

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. It was also the pandemic and I had shit else to do.

Thanks for your support!

– Jerry

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INTERVIEW: SAM TALLENT

Between sold out shows at The Humboldt Jungle, I stepped into the backyard/chicken coop with Sam Tallent (@samtallent) and stuck a recorder in his face. We talked improvising on stage, the film adaptation of his novel, if you need to be all in to succeed in comedy, defining your own success, and more.

What'd you think of the show? You've done the Humboldt Jungle before.

Yeah, I like it a lot. When I came up, I was in a militant, hardcore DIY punk band and we wouldn't play anywhere that wasn't all ages. It was a lot of houses, a lot of youth centers, warehouses — so it's cool to be at this kind of thing. And the fact that they do it to this high degree where the show sells out. I'm at Zanies in December, and I was like, "I want to do the show, but I can't advertise it because I don't want to be disrespectful to Zanies." Then they sold this all out. So it's just invaluable, dude. It's invaluable to have shows like this. Now I'm going to Detroit for a club weekend; I need to get that 45 back together.

Yeah, you were riffing a lot. Are you doing that to build new material?

No, I should be. I should be filming every set, recording it, listening back to it, trying to aggregate jokes from it. But no, the juice for me is improvising and doing shows. There's people here tonight who I just talked to who are like, "We got tickets for the second show too because we know you're going to riff so much." That feels good, but then you'll have two people in the crowd who were at the first show and a bunch of people who weren't at the first show. Then you're so obsessed with giving them another show that it might be a detriment to the entire show. It's a weird line to walk. But no, I'm not doing it to build new shit. If something works and I can iterate upon it and build upon it, that's cool, but that's not really the goal. It's more just to be in the moment, try and riff, try and have fun.

Do you believe in that whole Bill Hicks thing, where the material's only there for when you have nothing left to say?

You know who a big influence on me was? TJ Miller.

Really? I wouldn't expect that at all.

He's from Denver. When I started, I was like 18-19, and TJ



would come home for Thanksgiving and Christmas and do our shows and we'd go watch him. He was so improvisational, and that's back in the day when I thought — because I came from improv first — "Well, if you're gonna do stand up, you have to have jokes. These people don't want to see you improvise." My friends today will be like, "Yeah, when we met you, you were an improv guy, so we didn't like you." That weird, hardline stance that comedians have. But then you watched TJ, and he was just so good up there and so free. And now I have this notion of like, maybe if people come, then they can tape trade like the Grateful Dead: "I saw Sam in Humboldt in July of 2023 and he did this. Then I saw him again and he did this." I'm very obsessed with people getting a very good show that is not the traditional show. If you can go see anyone do stand up, if you can see someone do something exciting and just for that show, I think that's valuable.

That's cool to hear you have that commitment to your fans.

I'm so grateful. Cause you go on the road forever and now people are finally coming. I was on the road so much and you do the show for 20, 25 people. Then the next time you go, hopefully there's 50 people there, and then you just keep building it that way. But every time you do a show, you're trying to make sure they come back. Or if they brought people to this show and liked you, you

don't want them to have that awkward car ride. "He was really good last time." So I'm really obsessed with making sure that people enjoy it and they see something different. Even if they hear a couple jokes they've heard before, you're gonna hear a bunch of new shit every time.

When you're improvising, I imagine sometimes it's gonna go really well, and then sometimes there might be a slow show with nothing there. How personally do you take that? If it's not working, are you still like, "Oh, I had fun, this was great?"

In San Diego last weekend I did four shows. The first three were great, and then the late show on Saturday was not the most fun. I get off stage and immediately the other comics on the show, my good friends, are like, "We know you're gonna bitch about it. You did fine." If I don't have the best set ever, I'm furious. I'm so competitive. Even this show was a fun set, but I still know that it can be better. There's like this huge level of trust. If I'm able to trust them to go with me and they swallow the hook and trust me, that's when it's really fun. This show was good, but it can always be better, you know? So yeah, I do beat myself up about decent sets. What's the point of having a decent set? You wanna kill or you wanna fucking bomb horrifically.

How do you balance, "Oh, that's just comedy" and "I need to be better?" I'm always like, "I need to take everything personally because that's the only way I'm gonna improve."

