

# 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: PEYTON RUDDY

*A door guy at the Comedy Mothership, Peyton Ruddy (@peytonruddycomedy) is one of today's fattest rising comedians. We talk about moving from Chicago to Austin, differences between the two scenes, advice for Kill Tony hopefuls, the importance of developing new material, and more.*

**Can you rank these comedians? Ralphie May, Chris Farley, John Candy, Tim Dillon.**

Okay, let's see. Gotta put Farley at number one — he's the king. It's tough to put Candy second, but I'm gonna go Farley, then Candy, then Tim because he's the man, and then Ralphie. Was there another fat guy in there?

**I could throw in Dale McPeck as well.**

Okay, so I'll put him at one and everybody else can fuck off.

**So, you just moved down to Austin. What made you feel like you were ready to leave Chicago?**

Well, I went down there in July and Sam Tallent got me a spot at the Mothership. I did five minutes on the Crew Show, and Adam Eget saw me and asked if I was interested in being a door guy. I was like, "Absolutely." I was planning on moving down there in the next six months, but I was like, "Well, I'm getting what I was going to move down here for, so I might as well go now." I had my trip in July and then was living there in September.

**I feel like you're having the ideal Austin experience, right? You got door at the Mothership, you went on Kill Tony, crushed, got a bunch of followers. What do you think has worked for you that hasn't worked for all the other comics trying to do that?**

It was just complete luck and good timing. Austin is a great scene, and there's a lot of good comics down here, but there's so many more comics just down here for Kill Tony. That's what's so good about this city right now: it's waiting for more great comics to come down. So, when a comic who has more than a minute of material comes down here, they're like, "Do this show!"



photo by @mtr.chi

**When I visited, that was my experience too. I felt like there were a ton of very green comics, but if you had 15-20+ minutes, you could get some serious stage time.**

For sure, absolutely. So to answer your question, I would just say to come down here prepared. I feel like that's kind of what Chicago was: you get your stage time and your reps in for years and years, and then go to the big scene and try your hand at it.

**In what ways do you feel like Chicago helped prepare you?**

There's just so much stage time in Chicago. There are so many indie shows, not to mention having a club like Zanies. That was my goal the whole time: just get into Zanies, try and host the Super Six showcase, and then try and host a weekend for a headliner. That kind of stuff prepares you and helps you become a better comic. Austin is mainly shotgun hosting, nobody's a host really. So in Chicago, if you're a really good comic, you're getting work at these clubs, at Laugh Factory, at Zanies, where you're the host. You learn that skill, then you learn how to feature. And then you get a good act. I feel like Chicago is a great city for developing in those steps. Then, when you go to a new scene, you're a really developed comic ready to go on to that next step.



**I feel like at Zanies, you're also learning how to interact with headliners. What's your experience been working at the Mothership and interacting with some of the biggest names in comedy?**

It's been really cool. Like you said, Zanies is good for that and so is Roast Battle because they have a lot of bigger names on. It really helps because you have potentially three days of being with a headliner that you're a really big fan of. You do that enough and it kinda gets normal; you know how to keep cool even though you're kinda fangirling out, you know? I think I'm still pretty bad at it. I'm kinda like, "You mind if we get a picture?"

**How often do you interact with Rogan or some of those Mothership headliners?**

Everybody interacts with everybody. That's what's so great about the Mothership, is if somebody's headlining a weekend, a door guy's hosting it or featuring, unless the headliner brings somebody. But the door guys are doing Bottom of the Barrel — Rogan's on that show all the time — or they're doing showcases that Ron White's on. The club is so good about including door guys in everything: getting weekends, doing showcases, and just treating them right. It's like the best place.

**I also heard you can clock out and go do sets at other places.**

Yeah, they're really cool about going to do spots. The other thing about Chicago is that it's great for stage time, but you can't really spot hop like you can in Austin. All the main clubs are within two blocks of each other: you have Mothership, you have Sunset Strip down the street, you have Creek and the Cave up on 7th, Black Rabbit on 5th, Velveeta Room, there's Roscoe's in East Austin — you can go do like three spots within 25 minutes. All the clubs are like, "Yeah, if you need to go, just go do it." They want you to develop; the city is really proud to have comics that are doing spots. They don't want to hold you down at all.

**How many booked shows would you say you're doing a week down there?**

I would say probably four. It depends, but usually at Mothership you get one or two spots a week and you can go up every Monday on the Crew Show. There's so many shows down here too, so you can go do a ton of stuff. I think this week I have five spots, so you can really bounce around quite a bit.

**I saw you recently and I feel like you've gotten even better since you've moved down there. Do you feel like that as well? Or are you like, "I've always been at this level, it's just now people are noticing?"**

I think I've for sure gotten better. I'm getting up more than I ever really was in Chicago, and in front of a packed room. A lot of the clubs down here always have great crowds because of the pop-in culture, like, "Oh, Kam Patterson or somebody might pop in from California." Everybody's just flocking to these comedy shows. I'm not saying I'm great, but I've gotten better than I was. And you don't even really realize; it's just more reps and getting up.

