

THE COMEDY GAZELLE

THE LATEST IN CHICAGO COMEDY



**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
NATE BURROWS**

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 supercharge herself with a firm slap of the puss.

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's easy to miss.

That's why I'm starting The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to showcase this city's unrivaled talent. To keep everyone up-to-date on the scene, and to do it in a fun way. And not just in a one-off article, but all the time.

Each issue will include an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

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INTERVIEW: NATE BURROWS

Nate Burrows (@nateburrows2424) is a Chicago-based comedian and all-around good dude. Whether he's eating it on stage, dishing out Italian subs, or organizing a trash cleanup, Nate knows how to put a smile on a face. We talked about his sandwich company, the community, open mics, hairy Jamacian pussy, and more.

Can you talk about how Moralewich got started?

Pretty much at the start of the pandemic, it was the perfect timing. Netflix released that '90s Bulls documentary. My uncle's a chef, so him and I made sandwiches for all my friends before it would air. I just went and dropped them off, then we'd all watch the Bulls doc. And so it was kind of a way to stay in touch with my friends.

Everyone was saying how it made them feel real good, so I told my uncle and he was like, "We should do that for the homeless." I know a lot of people who do non-profit work, so I got put in touch with these nuns on the South Side of Chicago. It's called Precious Blood. So we would make the sandwiches there and hand them out, and from that, we met all these people and got to know the neighborhood. While they ate, we'd talk to them and find out how we could cater stuff to their needs. One guy was like, "My kids' coats are ratty," and we were like "Oh, we're gonna get you coats now."

One thing kinda led to another.

It snowballed, it was really cool. I met so many cool people and so many comics showed up for it. We're all kinda unemployed — I'm a bartender, I haven't worn real pants in the past six months — but everyone's kinda out of work, and everyone's been stepping up and helping. With the pandemic, it kinda hit me that so many communities are feeling unheard right now, or are feeling neglected or isolated. So I was like, "I wanna go to communities I haven't been to," and the only way I know how to talk to them is by giving out sandwiches. But what's good about that is that they're good fucking sandwiches.

Yeah it's not some bullshit.

They'll take a bite and be like, "What the fuck?" I'll be like "Yeahhh, that's eight hours smoked, mothafuckaaa. You thought it was gonna be some regular shit!" It's the best feeling ever when they're like, "Oh a hand-me-out sandwich?" Then they go, "WHAT THE FUUUCK." But I got



to meet all these incredible people. The nuns, they have no material possessions. They live in this one house and every day they've dedicated their lives to helping people. This Sister, Donna, she's turning 81 and has over 90 single moms that she helps. So I went through Sister Donna and we were able to give all these families coats and shit. Then you hang out and you leave and you're like, "God, that felt really good." Like I'm a Jew and I still feel great around them.

I was wondering about that.

They keep talking in a huddle and looking over at me.

So did you or your uncle have any background in community service?

No, I did some volunteer stuff in high school. My parents would feed homeless shelters and stuff, so I think it kind of rubbed off. Honestly, I didn't do much charity stuff, I'm just kinda surrounded by a lot of people that did charity stuff. My girlfriend worked at a community center. All these people were just kinda doing stuff around me, and with nothing to

do — cause comedy's done and bartending's very few and far in between, I figured I should probably do something to help.

You've been doing all this community stuff, have you been able to do anything creative during the pandemic?

Yeah I shot a little web series called Quarantine with Nate and Stu. Stu's my girlfriend. If you've met her, you've said hi to her. Everyone's gonna say hi to Stu. And we did little webisodes. We got real bored. And also in these projects, I can still have fun. Like, I'm trying to get Timberland boots for the kids who work at the community center. I wrote to Timberland asking if they could donate 20 boots, and if they don't respond, I've written a rap song. My rap name is Lil Timbs and I'm all about Timberlands and I'm just shitting on other boot companies. I'm like, "Bitch. LL Bean, you ain't Cool J." I hope to do more shit like that.

Are there any other projects you're trying to get into?