Yeah, always beat yourself up. These people who are able to let it fucking roll off their shoulders, I'm like, "You're lying or you're delusional." There's a lot of delusion in stand up; you have to lie the first three years that you're not wasting your time, that it is getting better, and that you are a good comic. Then eventually you have to get rid of that delusional aspect that protects you in the early years. When these people get off stage and they're like, "That was good," it drives me crazy. Because it can always be bad. And it's not just a set; it can be bad minute by minute. Everyone should just write jokes until they get good at that. And then if you get bored of that, then maybe you can start riffing if you have longer sets. You have to have longer sets to riff. You can't just riff in 10 minutes; that's the worst. Just don't get too far ahead of yourself. Learn how to do the job. It's a really hard thing to do.

Is there anything you're still trying to get better at?

All social media shit. The business side. Shit that I hate and I think is worthless and vapid and you need to get

good at. You need to just hire someone to do it, I think is the move. As far as standup, I'd like to be able to follow an idea past the point of me being uncomfortable with it and past the point of the crowd being uncomfortable with it. But I think you gotta prepare those things more. You can't just start riffing about cannibalism. Maybe have a plan of attack when you're talking about infanticide.

I know you write everything on stage, so do you think of a few ideas and then riff them out, or are you like, "This happened in the moment; I should turn that into a bit?"

Well, you saw Restless Egg tonight. You saw the legendary Restless Egg, which was me in the car ride home last weekend in San Diego after the show. I just said that to my friends, the other comics on the show, and they were visibly upset because they knew that I was going to do it the next night. And I did it the next night to mass aplomb. It was fun to be able to say it to them, "I told you, motherfuckers!" So there is this thing of like, if you figure out maybe just a couple funny words, then you can figure out how to make that a thing. Then I'm constantly commenting on how the show's going throughout. So even if a joke isn't good, you can have fun pointing out that it wasn't good, talking about the fake bravado that you had going into it. There's so many things you can do on stage that aren't just telling jokes. The negative space, I like that a lot.

What advice would you give to someone that isn't the ruffiest, most free person on stage? How do you break out of your act and be more in the moment, more improvisational?

Well, let me say this: I envy the guys who have foolproof jokes. I know so many people who have great one-liners, or Kinane, for example, what he does up there looks so extemporaneous, like he's just having a conversation. I think it's a grass is greener situation. Also, before I

did the improv, I went through three hours of material. I've been doing it 15 years. I think you should learn how to do 10, how to do 15, how to do 20, how to do a half hour, how to do 45. That's a very valuable thing to learn so that you get booked. Then you have this proof of concept, like, "I'm good, I can do the job that's asked of me." You have to learn how to paint the landscape before you do the splatter painting — before you go Jackson Pollock or whatever. I don't like comparing myself to any gifted artist, I'm just saying, I kind of envision my shit as more expressionist as opposed to the guy who can paint the bowl of fruit every day from five different angles of light. That's like if you're writing jokes and you're just trying to figure out how to make this perfect representation of what you see in your head. I'd much rather figure it out in the moment and blow it, be a human being. Fuck up a line that you think is good. Putting your brain two seconds in front of your mouth and letting your mouth have free reign. That interests me. But I really wouldn't advocate to anyone until they have a good hour to try and be a crowd work guy. What are you going to do? Go to an open mic and do crowd work? You're wasting everyone's time. I was lucky because in Colorado you get booked as a feature way early. I was able to learn how to improvise in longer sets earlier on because I was trying to fill a half hour in front of a bunch of oil workers in South Dakota. You learn how to throw yourself at their feet, to be the jester. I've never had an issue being whatever that crowd needs me to be in that moment because I don't want or need anyone to think I'm smart or clever. If anyone's thinking when you're on stage, you're wasting your time.

So you see yourself as more of a clown or jester?

I don't see myself as an artist or a philosopher. That's crazy: "Oh yeah, we're modern-day philosophers!" I think Norm had that thing, "You know who that's very rude to? Actual modern-day philosophers." I've never given a shit if anyone thinks I'm smart. If they leave having thought too much, you didn't free them from their brains.

You're a big Norm fan, right?

I love Norm; he's my favorite of all time. He's a genius. People bandy that word around a lot, but he was an actual genius. We were lucky to exist at the same time as Norm Macdonald.

I wanted to ask you about his character in your book. Do you know if he ever got to read it?

No, I know he owned three copies. I know that Sean O'Connor, who wrote for his show, hand-delivered him a copy. I know that Stanhope got him a copy, and I think



Sam Lipsyte, who was a mutual friend of him and Maron, got him a copy as well. But I don't think he read it. Adam Eget and I are friends now, he was the co-host of Norm's pod, and he said that he didn't ever see it open in his apartment. If you're dying, you're not gonna take a chance on a self-published novel.

I heard you're working on a movie for it now. Can you talk about that at all?