**Goal wise, where are you trying to go from here? I know you just headlined Zanies.**

Yeah, I would love to start building a little bit more traction. The Kill Tony thing helped quite a bit. I would love to become a headliner and start really touring around and at least doing some one-nighters and making some more money that way. I think that would be the next step: starting to headline a little bit more.

**Has there been any sort of change for you since you gained all those Kill Tony followers?**

For sure. Those fans are rabid; they're so nuts. Austin is obviously Kill Tony Central and I opened for Casey [Rocket] a bunch, so when that happened I got texts from a whole bunch of people that were like, "Come to Nashville, come to North Carolina, come to Florida." It was a lot of Southern states — I got that Bible Belt demographic — but a ton of people reached out. On the street is where it happens the most, a ton of Kill Tony fans just roaming around trying to get into the Mothership. The thing that I hate the most is the people who reach out with tags like, "You should have tried this, you should have done this." I appreciate it,

but I'm good. And the joke I did on Kill Tony was this Black Lives Matter joke, where I said that I support Black Lives Matter. I got a ton of texts like, "You fucking idiot, Black Lives Matter is a fraud organization! How could you support that?" And I'm like, "I just think Black people matter."

**I'm curious, how were you able to do so well on Kill Tony without being retarded?**

I think if a good comic goes on, they usually do well for the most part. But I'm sure I would be selling out the United Center right now if my head was backwards or something. That's the ongoing joke down here too, the disabled regulars.

**How did you decide on your minute?**

That was just the joke that was doing the best at the time. I've made changes to it since Kill Tony, but it was in that spot where I was like, "Oh, I'm going to start closing with this." It was just my best joke; there wasn't much thought process to it.

**Do you have any advice for any comics looking to do Kill Tony for the first time?**

If you have a physical feature that is very noticeable, just know that jokes are going to happen about it. I knew that if I was going to get called, it was going to be fat jokes. So, if you can, stay in the pocket and just roll with it. I've only done the show once, but I feel like some people get on there and they get upset. I would just go with it. At least, that's what seemed to work for me.

**I wanted to ask you about your process. Are you a sit-down, pen and paper kind of guy? Or do you just work things out on stage?**

I actually have a very weird, autistic process. I'll think of something and I'll write it down on my phone, and then I come back home and I'll write it down on a legal pad. It won't be a finished bit, but it'll be a whole page of what I think the bit should be. I just want to get the shell and three main punches in. Then after that, I love to go up and fuck around with it on stage. I used to write word for word, which works for a lot of people, but I think going up there in front of an audience is where you find the best way it could go. Instead of sitting at your desk like, "This is funny to me. I hope it goes well!"

**How old are you now?**

I just turned 24 in December.



**And you started when you were 17?**

Yeah, I was 17. In high school.

**How did you know so early that you wanted to get into it?**

I always loved stand up. My dad was really into it, my brother loved it, and we went to a show at Second City for my brother. He was into music and they have a musical director during the shows, so we were like, "Maybe that's something that you could do." Then the show was just great. And at the end, the guy who was in the cast was like, "Just so you know, if you like what we do, you can get into this by doing classes." And I was like, "Oh, there's a way in." When I watched stand up when I was a kid, I was like, "I guess they're just comics." I didn't know how you became one. So I took two classes at ImprovOlympic, and then realized it was a bit of a waste of my father's money.

**Where did you start standup?**

The Comedy Shrine. Then, maybe a month later, I realized that there was improv going on in the other room. I was like, "Oh my god, that's how you get on SNL!" That's what my dream was. I still love Saturday Night Live, but it was like the greatest thing to me. I was like, "Oh, improv, that's how the Second City guys are getting into it." So I was like, "Well, I'll just do both. That'll get me something!" And they still haven't called.

**Hey man, every now and then they need a fat white guy. You could be the next Bobby Moynihan.**

I used to say that to myself when I was a kid. I was like, "Okay, there was Belushi, Farley, Moynihan. I'm next."

**Are you trying to do anything beyond stand up, or is that the ultimate goal?**

Stand up is my number one thing. I don't really have any other things on the back burner right now. But I love writing and I'm always trying to think of some kind of terrible idea for a show or a movie. I just like writing; I think it's a very fun muscle to exercise. But as of right now, I'm just focusing on stand up and trying to get better and keep getting up.

**Do you feel an extra juice of motivation from what's happening right now?**

For sure. I feel like it's more of a job than it was in Chicago, and in a good way. It's a job because I want to keep doing new stuff when I go up at Mothership. I want people to see that I'm writing, that I'm trying new stuff. And so you kind of have an added pressure to it, which I really like. I feel like every time I had to have something new in Chicago it was because I was gonna be hosting Zanies, and I was like, "Alright, well, I have six months till maybe I get another weekend." Now it's like, "Okay, I have a week to try and get two or three new bits out."

