

# THE COMEDY GAZELLE





# ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I first moved to Chicago, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey annihilate a sold out Laugh Factory. *Why haven't I heard of her before?*

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it can pass you by.

That's why I started The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to share knowledge that can hopefully make the scene that much stronger.

Thank you for your support!

— Jerry

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## INTERVIEW: AARON WEBER

*Fresh off the release of his debut special, Signature Dish, I sat down with Aaron Weber (@realaaronweber) to pontificate about comedy between shows in the Zanies green room. We talk about learning from other comedians, shedding influences, tips for working clean, advice for frustrated comics, and more!*

### **Do you have any goals for the weekend or are you just running your set?**

So, I put out my first special at the end of January. It was 30 minutes, which I'm glad it was because I wasn't starting from zero right after it came out. And even though most people at the shows this weekend probably did not watch the special, I still am trying to approach it like they have. I want the whole show to be different stuff. I'm trying to get an act together, so this weekend there's a lot of bits I'm trying to figure out and reposition. So, probably more so this weekend than ever, I've really been diving in, trying to figure it out.

### **What does that look like for you? Are you listening to the sets? Putting pen to paper?**

I write out all my set lists on an app on my phone, and I just kind of look at that. I don't write things out word for word – which maybe I should – but the process changes. Sometimes I'll sit through and type it out and try to find stuff. I'm looking for a system. I should say: I'm always nervous about sounding like I'm pontificating about comedy. The only constant advice that's given, and I think has been since day one, is to just get on stage as much as you can. I remember asking for advice early on, and everyone was like, "Just get on stage and you'll figure everything else out." There's no cheat code.

### **Is there anything that has stuck with you from early on, though? I feel like when you're starting, you get a lot of advice and something tends to stick.**

When I got my first 10 minute set, I remember thinking, "Oh, I've done a five minute set, so this is just two five minute sets." And then somebody told me, "No, a 10 minute set is its own thing." If I do 45 minutes tonight, that's not 11 four-minute open mic spots. You gotta think of it as a cohesive thing. That doesn't mean having a thesis statement like it's *Nanette*, but you want it where it feels like a packaged thing. I'm still trying to work on that. A lot of the practical, off the stage stuff I learned was from the comedians that were nice enough



to take me on the road: Dusty Slay, John Crist, Kathleen Madigan, Henry Cho. They took me on the road and I watched them be comics. I watched them tip the staff, and I watched them meet people after the show and all that stuff. I remember I opened for a comedian and after the show they were getting ready to do the meet and greet, and he took a breath and was like, "Alright, now the second show." He thought about the meet and greet as the second show, and that really changed the way I looked at it. I was like, "Well, this is as important." These people came to the show and they wanna say hi. I gotta go give 'em something.

### **Yeah, those are your fans.**

Hopefully. And if they've never heard of me – but they still came to the show – and I go out and meet 'em, maybe now they'll come back next time. So, A: it's just a nice thing to do for people if they want it. But B, it's a smart thing to do.

### **Going back to your special you just put out, I imagine you've developed more material than that 30 minutes. How did you decide on what to pull together?**

Yeah, there was some stuff that was maybe three or four years old. A lot of it was newer stuff that I was excited about doing in that moment. So, I just thought, "This works as 30 minutes on its own," and then I just did it. There was some newer stuff on there that I didn't do here

last year at the club, so it's a mix of old and new stuff. I was just trying to have a fun 30 minutes. I wasn't thinking too much about that.

**Did you try to add stuff to the older things so that it felt newer to you? Sometimes I'll be excited about a newer chunk, but then I'm kind of on autopilot for some of the older stuff.**

You can do small things that I think breathe life into the whole bit. It can even be just doing it at a different point in the act, like having a different context for it. That can make the whole bit feel new for you. And then somebody told me if you change one small thing in a long bit, the whole bit will feel new to you because you're excited to tell that one part. Something I've been trying to work on is caring less about the specific wording for stuff. I know where the beats are. I know what to hit, hopefully for a laugh, but if I talk through it a little more conversationally, like I would off stage, that makes it feel like I don't zone out and go on autopilot. I don't like that feeling, so anything that keeps me in the moment instead of just reading it from my brain.

**I was gonna say, you sound very conversational. Is that a big priority for you to come across that way?**

I think it's just a style that I like. I wasn't necessarily that way at the beginning. At the beginning, if you see early videos of me, I'm just doing a Bill Burr, like, "No, dude, it's brutal!" But as I start to talk about more day-to-day stuff about me, I find the style I like is conversational. I hope that's how they feel, like I'm just hanging out with 'em. That's kind of the goal.