I have a couple ideas to do more garbage pickups. I'm meeting a lot of people that have that issue. Then me and my uncle are gonna start teaching cooking classes in these communities, because there are a lot of moms that don't have a lot of food to work with. And then whenever things get back to normal, we're planning on opening a sandwich spot. On Mondays our tip jar is gonna be used to cook for a different shelter every Monday. And we wanted to run a once-a-month show out of it and do different charity events. So that's kinda the pipe dream.

Dude, that sounds so cool.

We're gonna get a place that can fit about 20 people, and then put a stage in the corner. When we do a comedy show, we'd close the place down and it would kinda be a thing for the neighborhood. It would be like a neighborhood comedy show and all the ticket sales would go to an issue in the neighborhood. It'll all be community based. I wanna be like a barber. I wanna have that kinda vibe. We wanna go to a spot where they kinda take care of each other. We wanna serve good food, but also be a part of a community and hear them out and help with whatever issues they have. I think it would be a great time.

Are you gonna keep performing?

I'm not gonna have a lot of time to do a lot of shit. That's kind of what I realized, but I'm surrounded by so many



you get into it. You meet people that are really fucking funny and really interesting. Not some boring, "Oh, I do jazzercise" — or whatever normal people do. You meet a lot of cool interesting people. I don't think I'll be able to do stand-up as much, but I know I'm going to be surrounded by all those people. And I'll try to do a show at my spot and if not, I'll at least get to go see them and laugh, you know?



What kind of advice would you give to someone looking to get more involved in the community?

Right now it's very hard. I mean, having all the comics come out for the trash pickup, there were a lot of people that were new faces. And it is a way to meet people, so when shit does go back to normal, you've already kinda established a relationship. I'm not saying that as a ploy to come to my trash pickups, but I do think that right now you have to look at any possible way to meet people, especially if you're new. Cause right now, you're not gonna be able to meet really anyone and you've gotta find different creative ways to interact with people.

So you seem like a naturally funny, goofy-type person. Did you have a hard time translating that on stage?

Everyone kinda has a different speed with shit, you know? Some people can figure out why they're funny off the bat. They know exactly — and then some people, you go up and you have the shit in your head that you think is funny, but you kinda have to chisel it away. You just have to keep going up and figure out what was funny and what was not. With me, I was always loud, but I never realized I was loud. I'd go up and I'd black out for five minutes and someone would be like, "Dude, you were screaming the whole time." And I was like, "Really? I thought I was just talking."

How do you think your comedy's changed since you first started?

There's much more confidence. Much more fun. Much looser. You just don't really give a shit as much. When you first did it, it was like the scariest thing, at least for me. Bad anxiety. And then that kinda wears off and through being loose and used to doing it, you're able to be like, "What does it matter if I try to fuck around with this?" You're always trying to prove yourself, but you realize that it's not by doing the same shit, it's by seeing how unique you can get with something and how much you can make it into your own voice.

Do you write a lot?

I mean, I try. I think it's the healthiest thing you can do. When I went to New York, everyone was focused on that. They don't care how well you can riff and shit. You only get three minutes at these mics, so everyone is writing a real tight thing. So recently, I became more interested in doing that and seeing how many jokes I can fit in one premise. Just kinda going back to old material and seeing where you can put things in. Some people don't write. It's not the answer for everyone. I just think it works out my ADD brain.

"YOU'RE ALWAYS TRYING TO PROVE YOURSELF, BUT YOU REALIZE THAT IT'S NOT BY DOING THE SAME SHIT, IT'S BY SEEING HOW UNIQUE YOU CAN GET WITH SOMETHING AND HOW MUCH YOU CAN MAKE IT INTO YOUR OWN VOICE."

So I'm kinda ADD myself. Do you talk about that or notice it in your writing? I noticed I go on a lot of different tangents.

