

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 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: MO GOOD

One of Chicago's newest stars, Mo Good has exploded onto the scene and made her mark in just a few short years. Fresh off another iconic Facebook rant, I sat down with Mo to talk hatless hoes, developing material, Chicago's shortcomings, and more.

Your Facebook rant following the Keenan show is pretty legendary. I have to ask; what's worse: a hatless hoe or a musty bitch?

A hatless hoe. They could never and they disturb me. Oh my goodness.

Any advice for the hatless hoes? How do you up your hat game?

I think you kind of always remain hatless at this point. I don't think there's any uppinn' it. You either have a hat or you don't. I joke about it, but it's really just a mindset. Like comedy: some people have it, some people don't. Some people should work at Target stacking boxes.

What's the mindset of someone with a hat?

Oh, someone with a hat is cool. They're clearly amazing because they're hatted. Obviously. It's just that smoothness, that naturalness that you have on stage. You gotta be able to wear a fedora. If you can't really wear a fedora, sorry for ya! It's really just something I came up with after a competition with the women of Chicago. They announced the wrong winner, then announced the right winner and the ladies were at a rift, so I made a live video. I never make live videos, but when I do, I *do*. I was like, "Y'all worried about who won? My hat won. The rest of you hatless hoes could never!"

On that Keenan rant you said, "You're new to this, but you're true to this." Can you talk more about that?

I've been doing comedy for three years, so I consider myself a newborn. Comedy's always been in my blood, it's always been something I've been a fan of, a student of — that's just how I am — but I am relentless. I don't think there's anyone in my class of comedy that can out-hustle me. I'll go do two shows, go to work, I have two kids. I don't think there's anybody that out-hustles me. So when I say I'm true to this, I mean I'm really serious about this. Practice makes perfect, and that's the equivalent of greatness. But I never want people to misconstrue my youth in comedy as ignorance.



Photo by Drew Michael Photography

You're new, but had a quick rise in the scene. What were some of your initial goals when you started?

My first goal was to learn how to do crowd work. I don't like to talk to people. Comedy goes against my entire being. I know that's weird, but I choose books over people, right? It was actually very important for me to learn when to incorporate crowd work and not be thrown off when someone says something to me. My first goal was that, so I could get comfortable on stage. Then I was like, "Man, I have to get to the House of Blues." I don't know why, but that venue meant Chicago to me. Cause I'm born and raised. I'm serious about Chicago.

I feel like most people start by trying to learn a few jokes, not going straight for crowd work right off the bat.

Well I was fortunate. One of my mentors is comedian Meechie Hall. I took his workshop and that's how I got into comedy. He taught me how to write a joke, how to break it down, basically up until how to perform it. So the idea of a joke, I really had that down. Really I'm a storyteller, so I know how to tell a story, I know how to get animated. I had that

part down pat, but I was like, "Something's missing." I was a robot. If I got three minutes on the mic, I would get up there, do my three minutes, get off. I couldn't interact. I'm thinking, "You don't have time for all that," but I had to make time. I had to figure it out as my sets got longer. As you get funnier, they allow you more time, so I knew that was the next step. That's what I had to do.

What would you say is the most important lesson you've learned so far?

To stay on stage and get undeniably funny. I always tell people, "Focus on the funny." If you build it they will come, right? You can't be focused on the money or anything else. Your passion has to be for the craft and everything else will follow.

You mentioned you choose books over people. What're you currently reading?

I am currently reading a book called Mastering Stand-Up. It's teaching me the science behind comedy, to figure out my comedic character and how to present it better. My jokes are very funny, they're great, they're relatable, but I want them to be even better. So I read a lot of books about comedy, a lot of urban fiction novels about crazy stuff. I'm an avid reader. I could read a book a day, sometimes two. I read really fast. I've always been like that. I'm an only child. It was just me and my books, you know what I'm saying?

Do you read any comedian biographies? Those are great as well.

I really wanna start. The things I'm lacking, the things I'm not thinking of – I would like to flip my perspective. I watch a lot of comedian documentaries more than I read biographies. I just watched Jerry Seinfeld's documentary, Comedian, again last week. Like I said, just change the perspective in your mind.

They just released that George Carlin doc on HBO. He's the person that got me into comedy. Who inspired you or drove you to actually get on stage?