Garth Ennis, who wrote *The Boys* and *Preacher*, did the screenplay. They optioned it and then they got Ennis to finally write the screenplay. Ken Kesey wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and he would never option it, but he did allow them to make a play, and then the play got optioned. So *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the novel, was not the option thing that went on to become the movie. It was the play version, which was their clever workaround. I remember he did an interview, and they were like, "Did you see the movie?" And he was like, "Let me ask you this. That book was my baby. If the Hells Angels called you up and they said, 'Hey, we're gonna gang rape your daughter on your

front lawn,' would you go watch it?" I have my hopes that it'll be good, but I also didn't write the screenplay. So if it's bad, it's not my fault, but if it's really good, I wrote that book! I have plausible deniability, or I can receive my flowers if it is good.

Are you excited about it?

I'm overjoyed. But also, there's a lot of patience involved in waiting for it to all come to fruition. That's difficult as a comic, because we have everything so immediate. But I want it to take as much time as they want. I heard Russell Crowe has his hands on it and he likes it because he was obsessed with Bill Hicks. He's also just like a big fat booze bag now in real life, so he'd be perfect for it.

That would be crazy.

Yeah, he'd be perfect. John C. Reilly is my dream casting because he has live performance chops after doing Steve Brule and shit. I would love for him to be the guy.

Are they consulting you at all?

We did throughout. I was able to give notes on the iterations of the screenplay and that was cool, but to the letter of the law, I have fulfilled my responsibilities to that thing. When they make the movie, I'm gonna be on set producing it, but otherwise I don't have as much input as a lot of people would assume that I have. I'm super overjoyed about it. But again, just patience, patience.

If you write everything on stage, how does it work that you sit down and write a novel?

To me they're different things. They're just different ways to express yourself, modes of creativity. I love reading novels, I love reading short fiction, and I like the process of sitting down and writing novels, and I like writing fiction and prose. The kind of comedy I like is immediate, in the room; it's either very good or it fails live, and it's like a living, breathing thing. It's a very good question about the disconnect, but I learned how to do standup riffing it, and you can't do that with a book, obviously. You have to be in front of the device that you're communicating with, the laptop or the pen and the pad. I just don't enjoy it. I have the trappings of doing things that I really enjoy, and if I don't enjoy it, I don't really want to do that. Last night we did my going away roast in Fort Collins and all my friends came. I can write jokes for those, but as far as my act, I just want it to be this breathing thing that sometimes is dirty or sometimes is more acerbic. Playing with the vocabulary, trying to use the most precise word choice. These are all

really exciting things to do in the moment. There's also the thing of trusting your brain to back up your ego. I really think if you put yourself in a dangerous position on stage, when it comes to improvising, your brain will do everything it can to save you from the pain of bombing. It's like you're trusting your animal instincts to not let you die that awful death up there.

I know when you were starting, you were on the road, dumpster diving, living out of your car, stuff like that. Do you think that you need to be all in to succeed in comedy?

No, I think that you need to decide if you want to be comfortable or if you want to be fulfilled. I think a lot of people are afraid to fully dive into something because they want to be able to sleep in their bed every night, and they want to be able to purchase consumer goods that eventually will steal time from them doing creative things. I was totally fine with not having any money, not knowing where I was sleeping, because I got to do stand up and I got to hang out with my friends who were really funny. I totally understand why people don't want to dive completely in, and that is the sane move, but being comfortable is not very valuable. Security is not that valuable to me. I don't think you need to fucking go evangelical about it, and I was annoying when I was a kid, I'd be like, "Quit your job! Do stand up full time! Go on the road with me, take Greyhounds. We'll go to Chicago for a week and do every open mic and sleep at a friend of a friend's cousin's house! On the ground!" Telling people to quit their jobs is insane, but trading the hours of your life to benefit other people always turned me off. If you're going to work really hard at something, it should be something that you believe in, that you love, that makes you really fucking feel alive.

Do you wish that you had done anything differently at all?

I wish I would have gone to an Ivy League school. I could have played football at Dartmouth.

Really?

Yeah, I could have played football at Brown. I didn't. I think it would have been cool to go to an Ivy League and learn, you know? But then I wouldn't have done all the stuff that I've done now. From 18 to 22, I was learning stand up, in bands, touring, seeing the country, learning how to be self-sufficient without money, learning how to be clever, all these things. I also wish that I would have traveled internationally earlier.

I saw you've got shows in Japan and Australia. How is that, performing outside the country?

