



Fred Northrup, Washington Square News, New York U.

**Jeff and Randy Sklar believe that children are our future.**

"It was totally a boy's club," Boyd says. "All the writers are white men in their 30s. John Belushi once said that to write comedy you have to have male genitalia. But that's wrong, as will become obvious very soon."

It's already pretty obvious. With the success of performers such as Roseanne, Ellen DeGeneres and Margaret Cho, all of whom have their own network television shows, the woman's prerogative is in demand.

Robin Bucci, a recent graduate of Michigan State U., has been hammering away at improvisational comedy since 1989. She was one of three women accepted into the inaugural Detroit Second City troupe in 1991.

"When I first started, it seemed as if there were a lot less women [in comedy]," Bucci says. "But now there are a lot more women trying to break in."

Regarding her Second City experience, Bucci says the creative process of a truly improvisational ensemble is the best way to write and perform comedy. That and a head full of vodka. Just kidding.

"Like with *Saturday Night Live* — they have good ideas, but they don't heighten them; they don't take them to that next level," she says. "On TV, you have the actors with performance skills — and then you have the writers. You can have an idea that works good on paper but may not play as well."

"At Second City, the actors are the writers and creators through improvisation."

### Stand Up In The Place Where You Live

In the '80s, it seemed you couldn't swing a rubber chicken without hitting a comedy club. But stand-up is experiencing a major downswing, with only a handful of innovators pacing an army of mediocre talent telling dick jokes.

Identical twins Jason and Randy Sklar recently relocated from St. Louis to New York City to pursue their stand-up careers as the Comedy Twins. (Insert "Wonder Twin powers activate!" joke here.)

"Stand-up is really taking some knocks," Jason says. "Clubs are closing all over. I think it's weeding out those guys —"

"— who suck," his brother finishes. Twins can be so cute that way.

As opposed to sketch comedy or improv, stand-up is a particularly solo undertaking. Unless, of course, you share the stage with your twin brother.

"The difference between improv and stand-up is the difference between taking an essay test and writing a term paper," Randy says. "With improv, the audience understands that you're being put on the spot. With stand-up, the material and delivery are all expected to be there. You have to totally dazzle." Ironically, the Sklars forbid academic metaphors in their show.

Actually, the Sklars' routine lands them somewhere on the edge of conventional stand-up. While working the two-person gimmick gives them an almost Vaudevillian dynamic, the routine is peppered with the sort of cerebral pop culture references that *Seinfeld* pioneered. So what type of comics piss off the Sklars most?

"Shirley Hemple," they answer in unison.

"That's the big old Shirley from *What's Happening*," Randy says. "She represents everything we disdain. While we're trying to respect the audience and bring up the level of the show, she's killing a room doing feminine hygiene jokes. It's very frustrating."

Look, life's too short for bad comedy. (It's also too short for light beers, Luther "Luke" Campbell and those crappy Belgian reverse-pulse wattage calibrators.) It's a good thing some people are still fighting the good fight. Quality comedy is essential to a society's well-being — it's rumored that Greek civilization collapsed when shock comic Leviticus "Dice" Palocles launched his 30 city-state tour.

You just can't be too careful.

## Reality Bites The Onion

Some say *The Onion* is just an immature, irresponsible and sophomoric rag with nothing going for it other than adolescent impudence. We think people who say that are jerks. As you can see, *The Onion* tackles issues of national — nay, generational importance. So take that, jerks.

A recent expose by *The Onion* into the world of slacker priests:



**The Comedy Castaways, Onion Inc.'s TV sketch offensive. See, they ran aground on the shore of this uncharted desert isle...**

They're the new breed of God's disciples; armed with college degrees, laconic wits and unironed frocks. More and more each day, slacker priests are gaining a foothold in the church and changing the face of Catholicism.

Father David Murdoch, a slacker priest at St. Joseph's Church in Danville, Pa., is a good example of this new phenomenon. Murdoch, 29, is the child of divorced parents and still lives with his mother.

"I would get married, but why bother?" Murdoch says. "Everything about my upbringing has proven to be false. I don't trust politicians, the economy or the family unit. I wouldn't trust God, either, except that it's kind of required because I'm a priest."

A typical Murdoch service begins not with the traditional organ, but with a hit single by Dig, Live or another monosyllabically named indie rock band. Murdoch then walks among his parishioners and randomly references icons from 1970s Catholic-kitsch culture....

"We sing silly hymns that we remember from like, 1973," Murdoch explains. "People freak out when they hear the songs, because they haven't heard them since their first communions and Sunday school and shit."

Most of Murdoch's sermons are based on blaming the generations before him for the ills of contemporary society.

"I'm sick of all the labels: 'Twenty-preachers,' 'Jesus-somethings,' whatever you call us. Besides, I'm not going to be a priest forever. The priesthood is just an easy way to make beer money until I decide what I want to do with my life." (*The Onion*, Sept. 27, 1994)

## Tom Servo For Pope

One of the better success stories in the low-rent comedy business is the stellar ascent of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. Currently in its sixth season on Comedy Central, the show explores what happens when a human and three robots are forced to watch the worst movies ever made. Producer Jim Mallon and head writer/host Mike Nelson talk about launching their satellite of love.

**U.: How did you take the show from an independent UHF station to Comedy Central?**

**Mallon:** We did 22 shows at KTMA [TV23, Minneapolis]. Then we thought it might have [a wider] appeal, so we brought it to an agent in New York City. HBO picked it up, and we ended up on the Comedy Channel, which became Comedy Central.

**U.: What's the bottom-line worst, most aesthetically offensive movie ever made?**

**Nelson:** I would have to say, pound for pound, it couldn't possibly get any worse than *Eegah*. It's about a caveman who lives in the desert. This teenager hits him with her car, and he comes out and meets the modern world. It's obvious the father is having an affair with [his] son's girlfriend. Weird. Pedophilic.

**U.: Does Best Brains (MST3K's production company) have any other productions in the works?**

**Mallon:** Yeah, we're working on two new shows. Also, Universal wants to make a movie of MST. They've optioned it for right now, but the film industry is weird. Until you see a check, you don't know what's happening.

**U.: Any advice for young writers and performers?**

**Nelson:** Do your own thing — try to get your own show going. Don't put yourself at someone else's mercy.

**Mallon:** If you want to be a writer, write. You don't just magically get to be a writer. Identify what you have to say. Take advantage of the four-year liberal arts free ride you're on — even if it's cable access or a camcorder. Enjoy college while it lasts — the harsh and foreboding real world awaits.

**Nelson:** Unless you happen to work on a puppet show.



Draw, Jukka Hellen, and Tom Servo — Mystery Science Theater 3000