**I feel like a lot of comics will emulate someone when they're first starting. How are you able to shed that and start becoming more yourself?**

I'm still trying to shed it. I have moments where I hear somebody else in what I'm saying. I don't like it. Somebody said to stop listening to other comics. I think as your bits get better, you just start to do 'em in your own voice. I don't know if I can pinpoint what my voice is. There was never a click moment, but I have moments on stage where I really feel like I'm being myself, and then I have moments where I feel like I'm a guy doing standup. I think the goal is to get rid of those, and that just takes time. I started standup knowing that this is a long game. You're not gonna be good quickly, so I've always tried to have the perspective that I might not be really good at standup until I'm 20 years in.

**Is there anything you're currently trying to improve on skill wise?**

Yeah, there are small technical things that I'm trying to do. I have a dumb guy voice in my act, and I feel like I do it too much. I was thinking through a set and I was like, "That's too much." I can feel the crowd being like, "Okay." So, I gotta use it deliberately. Physically, I'm working on my hand motions more. I'm thinking about all this stuff. I heard Bill Burr say on a podcast once that if a basketball player can't drive left, they will deliberately drive left a lot to work on that. I didn't think about standup in that way, where there are muscles that you gotta work on to round out your game. So, there are a ton of little small things I'm working on.

**I'm curious, have you always been a clean comic?**

I didn't think too much about it at first, but it's kind of a function of how I was raised. I genuinely don't think about it anymore. It was never a decision like, "Oh, I should be a clean comedian!" That's just naturally kind of how I am. I remember I met a comedian once and he was like, "Man, I admire you clean comedians, dude. Cause I got into comedy to say what I want to say!" And I was like, "Alright?" And then I was thinking, "I am saying everything I want to say." Like, my hands are not tied behind my back. This is just kind of how I am. This whole weekend, there's been people bringing their families to these shows - people my age, but they got their mom and dad and stuff. I like that people can do that.

**Do you have any advice for somebody that wants to work cleaner?**

It's so interesting, because I always think that because some people were raised differently than I was, they genuinely have no instinct for what is clean. I always think to just imagine your grandmother's in the front row. That's a perfect barometer for me, but people's grandmas are different than mine, so

that might mean something very different. If you wanna work on being clean, which I think is a good thing to have in your tool belt, just do a clean set. Just do it. Do it on a show that's a dirty show. Nobody will know if you do it right. That's the best compliment you'll get from somebody is they'll go, "Oh, I didn't even realize the show was clean." I think sometimes it has a connotation of being cheesy dad jokes and puns and popsicle stick humor, but it doesn't have to be that. It can just be regular standup.

### How do you define clean?

If somebody on my show asks me, I just say, "No sex stuff and no cursing." Drug stuff is fine, you can go dark, you can do race stuff, you can do whatever. That's different for everybody, but I think that's a good place to start. And then just kind of read the room for the rest of it.

**I wanted to ask you a specific question about the hotel story on your special. When you say, "How many room keys do you want?" Did you actually say that, or is that just for the joke? And where do you draw that line?**

I thought about saying it, but I didn't say it. Some of that stuff that's absurdist, a lot of that is me in my head going, "What if I had done that?" But that was a real thing. I remember being behind that guy and hearing him say that and thinking, "What a creep." And then, if I remember correctly, in real life I talked to her. I was like, "Man, that guy was weird, huh?" I talked to her about it, but it's funnier if I'm the creep. I think a lot of standup is rooted in something that happened, but you gotta manipulate it in such a way that it's a good bit. Most stories in real life, there's no button at the end of a real life story. Most stories, like real stories, if you told it verbatim, it's like, "Alright, and then I just kind of went home." No story in real life ended with a callback, right? Or like a big full circle moment or any of that. That's all manipulating the story to make it work on stage.

**Do you have a process for pulling more stuff out of a story?**

I think you just beat it into the ground and stuff comes out. I talk through stuff a lot out loud – just like in my car or something – which I think helps me better than writing it out. Cause that's how I'm gonna do it, is talk through it. So if you talk through stuff, you'll connect it that way and then hopefully whittle it down. I've written a lot of stuff that I think is gonna be like a 10 minute story, and then it ends up being like a one liner.



photo by @abe\_auer

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**One thing I noticed watching you is that you get a lot of laughs on simple sentences, where you kind of just say something clear and obvious.**

Sometimes the simplest way to say something is the funniest way to say it. Because even if they know what I'm about to say, if I say it shorter and maybe a little different than they're thinking, that's a surprise too. I used to try to use a lot of really big words and then I stopped. Sometimes the simplest way to word something is the funniest.

