

Zany standup comics can provide a real lift

By Tannis Cohen
For The Tribune

A funny thing happened when I turned on the TV last night — I couldn't find anything that made me laugh. TV has become Tee-Vee, a glossy Dukes-of-Hazardland populated by souped-up cars and worn-out jokes.

And though there are still some good laughs at movies, it's been a long time since I've heard that gasping, tearful, great-laugh sound.

For those who are stalking the great laugh, there is good news: a troupe of zany stand-up comedians on tour from Toronto's Yuk Yuk's Komedy Kabaret, will be appearing live at the Festival Theatre (772-7779), 801 Sargent Ave., tonight and Sunday.

Humble start

Yuk Yuk's is not an exotic Tibetan bird, but the brain-child of 28-year-old Torontonion Mark Breslin, who opened the club in a bowling-alley-turned community-centre basement in 1976, and later transformed it into a full-time comedy enterprise in Toronto's fashionable Yorkville district.

Today, it is a mecca for tomorrow's stand-up comic stars, a combination nightclub and lunatic asylum, capitalizing on a North American comedy club explosion.

The success in the early 1970s of the Comedy Store in Los Angeles, where established stars like Jimmy Walker and Richard Pryor still drop by, led to a comedy club epidemic: Catch a Rising Star in New York, Hiccups in Ottawa, Punch Lines in Vancouver, and Yuk Yuk's in Toronto, which packs in 80,000 laugh-seekers a year.

Tour Manager Joe Axler



attributes the resurgence of live comedy to "rough times: betrayal and public disillusionment," and to the new breed of comedian stars, like Robin Williams, Andy Kaufman, and David Brenner, who got their starts on the comedy club circuit.

Comedian Larry Horowitz theorizes that "People want more variety now. It's like a smorgasbord. They still eat the soup of the day, which is rock music, but they also go to the salad bar of comedy."

Expect to see forthright,

experimental humor at the Festival this weekend. Comics, it seems, have their fingers on society's pulse, and comedy club regulars are the current jesters of society's court — satirical, prophetic, and very bawdy.

Axler argues that comedy must display a certain amount of bite, but believes good comics use four-letter words "for punctuation only": he claims he pities "the guys who have to swear to make a living."

Axler describes the five touring comedians as "the

most successful, the cream of the Yuk Yuk's crop."

Take Larry Horowitz (please), a former swimming instructor who has appeared on television shows like 90 Minutes Live.

Axler calls him a "master of comic timing and delivery"; in his five years as a comedian he has earned his reputation as a great lampoonist of the media, particularly television advertising, which he calls "sick."

"How about," he jokes, "the Save the Children spot followed by the Alpo com-

mercial? Your dog needs pure beef." Other favorite Horowitz topics: Cigarette smoking, women's liberation, and, of course, swimming.

Axler calls comedian Mike MacDonald, who began his career opening for punk bands in the Rotters club in Ottawa and seems destined for international acclaim, "nothing short of brilliant."

MacDonald's physical elasticity and pained features are accented by a merciless observational wit. (On the frustrations of being a Honda Civic owner: "You push in the lighter and the car slows down"), are the cornerstones of his humor; he is living proof of Charlie Chaplin's theory that "we laugh because it hurts so much."

Impressive list

Other talented comedians that will be appearing include Tony Molesworth, a versatile, juggler/ventriloquist/comedian on tour with this wisecracking dummy Jake the Rabbit; Greek Yukster Lou Dinos, who Axler calls "the ethnic comic" and compares to the late Freddie Prinze; and Lawrence Morganstern, one of the hottest new Yuk Yuk's regulars.

Axler claims the perfect audience is one that listens. He finds Winnipeg friendlier than Toronto and may think seriously about opening a Winnipeg Yuk Yuk's if the Festival audience is receptive.

How funny can live comedy be? Find out tonight or Sunday night at the Festival. Tickets for the Yuk Yuk's show are \$4 per person or \$3.25 for members. Show times are 8 and 10 p.m. Each show requires separate admission.