

THE COMEDY GAZELLE

THE LATEST IN CHICAGO COMEDY



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:

JAMES WEBB



INTRODUCING THE GAZELLE

When I moved to Chicago last October, 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 feature an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

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TALKING COMEDY WITH JAMES WEBB, CHICAGO'S BURLIEST PRODUCER

James Webb is the founder of People of Comedy Network and Standup Standup. He runs the city's most successful podcast studio out of his basement, where we met to discuss his story, his work, and his views on the scene.

So how'd you get your start in production?

I got a job at the Wheaton Grand Theater when I was 15. I was part of the local metal scene when I was a kid.

Laughs

What does that mean? That sounded very judgmental, JERRY.

I just think that's an interesting point to start from.

Yeah, I was an angry kid. Metal was an escape from the shitty Jesus-town I lived in. There was absolutely nothing to do there. Thank god for my first real job at The Wheaton Grand Theatre. My boss, the great Paul "3 Dolla" Warshauer, took me under his wing and taught me about the biz like I was his own son. Once I learned how to put on a show, I talked to all the bands that I knew and tried to energize that husk of a town for a night. It was great. Didn't sell out or anything crazy, but it was so much fun. Then it clicked like "Oh, that's all you have to do to put a show together?" And by then I had been a comedy fan my whole life. Every five seconds outside of work or school, I was watching Premium Blend or Comedy Central Presents. Or anything on Showtime with my dad. My dad was a big comedy fan, too.

So is that how you got into it?

Yeah, poppa bear was always the driving force behind my love for comedy, and still is, really. He showed me the Three Stooges when I was a toddler, then graduated me to SNL and all that stuff. When I was a teenager, all we watched was stand up. All the VHS tapes of the greats like Eddie Murphy and Kinison. And the best channel in history: Comedy Central. It's the only channel we had on ever. And I always wanted to be a part of that world. I just wanted to be close to it.

Then what?

I worked at The Wheaton Grand until it closed. Then I moved to the city. A few years later, by the will of the gods,



I got a job at another theater that housed The Edge Comedy Club, my portal into the Chicago stand-up scene. I got to see so many comics get their start there. Joey V was one of them. I'm pretty sure I saw his first set ever in that spot.

How was his first set?

Probably funny. Joey's one of those people, man. He has "it". He's always worked really hard, but he never had to. He's just gifted, you know?



 @JOEYVCOMEDY

Have you seen that often in your time here? You've seen a lot of Chicago comics.

All the time. And you used to see most of them leaving for a coast. Not so much anymore, which fucking rules. Having more hometown vets here fosters the industry, gives people something to get excited about, and makes everybody money so they can live the dream. And who do you think is gonna sit on the throne and call the shots when the "industry" comes here? Our people. That's why I've been preaching that forever, dude. Stay here. Stay in fucking Chicago.

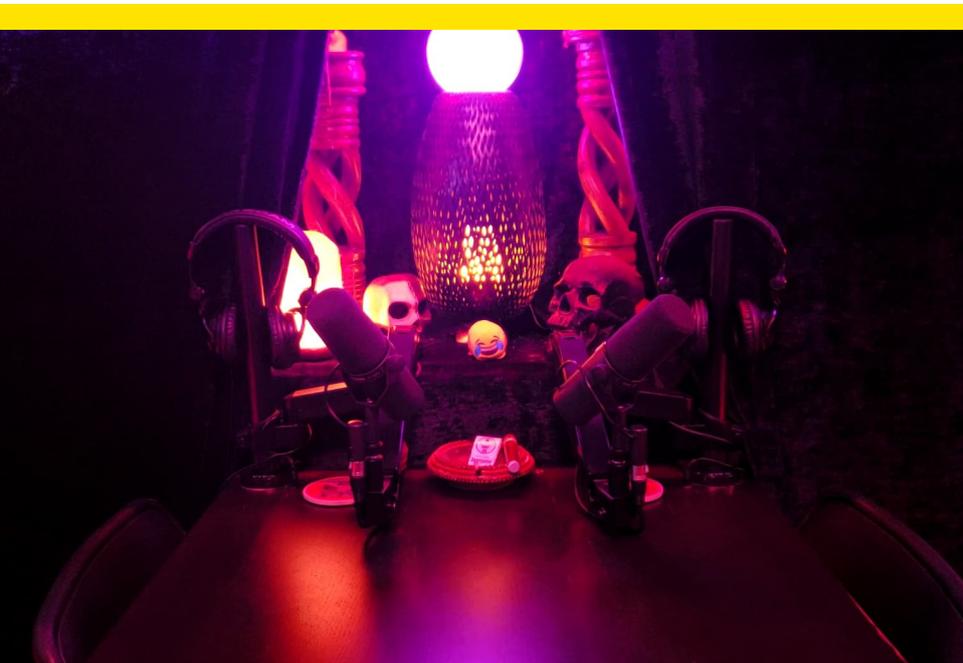
Why do you think so many people leave Chicago?