**Is there anything you know now you wish you had known earlier on in your career?**

I think people can worry about their career too early. Things aren't gonna happen right away. Take the time. I wasn't worried about chasing the Late Night spot two years in. Some of these guys are. They're worried about their career and you're like, "You've been doing this three years." So, I would tell people to just try to get good at standup. I'm still trying to get good at standup. And sometimes I feel like I'm good, and sometimes I feel like I'm never good. And then you see a really good comic and you're like, "Oh, well, that's the bar. Let me try again." But then

you're like, "Well, that guy's been doing it 20 years. Of course he's good. When I started, he had already been doing it 10 years." You gotta think about it like that. You can't compare. There are guys that I've been competitive with in my head secretly throughout my career, and you gotta recognize there's not a single path to success. Just keep doing what you're doing and keep your head down. People will pass you, and then you'll pass them, but just move forward.

**I think it's interesting you put out your first special around the 10 year mark. It seems like you took your time to get it out there. How did you know you were ready to finally put something out?**

Oh, it was Nate's idea to do it. I've been doing 45 to an hour on the road for years, so I felt like I could do a good 30 minutes. But it was his idea that I should have something out. You wanna be able to point people to something. When people go, "Oh, you do stand up? Where can I see your stuff?" I'm like, "I don't know, dude. Just come see me." But now I have something approved by me that I can show people.

**Has he given you any other advice or guidance over the years that's been particularly helpful?**

He's been very generous to me with his time and advice about stuff, which he doesn't need to be. I mean, he's like 15 to 20 levels above me and he's the biggest comic in the world. He doesn't need to be talking to me about small-time stuff I'm dealing with on the road, but he is great about that cause he's been at that stage. One technical thing Nate taught me, he was like, "If you're doing a longer set, it's okay to settle in and not get a ton of laughs right up top." I think if you're doing a five minute set you should just be killing the whole time, but if you're doing 45, you can take the first 30 seconds and just let them get used to your voice and pacing and stuff. If you're confident enough, you're gonna get laughs. I used to be frantically scrambling to get a laugh so quickly, and I'm just not anymore. Nate's told me a lot, and I just watch him too. I've seen him build his last two specials from scratch; I've seen him get an idea and then write it down, and then do it on stage, and then that ends up on a special. So, seeing something come from scratch like that is super helpful, just to see how he does it.

**It's encouraging to see someone at that level still do the same process.**

Yeah, I remember I met Ralphie May early at Zanies and he was like, "I wish more open micers came to my show so they could see that I'm not that different." I thought that was interesting. He was like, "I'm doing the same stuff you

are, I just know how to do it better. But I'm not that different."

**I know you gotta get downstairs in a second, but do you have any advice for frustrated comics?**

Try to get out of town if you're frustrated in your scene and you feel like you're running on a treadmill. Even if it's going and doing open mics in other cities, get out of the city. Early on, I'd leave Nashville to go do a mic in Chattanooga and that would re-energize me because it's something completely different. New audiences that haven't heard all your stuff, comics that haven't heard all your stuff, that'll re-energize you. I know working the road is easier said than done, but go spend a week somewhere and do all their open mics. It just feels fresh and then you come back to your scene with a new energy. And when you're out doing stuff and on the road, at least for me, that's when I'm writing and thinking about stuff too. You come back from the road and you're like, "Oh, now I got stuff I want to try."

Follow us [@comedygazelle](https://www.instagram.com/comedygazelle) to stay up to date on our latest interviews and live shows!





# VOUCH

THE COMEDY GAZELLE PRESENTS



*Hosted by*  
**BRANDON KIEFFER**

*Featuring*  
**XAVIER SMITH, RICARDO ANGULO, MIKE KNIGHT**  
**CHRISSY FERRERA, AMBA WALKA, HARRY JENSEN**

*Laugh Factory | 8:00pm | 4/30/25*

The Comedy Gazelle presents:

# VOUCH AUDITIONS

*3 min sets  
40 comic cap  
Mon, May 19th*





# Comedians Recognizing Comedians

## MATT SULLIVAN

Kid has been doing comedy for 8 months and won the roast battle tournament. He's a prolific writer and very quick on his feet. He has a bright future

## HAROLD PATRICK

He hits so many mics a week and is constantly improving, his work ethic is inspiring to new and old comics!

## ZACH ALBERS

Zach is one of the funniest comics in Chicago right now. He always kills.

## TINA YOUKHANA

I feel that she is truly a comedians comedian, bar none.

## GRACE KILPATRICK

Grace is such an amazing comic! She's an amazing host and her jokes have a strong POV. She's also such a sweet and kind human!

## ALEX TSAKANIKAS

He's incredibly funny, unique, talented and criminally underbooked.

## SO FAR SO GOOD

Everyone talks about keeping it fresh and doing something different then the same old stuff, but these guys are some of the only people with the balls to do it and keep it funny. They are one of the few to push past the monotony of traditional standup and give audiences something fun, cool, different, and exciting every time anyone gets to see them perform

## HUNTER HIRSH

He's been sober and working out so much that his opener ( fat joke ) is gonna stop working soon.

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?  
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

**DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE**