I've always loved Bernie Mac. When I was a little girl, I was seven years old, I met him at a restaurant on 71st Street. He was like, "Oh, you're a pretty little black girl. Take care of your momma!" He paid for our food and he gave me some money. I didn't know – I knew it was him, but I didn't know. I was seven. When I realized it was him I was like, "Man." He had this energy to him. "I ain't scared of you!" He probably was nervous as hell, but he commanded that stage. A lot of people say, "You the female Bernie Mac." I'm like, "Na I'm just me. Don't do that to that man." That command, man. I wanted that, I was hungry for that. To be that powerful on stage.

I think you definitely get that with your comedy. How'd you develop that just a couple years in?

It ain't on ya, it's in ya. I'm naturally very funny, very silly. I'm a storyteller. But I learned the command really from doing the South Side mics when I started. I went to Frances, Bar 10. I started at Bar 10 with Leon Rogers. Rooms that are really tough and tumultuous, where if you don't have them in the first 10-15 seconds, you're not gonna get them. So rooms like that really taught me that command and made my presence bigger. Then I decided to be confident about it. "If I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do this full throttle." Like I said, I've got two kids, and if I'm gonna spend time away from my kids, it's gotta be worth it.

Definitely.

So I wrote my jokes out – I write my jokes out verbatim. I write them out in a notebook and I have a photographic memory, so I memorize them and when I get on stage I might add something, subtract something based on how the crowd's feeling. I'm really good at reading rooms. I actually watch the show. I sit and watch the show and see what piqued their interest, what didn't. I wanna make sure I don't duplicate what the other comics did.

You mentioned you're a storyteller. So if something funny happens in your life, you write it out first and then try it? Or what's your process for that?

Here's my thing. Now that people realize I'm funny, I don't get a chance to get on stage and work things out as much as I used to. I don't get a chance to hit a lot of open mics because I have a lot of booked shows. Which is great, but it can be a hindrance for growth. This is what I do: I have a funny thought that crosses my mind, I'll jot down just the thought and basically have writing sessions with my friends. I'll talk to my mom, my auntie, my cousins, friends in comedy, a co-worker. I'll say some silly

stuff and be like, "Oh, I can use that." Everything is a piece of a puzzle, you just gotta figure out where it fits. That's really my process if I have a new topic I wanna talk about. All my jokes are real life things that I may have flipped, embellished, or whatever, but it's all real true. So I take whatever it is that's on my mind and in my book and I mix them. When I'm on stage, I slide in new material while I'm doing my old material that I know works. So I can sprinkle in some newness in between. I figure out where it fits; I complete the puzzle on stage. You know when you have a puzzle and you do all the outside pieces first? I already have the outside, and then I fill in the rest when I'm on stage.

If you're sandwiching a new joke and it doesn't land, will you just scrap it?

I think, "Where does it fit?" I don't scrap any joke, I put it to the side. I don't stress myself, but I will pay attention to it and it will come to me where it fits. I could be talking to you on the phone, we could be kicking the shit and I'd be like, "That's it!" I don't stress my material. I'm adamant about it, but I'm not pacing back and forth, "Oh come on, come to me!" That creativity has to flow. I'm not sitting here rocking back and forth. If you're funny, you'll always have material.

Let's say you're on a big show, you're up next, and you're about to go on stage. What's going through your mind?

Oh, I'm scared shitless. I'm always nervous. Just don't let the crowd know that. Never let the sharks know there's blood in the water, baby. I'm always nervous. I'm always going over my set in my mind and I'm always soaking up the energy of the room. Even if the person before me bombs, I'm like, "Man, I can't go up there and do that." I gotta go kill it. If the person before me is murdering, "I'm like, man, I gotta follow that. Let's go!" I just feed off that energy. It's gonna be a double homicide.



So you don't mind following someone that just killed?

No, I think it's great. I'm like, "Oh, you set the tone. Let's go!" But I'm gonna be honest with you, I like to go after people that bomb cause I kind of like to be the energy shift sometimes. Like, "Wake the fuck up! Let's go!" I don't mind either way.

My favorite thing is when everyone is bombing and you can turn it around.

Yeah, you notice they're laughing at jokes that are kind of mediocre, they meat as fuck, they not really up to par yet. You know when you get up there with your stuff that's polished, but not rehearsed, you're like, "Oh, I'ma kill in here"

That's interesting. Polished but not rehearsed. Can you talk about that more?