For sure. A new joke I was working on before this all hit — I was watching Intervention and there was a guy doing heroin. And I'm like, "I could never do heroin." Not because it's an addictive drug, I just don't have the focus to follow all those steps. There's like a spoon. You're gonna have to do dishes after and shit? There's way too many things. You gotta tie some shit, you gotta get a syringe and a spoon — you gotta go to like three different stores to get those things. So that neurotic ADD thing kinda came out. And then the ending I could never get to work, but say I do get addicted to heroin. How do I get help? I have to go through a 12 step program. No fucking way.

How did that not work? That's hilarious.

It's all in the delivery. And it's a very dark topic. I have to sell the fact that I'm not selling heroin, I'm selling my ADD. I'm using the analogy to express why my ADD benefits me in certain ways. It used to make me real sad and down that I couldn't focus on anything, but then I was like, "Oh, I can make fun of that." People say that shit and it sounds sappy or cheesy, "I'm bringing light to dark things in my life," but it does help soften the blow of certain realities that you have to face.

Do you wish anything was different about the Chicago scene?

I feel like there are way too many open mics. And that might sound like some old timer shit, because when I started there were maybe 1-2 mics a night. And now there's like 4-5. I feel like when you had 1-2 mics, everyone had to go, so you just had this crowd. You'd have to go to these hard rooms, and hard rooms just meant that there were working comedians you had to go after. Some people don't like that, but in my mind, that is the best way to figure out how to do comedy: follow someone who just crushed and be like, "Ok, I need to be at this level." You'd follow Liza Treyger or Danny Kallas, all these great comics, and if you did well, it was like the greatest night of your life. And if you bombed, it was suicide watch. Like, "Fuck, what am I doing?" I feel like you don't see that kind of pressure or vibe anymore at an open mic.

So you'd say the quality of open mics has gone down.

It's a good sign to see more open mics cause that does mean there are more people getting interested in it. And that is cool. Even if they're not strong at comedy, they're still at least stretching out a voice within them. That is cool. But it also does affect the quality of the open mic and the degree of pressure. I've been to certain open mics and I don't feel pressure in bombing. And sometimes that can be good, sometimes you'll learn something about being loose and shit. But the most I've improved was by going to those mics — where you go there enough and then you realize you're starting to get bumped in. And you're realizing they're putting you up early because they want you to bring the room back. And then it gives you this new edge and tightrope that, "Oh they're putting me up early. I need to be good. I can't half ass this."

What would you say to people at the bottom of the lineup? Can you really be funny at the end?

You for sure can. Sometimes there's times when you're like, "There's no fucking point to me going up right now." But a lot of times, I'd see the names on the lineup and be like, "Well, I'm gonna get to watch all these people that I think are really funny." And it was so cool to me because you get to watch these people you respect in the comedy scene work out material. You'd watch them do the same shit you were doing — stumbling over lines, putting certain things in certain places — and you kinda saw the process. Some people

don't like going to open mics, and I get that some of them can be the most depressing thing ever, but it's still real fun to watch people and see where someone's idea is. You can laugh at someone who doesn't have great cadence at an open mic. You're more looking at the idea they have. I love telling people, "Hey dude, I really think that idea was funny. That punchline didn't go well, but that idea is funny. You can find something." I had people say that to me when I first started. It's an encouraging thing, but it's like anything you do: you enjoy the process of it.

But if you're going to the shitty open mics and going last, yeah you're probably not gonna get shit outta that. But a lot of comics, especially the worked-in comics, love hanging. Cause the end of the mic, I call it the roach, it can be the funnest shit ever. It will be insane. It will be loose. At Lottie's, Junior Stopka used to go up last, and he's the best comedian to come out of Chicago in my mind. He'd go up last and he'd do 10-15 minutes. It'd be 2:00 am, we'd all be hammered, and you'd watch this dude who was incredible just fucking destroy. 2:00 am and there's only five people in the crowd.

That's why I like going to open mics. Because you have no reason to succeed. There's no point in you actually having a good time. So when you do, it's like the greatest reward ever because you go, "Oh these motherfuckers didn't want to listen and I got them to listen. That's the most validation you can get when you wanna know if you're doing it right."

Was there a certain point when you felt like you stopped putting so much pressure on yourself?

