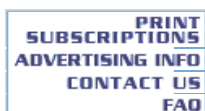




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### Features

East May 26, 2005

*Spotlight on Comedy*

### Comedy Best Bets 2005

10 Standout Standups Worth Watching

By Amelia David

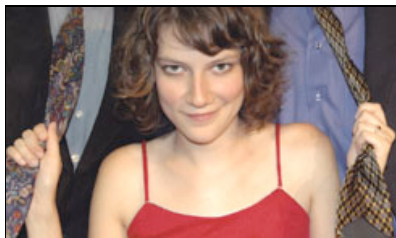


Photo By: Lisa Mauceri

Once again, after a last-minute shower of April and May show invitations and tape submissions, here is our annual Back Stage Comedy Spotlight list of 10 standout standups. Choosing the list is actually an ongoing process; queries about next year will start to appear in our mail the day this issue hits the newsstands. We gather this information throughout the year, using it to create this list and provide regular material for our Laughing Matters comedy column.

How do we find out about shows and performers? We get listings and invitations for numerous shows and industry showcases, and we hear from club and festival bookers, agents, managers, publicists, and producers. We look at recommendations from comics we admire and accept homegrown submissions of tapes and press kits from readers who either are performers or are recommending performers whom they've seen. There are no special ins or secret handshakes that land a comic on the list. It takes a charismatic, compelling stage performance, laugh-out-loud material, and a thought-provoking set -- preferably all three at the same time.

In our talent search, we will sometimes arrange for comps to see a show; often, however, rather than announce our visit, we'll simply arrive and sit in the dark, rooting for the laughs to begin. We may choose to see a live show as an introduction to a performer or a production, but since we want to catch as many performances as possible, tapes and DVDs constitute our best resource. They're also good for gauging when a performer is ready for review consideration. If a performer can't provide a picture and resume with a list of club performances and hasn't yet needed a professional audition tape, he or she usually isn't ready. We look at hundreds of tapes and DVDs and will switch them off if the work hasn't grabbed us within the first 10 minutes. And that's being generous. Many in the comedy industry say they decide in the first two minutes if a performance is worth watching, and auditions for late-night talk-show spots are usually no more than five clean minutes. So keep your reels under 10 minutes and always be sure to put your best material first.

While some of our top 10 comics may be new to you, most aren't new to the business. Even an overnight success is usually a performer who has spent years "seasoning" to find his or her comedy voice. We try to provide something for everyone to enjoy by not choosing too many comics in a single style or category. We also follow performers from year to year as they evolve; a performer may send us a new submission every six months (or even three, as long as it's 100% new material). Experience can do amazing things for the evolution of a stage performer. These 10 performers have been paying their dues and we believe they've earned your attention. We hope at least a few will grab you and provide you with the laughter they gave to us.

#### Mimi Gonzalez: Funky Feminist

We first saw Mimi Gonzalez at New York's Gotham Comedy Club in a 2004 show that celebrated comedienne featured in a new paperback joke collection called "She's So Funny." Gonzalez was first recommended to us by past Back Stage Top 10 comic Jane Condon, who is also featured in the book. Gonzalez had sidesplitting material about her father, a Latino patriarch married 10 times with multiple families. While this strong, high-spirited comic had great observational material about being an American with hybrid roots, what made her set especially interesting was her ability to make her feminist material both funny and accessible to everyone in her audience (something we don't always see when feminism and comedy are mixed).

Gonzalez originally made a name for herself in San Francisco by producing "Women With Balls," a weekly women's showcase. She moved the show to Los Angeles with much success and was a semiregular at L.A.'s Laugh Factory and the Improv in Hollywood. Believing a comic has to pay some road dues, Gonzalez has worked clubs, hotels, and casinos, toured the U.S. twice, and entertained the military in Japan, South Korea, Bosnia, and Kosovo. She's experienced the fate of many road comics, however: Because she's on the road so often, she hasn't had time to develop a home club in New York that could give her headliner status. Since she tells us that this year she's ready to "come in off the road and trade in driving gloves for boxing gloves to slug it out in

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New York's clubs," we wanted to get you in her corner as she lines up more city shows.

Gonzalez has a no-genders-barred approach to sexuality and a funky kind of feminism that we believe will be very successful. Because of her last name, you may first see her pigeonholed a bit as part of Latino-themed nights (even though this Latina tells us she's "currently learning Spanish from books and tapes"). We're sure that as soon as New York bookers get to know her, she'll do well in any show. Gonzalez recently spent a month co-hosting a morning radio show in Albany and we wouldn't be surprised to see her develop into a successful radio personality as well. You can get her club schedule and more at [www.mimigonzalez.com](http://www.mimigonzalez.com).