Yeah, I never wanna get on stage and be rehearsed and look like an act, like I'm reading from a book. But I always want to be polished, meaning I've done my set over and over so that I understand my set. But I never do my set the same way twice. I'm always adding, always changing, trying to find the best formula. So when I say polished, I just want to be professional. I want it to look good. Because I'm a storyteller, I want to take them on a ride with me. I wanna tell them my story and feel like they're in it. If I take you on a ride with me, I can drop you off wherever and you're gonna be happy about the ride.

With storytelling, do you feel like one bit needs to preface another, or are you just doing them in whatever order you feel like?

A lot of times I'll switch my ending joke to make it my first joke, and vice versa. I can do two shows and I'll do two different sets cause I'm working on stuff. I've done these jokes for a year and a half, two years, I'm noticing my transitions are getting smoother because it's going on topic. It's easier for

me to remember, it's easier for me to do, and I'm just watching the puzzle coming together. I think at first my transitions were choppy. Even sometimes when you have a really rough transition – I'll be talking about my kids and how I'm not that nurturing, then I'll be like, "Yeah, so I work in healthcare taking care of y'all grandma." They'll be like, "Ah, I didn't see that coming." It just depends on how you want to transition your jokes. Whatever ride you want to take these people on, have at it.

I think sometimes I'm a little in my head about it and I'm like, "This needs to follow this," and then it starts to feel like I'm doing the same thing over and over.

Sometimes repetition gets boring. Some people are like, "Oh, I'm tired of doing that joke." Then spice it up. You don't even have to switch it up. What in that joke is tiring or boring to you? Cause I love to do my jokes when I know this is a big part of what's coming next and I know how people respond. It's fun to me. But you can't get like, "Oh, I'm tired of this." I do have a lot of material, so I'll switch up what I'll do depending on how much time I have on stage. When I'm headlining, I have time to do an hour. I got time to mix it up, go with the flow, do crowd work, I have time to coast. But when you have those tighter sets, you really wanna be tight, be professional, you really wanna make it good. Cause you're on that stage for a good time, not a long time.

Is there anything in particular you're trying to work on? What are some of your current craft goals?

To build my social media presence. I'm gonna be honest with you, that shit matters now. Comedy is all over social media. You can reach more people and that'll give you the opportunity to perform on more stages. My first love is the theater. I'm an actress. I'm naturally silly, funny, I can kick out a few skits or whatever. I just don't commit to it. So my biggest battle right now is my fight with myself to be consistent like I am on stage, off stage. And also I want to dig deeper with my set. I feel like a lot of the time I'm scratching the surface. I wanna talk about real things, real traumas, my relationship with my mom, alcoholism, real serious deep issues that may have hurt sometimes, but they barely sting now as time progresses. I really wanna get more personal. I don't know if you watched Jerrod Carmichael's last special, Rothaniel, but I wanna get that intimate. I damn near cried. When I leave the stage I want you to be like, "Damn, I know Mo." Right now, I think it's just scratching the surface. It's funny, it's fun, but it's too light. I need to get a little darker, a little deeper.

I think that's the best comedy. That's what I'm trying to do too, but it's hard. People want to latch onto you and get to know you, but you have to be funny first.

That's why it's important to learn about your comedic character. Because even the things you want to say, you can learn how to flip it so that the crowd not only understands it, they appreciate it, but it still comes out funny. I want you to read this book, *How to Kill in Comedy*. They use Rodney Dangerfield a lot as an example. He'll say the most moronic or disrespectful stuff and he'll be like, "I get no respect." The way he flips it, it's almost like you're delusional, like you don't know that you're being this way. In my set, I'm really mean – that's how I am – but I appeal to the crowd like, "I'm not being mean, I'm being honest, I'm being nice." You know what I'm saying? I had to learn that. And I learned that within the last month. I've been reading this book and I reread it and I'm just applying it now. That's really gonna help me with my jokes that are maybe a little darker, a little deeper. Just flip it.

Interesting. I'll have to check it out.

I did this joke when I first started about how my mom used to dress me like an old lady. But when I read that book, I flipped it and realized I had so much more material on it. I flipped it and made it seem like I was making my mom suffer cause I was the old lady and she was trying to buy me new stuff. I was saying old sayings. Somebody was like, "Are you coming to the birthday party?" I'm like, "If the Lord sees fit to keep me here!" Like I have an old soul and made it seem like my mom was suffering from me being too old. And I got more material off that, and it was more fun to do when I flipped it. Read that book, I'm telling you.

Yeah, the initial way it comes off whiny, "My mom used to dress me this way." Then you just made it fun.

