UNLV while working on his thesis.

"I always experiment with my class," he said. "For instance, when my students come in late (to class), they must, upon arrival, give a speech titled 'Why I'm Late for Class Today,'" Upchurch said. "I try to have fun."

As far as Upchurch's future plans, he said he'll probably go on to get his doctorate. "Then I'll be tremendously over-educated, but that is important. It (education) is something that can't be taken away from you." After receiving a doctor's degree, Upchurch said, "I'll probably go to New York to become a TV writer. Well, I am a television writer, but I want to get paid."

## City's park and recreation brings German new-wave films to Las Vegas

Beginning next Wednesday, the Cultural Division of Clark County Parks and Recreation will show four of the most distinctive films of the acclaimed German New-Wave cinema movement.

The films will be shown on four successive Wednesdays at 7 p.m. each night at the Winchester Community Center, 310 South McLeod Dr. They are recommended for mature audiences only and admission is \$1 each night.

The series features four film makers: Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Volker Schlöndorff and Wim Wenders. The German New Wave has become an influential movement.

The series begins with Herzog's *Fata Morgana*. The film is a darkly humored, non-narrative documentary about man's progressive intrusion into the earth.

The second film in the series, Fassbinder's *The Third Generation*, will be shown April 8. Fassbinder is recognized as one of the most influential and widely-recognized figures in the German New Wave, and perhaps in all of German cinema.

Released in 1979, this dark comedy concerns a group

of upper middle-class terrorists, neurotics and misfits without a trace of ideological motivation.

The next film, Schlöndorff's *Circle of Deceit*, will play on April 15. This 1981 film concerns a German journalist covering a Lebanese civil war. The film tersely examines his experiences in Beirut.

The series ends April 22 with one of the most popular German films in recent years, Wender's 1988 *Wings of Desire*. *Premiere Magazine* named it the second best film of the '80s, while *Time Magazine* ranked it among the 10 best of the decade.

The film operates on several levels. On one hand, it is a supernatural love story, gracefully moving between black and white and color footage as it tells of two angels who wander pre-unification Berlin.

At the same time, the film re-examines Berlin and its almost spectral inhabitants in the period before the Wall came down.

Film critic J. Hoberman wrote, "The first time I saw the film, I thought it was a knockout; on second viewing it already seemed a classic."

## Avant-garde student works display versatility

by Tricia Romano

Students Andrea Robertson, Jane Callister and Mark Brandvick took top honors last Friday at the opening of the 1992 Juried Student Exhibition. They each received \$250, \$150, and \$100 respectively.

Other artists who were recognized for their presentations were Michael Wine, Mitchell Crawford, and Jennifer Jarros.

The artists' works were selected out of a total of forty pieces. The contest included exhibitions in drawing, painting, mixed media, printmaking, ceramic sculpture, and photography.

Hunter Drohojowska, the chair of the liberal arts and sciences school at the Otis Parsons School of Art and Design, juried the exhibit. In the process of judging, she eliminated 60 works of art before reaching the final group that was shown.

Drohojowska chose the works that she felt were unique and out of the mainstream art world.

"I could only rely on my sense of what looked promising," Drohojowska said. "I think I chose artists for their sensibility, rather than their quality



photo by Rob Weidenfeld

The current student art exhibit at the Donna Beam Fine Art Gallery will be displayed through April 10.

that might have earned them an 'A' in class."

Drohojowska is also a writer for *Achitectural Digest* as well as serving as a contributor to the *Los Angeles Times Art News*.

Treasurer of the campus Art Club, Michael Fees was instrumental in organizing the

event. He and the other members of the Art Club, chose Drohojowska from a list of art critics, and eventually narrowed the field through a voting process.

Drohojowska summed it up best, "The UNLV art department is a majorly happening scene."