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Ochi's Lounge hosts Backroom comics

by Kevin Scott Hall
EDGE Contributor
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Having originally started a gay stand-up night with ThursGays at the now-shuttered Mo Pitkin's in the East Village, friends Shawn Hollenbach, Jenny Rubin, Dave Rubin and Paul Case have recently brought their unique brand of gay comedy to Friday nights at Ochi's Lounge on West 14th Street.

Billing it as the Backroom, they promise provocative comedy.

"We're looking for fun comics with a great point of view and sometimes some sexiness to the material," Hollenbach, a comic with boy-band good looks and a devilish smile, said.

He performed a lot of family material and then did his popular routine about the Miss Subway contest on a recent Friday. Comic Adam Lehman told EDGE he and his comedic colleagues can loosen up a bit with a gay crowd.

"It frees you up with your language and content," he said.

Lehman, who presents a relaxed persona onstage and projects intelligence and creativity, also featured a sketch of a phone call with Janet Jackson. He used overdubs of her actual voice from recordings.

"Gays have developed a sharper wit in order to survive," Lehman explained. "So we have to work harder to make them laugh."

Another audience favorite was gay-friendly Ann Design, a school teacher by day. With her sunny, dimpled face and blonde bob, she looks like she just stepped off the bus from Iowa. The look perhaps works to her advantage, as she delivered a breathless, blistering rant about her teaching job and Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin's family.

"I feel sorry for that Levi Johnston," Design said as she referred to the Alaska governor's future son-in-law. "He just wanted to get laid and now he's thrust into the spotlight meeting heads of state and has to marry into that awful family!"

Hunky, low-key David Rubin, who offered more political humor, and Danny Leary, whose mere facial expressions and body language evoked laughs during his commentary, were among the other comics featured.

Host Jenny Rubin kept things moving with gay trivia questions and stories about growing up in the Village and living in New Jersey.



Shawn Hollenbach performs at Ochi's Lounge on a recent Friday night. He, along with friends Jenny and Dave Rubin and Paul Case, have launched the Backroom as a forum to provide Gothamites with a unique brand of provocative comedy. (Source:Shawn Hollenbach)

Many of the comics touched on the recent financial crisis. Case, who did not perform that night, pointed out their shows are free with just a one-drink minimum.

"All that's required is that people show up and laugh," he said. "People are looking for entertainment that's not going to break the bank."

Hollenbach added he hopes to build "a gay comic Mafia. He noted in particular there are no A-list gay comics on the circuit, while lesbians have Ellen DeGeneres and Rosie O'Donnell representing them in the mainstream media. Hollenbach was quick to emphasize, though, all the Backroom's comics have solid credits under their belts that include television experience.

Case added the live performances provide an additional element for his comics.

"Nothing is censored," he said. "We leave it to the performers to say what they want to say and perfect their craft."

Ochi's Lounge, which is downstairs from Comix, is located at 353 W. 14th St. between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Log onto www.comixny.com/ochislounge.aspx or call (212) 524-2500 for more information.

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