Cause it's still the truth, but if you flip it and make your mom the victim, in your mind you're proud of what you did, but you don't know it was messed up. They're like, "You're crazy as hell." But that's the idea, for them to think you're delusional, like you don't see what's wrong here. So that makes them comfortable to laugh at it. You know when people say, "Oh, bless your heart?" That means you're being dumb, but it doesn't make them uncomfortable.

Alright, I gotta get you to sound off a little bit. What upsets you the most about the Chicago comedy scene?

We really have a lack of camaraderie. I think the Chicago comedy scene as a whole, we are broken. Chicago used to be a mecca, you used to have to come through Chicago to even make sure you were funny. Chicago's kind of become a joke. Cause I go to other cities, I travel and perform other places, and they have a really tight knit comedy scene. I mean everybody has their issues, but you go on down to Houston, even the girls there were really tight, they were nice, they were cool. I believe the women in comedy are definitely tighter than the men. We're all cool with who we're cool with and that's fine, but as a whole we should be doing more. We should be putting on shows. There's no way that other people are coming from out of town and selling out the Chicago Theater, or this and that, and we can't come together as a collective and do something good for our city. So I think that's where we really dropped the ball. There's a lot of negativity. Because I'm new, I'm ignorant to a lot of their personal beefs or whatever bad blood they have, but given that we're losing our comedy friends and family day after day, you'd think you'd kind of bury the hatchet and move forward. You know what I mean? Easier said than done, cause I know I could hold a grudge if I felt like it, but I just don't want people to live in my mind like that. You can't exist in my brain like that. I got shit to do. I think Chicago comedy, we gotta come together because we can do some dope shit. And then the separation from the black comics, the white comics, North, South, West Side. We've been able to be a mixing bowl a little more, and that's what I like. I go on every side, I know everybody, I'm chillin'. I think we need to do more of that, more mixing it up. There's a lot of great comics up north, there's a lot of great comics on the South Side. Never heard of each other and they've both been doing comedy for ten years. How?

What can we do so that people get to know each other on the different sides of Chicago?

People who are booking shows, we gotta start booking different. Now, you don't know if you don't know, but they should start taking more recommendations. I do a monthly show and I would like to book more North Side comics. I've seen quite a few that I really, really enjoyed. I only book three comics a month, so it's gonna take a while, but I would like to sprinkle in some of those comics so the other comics on the show will see that they're dope, they'll have a good time. I've seen it happen at a show. I put a show together and people come from different sides, different walks of life then, "They're funny, they're funny," then I look up and they're on a show together. We need more of that. Cause laughter has no color, baby. Funny is funny.



BONUS: Mo Good's Top 10 Chicago Comics

- 1. FAB MONROE**
- 2. ERICA NICOLE CLARK**
- 3. COMEDIAN FAMO**
- 4. JUST NESH**
- 5. MEECHIE HALL**
- 6. MARLON MITCHELL**
- 7. TINY THICKEMZ**
- 8. GEOFF ASMUS**
- 9. MARILEE**
- 10. JAMIE SHRINER**

Blake Burkhart Comes Up Short (Again)



Blake, how do you feel about not being on Mo's Top 10 list?

Jerry, how do you feel about being on nobody's Top 100 list?

THE FINAL VERDICT

by Luke Ipsum, Jon Dunne, Andrew Shankland, Jeff Braun

JUDGE: So after seeing all of the evidence and testimony in this quadruple homicide I'm now ready to make my final verdict in the case of Mr. Murderhands.

DEFENSE LAWYER: You've got nothing to worry about Mr. Murderhands. You're gonna be walking free in no time.

MR. MURDERHANDS: Me will kill again.

JUDGE : Ahem. After reviewing all of the evidence, the court finds the defendant, Mr. Murderhands guilty on all counts of murder resulting in a life sentence.

The judge wacks his gavel.

DEFENSE LAWYER: Objection your honor!

JUDGE: I'm sorry, but the court has made its ruling.

DEFENSE LAWYER: B_B-But... I weellly need to win this case! I went to weent to waw school and it was weellly hard! And and and I know I didn't do my best job b-b-but but it's just that being a lawyer is weelllly d-d-difficult and...

The Defense Lawyer starts to cry uncontrollably.

JUDGE: Oh my god. I hate it when people cry. It makes me so uncomfortable. Just please stop.

DEFENSE LAWYER: And I know I d-d-d-d-didn't do wif the e-e-e-e-e-evidence, or with the a-a-a-a-arguments, but if I don't win this case my m-m-mommy and d-d-daddy are gonna weellly mad at me cause they p-p-paid for all my schoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooool.