**Yeah, it's nice to have that structure.**

Exactly. It's not that you don't want to write, but you don't have that time constraint. I feel like now more than ever, I'm like, "Okay, I gotta do this." Because I don't wanna fuck up and not get booked.

**Right, you don't want to squander that opportunity. How nerve-racking is it for you doing a brand new bit on a packed out Mothership show?**

I do a lot of new stuff on the Crew Show, which is basically the mic for the door guys and the paid regulars. I love it because every comic gets it if they're taking it seriously, like, "Yeah, I'm gonna bomb with this new shit, but it's new shit." If I have something new, I'm just excited to try it. And if it bombs, of course I'll crawl into a hole for a week, but I love taking it on stage and doing it for the first time. And it's great to try it at Mothership because there's an actual audience. I feel like in Chicago, I didn't have that many opportunities to get up and try my new stuff at a show because I wanted to do well so I could come back. It was like, "Well, this is only my fourth time back in like a year, so don't fuck around up there." Now I'm realizing that new stuff is good. Even if someone's

bombing, they're writing, they're trying new tags, they're rearranging their set, they're opening with their closer. Even if it's just an idea, it's still progress and a step in the right direction.

**If you could change anything about the Chicago scene, what would you want to change?**

I just wish there were more clubs there. I love how many indie shows there are, I think it's incredible, but I think clubs really develop a comic. It's just more opportunities for comics to get up and become good hosts, become good features, hopefully headline. And I guess the second thing I'd fix is the attitude on a lot of these comics. I feel like a lot of them think they're too good for it – they're too good to do stand up, but they want the social status of doing it. But they don't go out, they don't do new stuff, and they're not working. It baffles me that nobody wants to try new shit out there. People think they get the top dog spot and then they don't have to work anymore. And it's like, "Alright, well, that's slowly gonna go away." Everyone's going to catch on; the new comics in the scene are gonna be like, "This guy's great!" But then they've been in the city for a year, and they're like, "That guy hasn't done fucking shit!"

**And what would you change about Austin if you could change anything?**

I would say you don't have to follow the trend of what comics are doing down here. There's a lot of alt comics, and you don't have to be that. I feel like some people are kind of biting somebody's style because that's what's working for somebody else. But the comics that are really great down here are just themselves and they're just doing what they want to do. I feel like a lot of new comics come in and they're like, "Oh, it's working for that guy. I'm going to try being like him!" I'd say just be true to what you think is funny, what you want to do. I think Joe List said this one time – he was like, "That pendulum will swing back at some point,

and whatever you're trying to do to fit in won't be cool anymore. So, you just need to stay yourself." If you try and do what this comic's doing, eventually that comic won't be cool and now you're fucked. And also you're just copying that guy, so it's just never good. So, I would just say to focus on being yourself and writing more than one minute of material.

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Interview by @hamedicomedy*





# VOUCHI

THE COMEDY GAZELLE PRESENTS



*Hosted by*  
**BRANDON KIEFFER**

*Featuring*

YONI HEISLER, CHRIS DAMEN, JENNIE WEAVER, ALAN SALAZAR  
OLZHASBEK ZHAKENOV, TRISTAN A. SMITH, JACK ALLEN

*Laugh Factory | 8:00pm | 3/26/25*



# Comedians Recognizing Comedians

## CHICAGO.OPENMICS

I don't know who they are behind that account, but every comic should thank them for putting together that spreadsheet and uploading the mics happening each night! Thank you for everything you do and how effective and diligent you are! I'd be so lost without that page!

## TITO

He's working hard out here and is funny as fuck. Book this dude! His mic is always fun too. Dude needs more credit!

## 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!

## KAT DIAZ

Runs 2 open mics and 2 shows. Is booked basically every night. Takes no days off. Hardest working comedian in the city

## RACHEL DISPENZA

Rachel is so 🍷 funny 🍷 ! They consistently write the punchiest jokes, they're a great pal, and they always step in to help when something goes awry (i.e. they are amazing at fixing broken microphones!). I'm a Rachel dispenza stan 4ever

## TY BLASING

Ty is super always a pleasure to be around and is funny ans heck. He runs a great open Showpen mic at my buddy's with Carolyn who's also awesome! Energy can literally shift a room. I can't wait to see what new bits he comes up with!

## RONNIE RAY

Ronnie is making a new special every month and this dude is an amazing host at his shows. He's mad underrated in the scene and he's needs to get booked more and shown more love. Dude books weekly at his shows at Lincoln Lodge and always kills it! He's a a true comedian and kind person!

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?  
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

**DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE**