#### **Brad Zimmerman: Comedy Crafted With Care**

We got our first taste of Brad Zimmerman's dry, brainy, and just plain hilarious material at New York's Carolines, where he did his routine about a waiter who doesn't particularly like his job or his clientele. When we found ourselves laughing so much that it was hard to take notes, we knew he was destined for big things. Zimmerman, however, is a comic with a very strong work ethic: He's much more interested in doing his job of making audiences laugh than in seeking press accolades. The past few seasons, whenever we wanted to get information from him for *Laughing Matters*, he was always traveling around the world, hard at work -- which just made us respect him even more.

Last year, Jimmy -- as he is affectionately known by comics, including the many who recommended him to our list -- killed at "The Bar Mitzvah Show" at the Just for Laughs comedy festival in Montreal. He also performed at the festival's gala, which was hosted by Wayne Brady, who told the audience of over 2,000, "I'd love to get a commission on this guy, because he's brilliant." We agree.

Zimmerman has been featured in a tribute to the Friars Club with the venerable Freddie Roman and Stewie Stone and was part of the Kung Pao Kosher comedy festival in San Francisco with Judy Gold. He also took part in the Friars Club roast of the Smothers Brothers at the Hilton Hotel and has performed at the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas, the Improv in Atlantic City, and, so he tells us, "every Jewish country club in Long Island." You can bet that each synagogue and private party set he does is crafted with the same care as when he performs in front of thousands at a festival. He's also worked in New York at the Gotham Comedy Club and Stand-Up NY, to name a few. He's got such a strong stage presence that if he ever wanted to cross over to acting on the stage or screen, he'd be a casting catch there as well, comically or dramatically.

We especially want you to know about Zimmerman because of the debut of his upcoming one-man show, "Atta Boy, Jimmy," at the Irish Arts Center (553 West 51st St.), June 23-25. For reservations, call (212) 868-4444 or go online to [www.smartix.com](http://www.smartix.com). We'll be in the front row cheering. We're sure you'll become a Jimmy fan, too.

#### **Dena Blizzard: One Funny Mother**

This former Miss New Jersey and mother of three can be seen throughout New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware bringing down the house with fun takes on dating, marriage, and parenting. Although Dena Blizzard had only been performing comedy a short time, she won the New Talent title at the 2004 Ladies of Laughter competition at the Improv in New York, where we were first introduced to her work last August by show producer Peggy Boyce. Blizzard's material -- including a stage demonstration in which she creates less-than-serene yoga positions that let her kids and hubby know just what she is thinking of them -- was the hit of the evening. We were shocked to find out that she was relatively new to standup and competing in the amateur section of the contest. After the contest, *Laughing Matters* called her "a real find with a bright future ahead." If you see her name in a show's lineup, we know you'll be in for a fun time.

Blizzard was also a finalist in radio station WMMR's Last Philly Comic Standing and the Comedy Zone's Captains of Comedy competition. She can be seen on QVC as the official spokesperson for Solitude and has also made appearances on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox. Some of the clubs where she performs include Catch a Rising Star, Rascals, and Stand-Up NY. She's appearing at the Comedy Stop at the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas through May 28. Blizzard is one funny mother -- and that's also the name of her website: [www.onefunnymother.com](http://www.onefunnymother.com).

#### **Erik Marcisak: It's Saturday Night... Rewritten**

When *Laughing Matters* first heard about writer, director, performer, and executive producer Erik Marcisak, he was running Above Kleptomania, a theatre company in New York featuring improv and sketch comedy. We began to see his name connected with a number of shows and became curious to find out more about this comedy supporter. Marcisak believed so strongly in the goal of providing low-cost comedy that in September 2004, he created a home for a coalition of actors, writers, and directors called Juvie Hall, a sketch-comedy-only theatre in the heart of the East Village, running Wednesday through Sunday at the Gene Frankel Theatre, 24 Bond St., between Bowery and Lafayette. Looking at this space's roster of shows and the long list of artists who work there would have been enough for us to give Marcisak a spot on our list this year.

We're big believers that you can still create your own entertainment destiny by saying, "Let's put on a show" -- and then doing it. When we asked Marcisak about his goals, he made it clear that he wants to strengthen and advance the quality of sketch comedy. He also has a special interest in one day working on "Saturday Night Live," which is what drew him to create "Saturday Night Rewritten," a show with a fast-paced and fascinating premise. Imagine watching "SNL" on Saturday night and then using it as your inspiration for a new show, written and rehearsed for seven hours on Sunday and then performed for 90 minutes Sunday night. There isn't enough