No, I don't think anyone loses that pressure. Open mics, yeah. Cause you go to enough of them and you see a lot of the same faces, so you feel more comfortable because everyone has seen everyone bomb. But if you get bumped up and you bomb, there's still that guilt. There is that insecurity. But you get more comfortable by being aware of it and acknowledging it. Then it kinda dissipates. It just depends on what you're working on. If you're working on a controversial idea, you're more nervous because you have to figure out the best way to say it.



I've noticed that I'll say a joke a million different ways, even though I'm trying to say it the same way. Do you have that?

Yeah, the more times you do your joke, the less you'll change the patterns. But I don't want to say the joke the same way every time. When you're in the moment and you feel like you can add something or you can say it in a different way or say it less aggressively — which I've never learned how to fucking do, I've never learned how to pull back on a joke and be subtle — but it is kinda this muscle you gotta work. Some people go line for line, but for some people it will be completely different. Kristen Toomey is a great example of that. Same premises, but she'll sometimes go off on random tangents within the premise, and it's one of the most fun things to see. She's so naturally funny that when she goes off on these random tangents, it's like watching a completely different set. You know what you like about the joke, then it's like this remix. I love that. God, you're making me miss fucking open mics now.

They're the best.

I tell my friends who are normal people that you can't pay for a ticket to see some of these people. Some of the nutjobs that come through, you'll never experience this entertainment anywhere else. There was a dude, he came up and he goes, "I got kicked out of an overeaters anonymous meeting. Cause everyone said what they ate, and it got to me and I said, 'Hairy Jamacian pussy.'" And everyone goes, "What the fuck??" It was the funniest bomb I've ever seen. We just started dying. You're never gonna see that. Even if they're bombing, these people went up on stage in the basement of a bar and said some shit. It's just so funny to me.

That's what you need. You need an open mic at Moralewich.

No. Never in a fuckin' million years. Do you know how many open mics have fucking scarred me like a war vet with PTSD? I know the demographic of people it brings — just a bunch of backpack wearing, smelly fucking hipsters. No, I'm just kidding. Like, Cole's has been incredible. It's a bar I've always admired the vibe of. At times it's pretty hipster, but it's a cool community. It's people who support local art and shit, and I do really think that's a cool thing. I think it's cool when regular people come down and support open mics. Those people are interesting to me, because they're like, "Hey, we're drunk. There's an open mic, let's go fucking watch." It's honestly awesome because it reminds you that there are people who just want to experience something different.

Anything else to add?

I just wanna say Dale McPeek is my favorite comedian of all time. Dale has been an idol of mine and I'm just so glad I've become his teacher and that I can teach Dale McPeek what's funny and what's not. And Dale, you've paid me good money for taking my comedy classes, and you still continue to do so, and I just wanna say, Dale McPeek, keep taking my comedy classes. You're getting so much better. I'm so proud to see where you've gotten in life. And I don't know if you want me to tell everyone else this, but I know you've said that I'm a mentor to you and how much it means to you that I've stepped down from my pedestal to help you up on it. So, Dale, any time buddy.



BONUS: NATE'S TOP 10 CHICAGO COMICS

- 1. LAEL O'SHAUGHNESSY**
- 2. KRISTEN TOOMEY**
- 3. CALVIN EVANS**
- 4. MARTY DEROSA**
- 5. AHMAD DANIELS**
- 6. PAUL MILLER**
- 7. ERICA CLARK**
- 8. TIM SMITH**
- 9. GEOFF ASMUS**
- 10. REBEKAH GIBSON**

HONORABLE MENTIONS: TOM RYAN, ALI DRAPOS

**DISHONORABLE MENTIONS: DALE MCPEEK, SNAKES
BURGHART**

ARTWORK



Alex Kumin at Parlour Car

SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON IS A CHICAGO-BASED PHOTOGRAPHER AND LOVES CAPTURING COMEDY, MUSIC, AND THEATER PERFORMANCES ALL OVER THE CITY. SHE IS INSPIRED BY ALL OF THE WONDERFULLY TALENTED PEOPLE OF CHICAGO.