I love it. It's brand new. I've done every state in the country besides Delaware. I love America, but now comedy's new in Paris, comedy's new in Estonia, all these places I'm going in November. It's fun to go and see if you can figure out how to connect with people. It's not like you're performing for people from Japan, you're performing for expats and English as a second language people. But still, that's fun, that's novel. It's all about novel experiences. Also, it's one thing to go to Kansas City for a weekend, but you go to Paris and do stand up, you're in Paris the rest of the day. Eventually I want to move to Spain for a while, New Zealand. The world's so big.

Is your wife traveling with you?

She's off for the next six months. We left Fort Collins today; we don't have an address. She's gonna be on the road with me. We'll be spending some time in Detroit with her family. I'll be spending some time in Austin. She'll be with me in the cool places; she won't be going to Springfield, Missouri.

How was it before you guys moved out? You're on the road constantly. Was that difficult to make work?

No, because she's driven. When I got with my wife, she was considering going to med school. She was young. I think she was 20. I was 23. She was like, "I kind of want to go to med school." And I was like, "Dude, do it." I was already on the road. I was like, "I will support you full-fledged in any pursuit that you want to do. I love you. You've been supportive of me." Of course, there's times when I miss a birthday party, or I'm not there for something that she thinks is very important. But also, her being driven and her wanting to aspire to this very high thing of being a doctor has been great for me. I support her. When she was in med school, I was alone. She'd be home, but she would be studying in a different room. Residency, incredibly difficult. Fucking 80-hour weeks. It's not like when I'm home we're holding hands and watching television. She gets it, man. In the past when you would date people who are like servers or work a nine to five, on the weekend they expect you to be home. It's like, "Well, that's when I work." There was just an immediate understanding. She was like, "Oh, this is what you do. You're good at it." And now, finally, there's a financial reward, which has been cool. Cause I would work so hard, and I'd be gone for two weeks and come home with like \$300. Then you have to tell her, "Yeah, but the shows were good! There was fucking 15 people there in Providence, Rhode Island, but they all loved it, and I fucking spray painted t-shirts before that in the parking lot, and I sold all those t-shirts."

That's great she was so supportive.

I never would have married anyone besides my wife. I think it'd be really hard to find anyone that compares to her, you know? I never thought I'd be married. I mean, she proposed to me. I was like, "Yeah. If you're down, I'm down." It's really important to have someone that you look up to and you don't wanna blow it because you respect them so much. I'm very grateful for

everything. I walk through life with gratitude, and gratitude isn't funny, so you have to pretend to be mad about stuff. That's difficult, finding new things to contrive.

I know a lot of comics are like, "I did that show, only 15 people were there!" How have you been able to stay positive and avoid that? I assume after a while the road takes its toll.

I mean, what's success, dude? Everyone has this idea of success, then you hang out with really successful people, you hang out with Kreisler, Tim Dillon, Gillis, and they're not happy. You know, they have everything you want. It's like, "Well, still that's not enough." I think you have to figure out what success means to you. Like, success last weekend was Chris Charpentier, one of my oldest friends, was hosting, Nathan Lund featuring, my best pal, we're in a fucking condo in San Diego, swimming. That's success. Then you get to go do stand up for people who want to see you now. They come to the shows because they bought tickets to see you. Getting in today, Professor Pizza hits you up, and he's like, "Come over to this spot, I'll make you three different pies." It's like, what more do you want out of this? You could eat really, really good meals from people that are doing innovative things. You could hang out with the funniest people in that city you go to. I come here, I get to see Jason Melton, Aaron Naylor, fucking heaven, Joe [Eames], everybody. I've made it. I'm happy, you know? I've sold 70% of my tickets in Australia already. That's success.

I love that, defining your own success.

You have to. Because you can keep comparing yourself to people and be like, "I don't have that. I'm just as good as them, I'm funnier than them." But no, you're not. You're not funnier. Some people think you're funnier, some people think they're funnier. You can't put a blanket over who's the funniest. That's asinine. There's a lot of very bad comedians that a lot of people love, and that's good. That gets people into stand up. Maybe once they get done with that phase, they stay around and they get into comedy deeper. Maybe they end up buying a ticket to you. It's all good for comedy.

*To check out Sam's upcoming tour dates, visit samtallent.com. His best-selling book, *Running The Light*, is also available for purchase on his website. I cannot recommend it enough.*



The Comedy Gazelle

Presents

VOUCHER

Featuring

Chris Grieco

Noe Noel

Nick San Miguel

Laura Hugg

Blake Burkhart

Zach Albers

Ralphie Roberts



Tuesday - August 1st - 7:30pm

Laugh Factory

3175 n Broadway, Chicago, IL 60657

Comedians Recognizing Comedians

MARK MCPARTLAND

"Mark is one of the funniest dudes in the scene and unfortunately one of the most under appreciated. He always has new stuff, his jokes are loaded with tags, and the perspective is always clever."