JUDGE: Oh my god. I hate this crying. I mean, okay, fine. Perhaps we can let Mr. Murderhands just do 15 years with some *good behavior*?

PROSECUTION LAWYER: Objection your honor! You've already made your decision. You can't go back on your ruling!

JUDGE: Overruled! I can't stand to watch this grown man cry. Mr. Murderhands gets 15 years with *good behavior*.

DEFENSE LAWYER: Mr. Murderhands is weellly b-b-bad at good behavior! How do you think that he got the name "M-M-Murderhands?"

MR. MURDERHANDS: When me kill me cum.

DEFENSE LAWYER: See! He's not a b-b-bad guy, he just wants to c-c-cum! Just one of the f-f-fellas! Don't we all just want to b-b-bust a n-n-n-n-n-nut?

JUDGE: Okay fine. What if I let you show some more evidence? Would you like that?

The Defense Lawyer sheepishly looks away.

DEFENSE LAWYER: M-M-Maybe that w-w-woooould be goooood.

JUDGE: Comeon buddy. Why don't you show just a *little bit more evidence*?

PROSECUTION LAWYER: Objection! What you're doing is completely...

JUDGE: Overruled! He has very rich and powerful parents!

MR. MURDERHANDS: Me thirsty for human blood.

DEFENSE LAWYER: Okay. My w-w-w-wone next piece of e-e-evidence for the court. This is the loaded gun Mr. Murderhands used to murder all of those people.

The Defense Lawyer aims the loaded gun at the Prosecution Lawyer.

PROSECUTION LAWYER: Your honor! He brought a loaded gun into the courtroom!

JUDGE: Overruled! His dad is very wealthy and helped get me this job.

DEFENSE LAWYER: Okay if you s-s-ssee there are no bullets left in this gun and this type of gun usually holds s-s-six a-a-and you're saying that my client killed two people then how are all s-s-six bullets gone?

JUDGE: Are you saying that Mr. Murderhands actually killed six people?

BANG! The Defense Lawyer shoots the Prosecution Lawyer.

PROSECUTION LAWYER: Fuck!

MR. MURDERHANDS: That felt good didn't it?

DEFENSE LAWYER: Oh noooo! I miscounted! I can't do ANYTHING right. I'm so STUPID!

The Defense Lawyer starts to bang his head on the podium.

JUDGE: You're not so stupid.

DEFENSE LAWYER: When they called me Magna Cum Laude they must have been saying it sarcastweeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

JUDGE: Don't say that.

PROSECUTION LAWYER: Objection your honor! He shot me and b-b-being shot h-h-hurts weellly b-b-b-baaaaaaaad...

JUDGE: Overruled! Crocodile tears!

DEFENSE LAWYER: Okay, wow, now I'm starting to realize how annoying all that crying is.

The judge bangs his gavel.

JUDGE: Mr. Murderhands you're free to go.

MR. MURDERHANDS: FREE TO GO? FREE TO KILL?

PHOTOGRAPHY: TJ SOPOCI (@TJSOPOCI)





MY NAME IS TJ SOPOCI. I'M A CHICAGO BASED PHOTOGRAPHER, PODCASTER, STAND UP COMEDIAN, PRODUCER, MUSICIAN AND DIGITAL CREATOR. I STARTED A PODCAST IN 2018 CALLED MENAGE-A-POD AND THAT INTRODUCED ME TO THE CHICAGO COMEDY SCENE AND OPENED SO MANY DOORS IN TERMS OF PERFORMING AND CREATING. PHOTOGRAPHY HAD ALWAYS BEEN A HOBBY OF MINE, BUT I STARTED TO PURSUE IT MORE SERIOUSLY JUST PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC. I STARTED OFFERING MY SERVICES TO FRIENDS WHO PRODUCE SHOWS TO BUILD MY PORTFOLIO AND NETWORK WITH MORE PEOPLE ACROSS THE SCENE. THANKS TO PHOTOGRAPHY AND STAND UP, I'VE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE COUNTLESS FRIENDSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME. WE ARE SO LUCKY TO LIVE IN A CITY WITH SO MANY TALENTED AND CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS AND I PERSONALLY AM SO LUCKY THAT SO MANY OF THEM ALLOW ME THE PLEASURE OF DOCUMENTING WHAT THEY DO SO WELL.

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

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