SARAH AND TWO OTHER CHICAGO-BASED PHOTOGRAPHERS WERE RECENTLY FEATURED ON THE COVER OF THE READER.  @SELFOTO



Sarah Squirm at Helltrap Nightmare



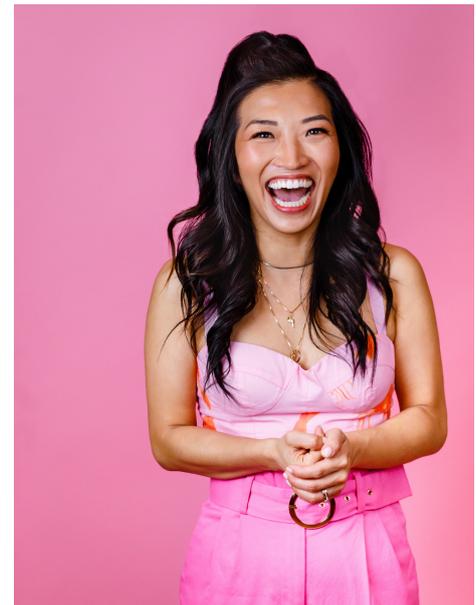
Sonal Aggarwal at her one-woman show, *The Alchemy of Bliss*



Alex Grelle and Jane Beachy for *Ordinary Peepholes*



Brett Axell of *Acres to Miles* at *The Paper Machete*



Eunji Kim

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BOOK REVIEW: SEINLANGUAGE

By Keay Crandall (@keaycrandall)

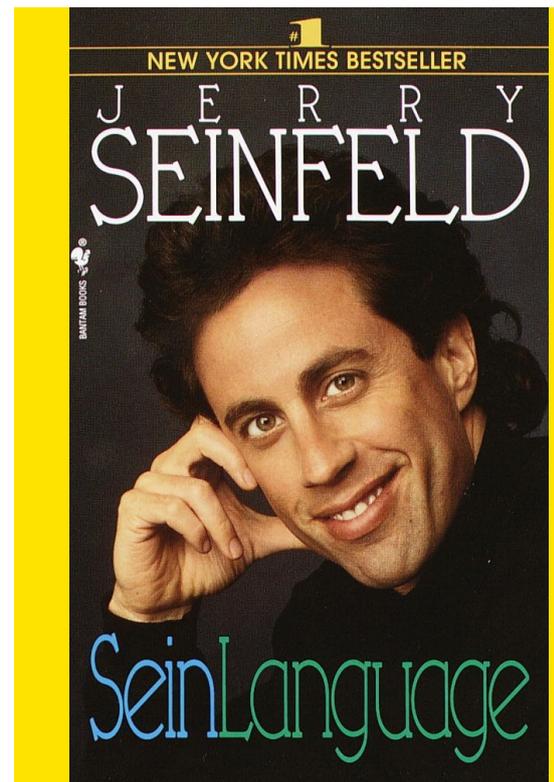
IMy grandfather picked this out to give me for Christmas because I said I have been reading books about comedy. The real gift was the receipt he left in the book: Seinlanguage: \$17, Yaoi! Hentai Manga Erotic Combo Book: \$9.99. Maybe he is saving that for my birthday.

SeinLanguage is what you would expect Seinfeld to publish. Jokes about every day topics, in topical order, with no surprises. The jokes are pretty safe, but I was surprised that I don't remember hearing many of them in his standup. Does watching his show count as watching Seinfeld's standup? Seinfeld has a very distinct voice and there is something fun about being able to hear that voice in your head while you are reading.

Seinlanguage would be a good book to keep in the bathroom. You could pick it up and have a chuckle while you have a sit down piss. Plus, the shower steam and mouthwash splatter would give this book a lot of character.

Anyway, i liked it because it was low risk, low reward. It was a fast read and I laughed a few times. I might regift the book to my grandfather next year, he won't remember.

Overall rating: 3/5 Gazelles



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