"Mark makes me laugh every time I see him perform. Whether it's topical bits or riffs on audience reactions he always shows he has a quick comic mind and demonstrates his abilities as a writer. One of my favorites in the scene."

RON HEXAGON

"Absolutely killing it with musical comedy and is beloved face in the comedy scene. Great energy super funny guy even nicer of a person."

JOE FERNANDEZ

"Joe runs one of the best mics in the city, and is there almost every week without fail. Despite what he might tell you, Joe puts a lot of care and thought in to making sure the mic he runs is an inclusive and fun space for anyone to try something new. Not many open mic hosts in the city are putting in the effort that Joe is and it shows."

CAM RIVERS

"Cam makes me laugh every single time I see her perform. Her jokes are stellar and she's incredibly nice. She runs one of my fav mics at the Annoyance which provides people with no lives (like myself) to do something fun on a Friday night."

RICARDO ANGULO

"Ricardo is a work horse who is always grinding at mics and always has great material that kills. He is also very nice to up and coming comedians and is more than willing to show support and give advice to steer them on the right track."

JACK ALLEN

"Jack is one of the nicest and most genuine guys in the Chicago comedy scene. He's also incredibly funny and weird with a unique voice - I'd love to see him booked on more shows."

MATT TORRES

"The guy has just stellar, infectious energy on stage that makes you want to laugh at everything he says, direly under-booked."

Comedians Recognizing Comedians

MITCHELL POTTS

"I don't care how many times I hear his joke about being a garbage man, but the way he delivers the phrase 'vile perverts' gets me every time. Great jokes paired with great delivery. Incredibly funny guy."

LELE MASON

"Lele is an expert storyteller with a super fun energy and every time I watch her do comedy I find myself so involved and wanting to hear what happens next!"

ALAN FORD

"Co produces the open mic at Riddles Comedy Club. Also runs a monthly showcase giving opportunity to the comics that attend the open mic. Being south of the city, some in city opportunities are missed."

DAN MCCARTY

"Dan is a renaissance man. In addition to running and performing in shows and open mics, Dan has been doing improv, podcasts, writing classes, and hosting. He is committed to improving as an all-around performer, and it shows. He works clean, for the most part. He has a lot of material. He can riff. He can tell stories. He is reliable in life and in whatever role you need for your show."

WES MCGEHEE

"Every time I see Wes he is always trying new material. It's so easy to get stuck doing the same stuff but Wes is a prolific writer and inspires me to try stuff even if I don't know if it will work. He has a joke about Elliot Page and civil war re-enactments that is absolutely killer."

TIM BRENNAN

"Tim is such a thoughtful and diligent writer. The most impressive thing about him is his consistency. He's also always on time and supportive of others in the scene."

JEN FLAXMAN

"Jen is a newbie but she's very funny and driven to put in the work to become a better comic. I've seen her grow a lot in the last year and she's not slowing down."

HUNTER HIRSH

"He's one of the most innovative comics in the scene and easily one of the hardest working."

ARTWORK: SIERRA SEVERSON

@sierraseversonart



SIERRA SEVERSON (@SIERRASEVERSONART)

SIERRA SEVERSON IS AN ANALOG COLLAGE ARTIST FROM COASTAL CALIFORNIA NOW BASED IN CHICAGO. IN A WORLD OF MEDIA SATURATION, SIERRA FINDS IT THERAPEUTIC TO BE ABLE TO MANIPULATE AND CREATE SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW FROM THE WEALTH OF IMAGES THAT ALREADY EXIST. ANALOG COLLAGE BEGAN AS A THERAPY PRACTICE, A RESPITE FROM SCREENS AND TECHNOLOGY, AS WELL AN APPRECIATION FOR THE PRECIOUSNESS OF PRINT MEDIA FROM THE PAST. HER WORK IS INFORMED BY HER PREVIOUS LIFE AS A SOCIAL WORKER, AND INSPIRED BY HER ONGOING LOVE AFFAIR WITH MUSIC AND FILM. SHE CREATES WORKS INVOLVING ARCHITECTURE, NATURE, THE HUMAN CONDITION, AND THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S SOVEREIGNTY. SHE STRIVES TO INSPIRE INTROSPECTION AND CREATE SURREAL MOMENTS OF JOY AND DARK COMEDY WHILE DEALING WITH HEAVY SUBJECTS.



**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO
MADE THIS POSSIBLE.**

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

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