Opportunity, perceived or real. Chris Redd got hired by SNL. Can't say no to that. Or someone will get some writing gig in LA. That's where the "real" industry is, right? Why stay and build one here? It's way easier to get handed a fish than it is to learn how to fish. Or, shit, build a boat and learn how to sail. And if you're sailing your own boat, nobody can tell you what to do. You know? Ramblings of an ideologue, but you kind of have to aim high to hit high. The people who stayed here the last couple years know something big is happening, though. Or at least was before this pandemic. We were so close, dude. EVERYONE was doing well. In January and February I made more money than I ever had before – just doing shit I loved to do full time. And it wasn't just me, it was so many comedians and all of these people filming stuff and writing new stuff and making shows happen. The pandemic dude, it really destroyed so much momentum. Not progress, but definitely momentum. And we'll get it back soon.

"WHO DO YOU THINK IS GONNA CALL THE SHOTS WHEN THE 'INDUSTRY' COMES HERE? OUR PEOPLE. STAY IN FUCKING CHICAGO."

What do you think the scene still needs to get to where you envision it?

A vaccine. I'm telling you, pre-COVID, a puff of air in the right direction would've gotten us there. It was so, so close. I was in talks about opening a production house and getting a building. The possibilities really were endless until March 14th. It's kinda crazy that this studio has sustained itself as long as it has. I was on the brink for a minute, but thank god for unemployment.



INSIDE CHICAGO'S BASEMENT

What makes a good studio?

Depends on the aesthetic you're going for. From a technical perspective, good soundproofing is at the top of the list. You don't wanna do it in a living room or a kitchen. A smaller room with lots of curtains to dampen the sound. Accent lighting to control the vibe. I have a thousand fucking lights in here.

Is a podcast a good way to get comfortable talking and releasing content?

If you're a comic, don't feel guilty or apprehensive about starting a podcast. Yeah "everyone has one", but it will really help you on stage. You have to know how to weave in and out of shit. And having as much conversation as you possibly can will only strengthen all the muscles you're trying to work out up there. It doesn't matter if nobody listens to it. If you like to do it, do it. At worst, it's a developmental thing you'll get a few decent bits from.

Any comedy or production pet peeves?

People who don't talk close to the mic. Bring the mic with you when you move. Don't talk over people. Oh my fucking god, don't talk over people. And that also comes with time, but I don't want to listen to a podcast where there are three people yelling over each other. That's not a podcast, that's a bar fight. Be gracious with other people's time in the room you're talking with — don't talk over them. That's pretty much it. Oh, and be funny.

Last couple questions: If I'm an aspiring comic, why should I come to Chicago?

Chicago is known globally as the training ground for comedy, period. Back when the world was the world, we had a very supportive, honest, community that was also thriving and bustling. You could get on stage four times a night, every night of the week. In every neighborhood. You could talk to as many different kinds of audiences as you could imagine all in one night. And you could feasibly do it all for not a lot of money. This isn't New York where it costs \$1000 to get a cab and you're waiting three hours to get to your next spot. You're in another neighborhood whenever you want ten minutes away. And we will get back to that again. I know we will get back to that. People come here and are excited to be here for comedy. People here care about the community, because we know that you need a strong community to build an industry. And I feel like the people "in charge" here - they're not in it for them. They're in it for the future of what the business will be. And you do not see that with this kind of fervor in any other town. Chicago's duty is to help you. You go to LA to get ignored, you go to New York to be told to fuck off. You come here to be helped. It's in our nature.

If I'm an aspiring comedy producer, why should I come to Chicago?

It depends on what you want. Do you want your own thing or to be a part of someone else's thing? If you want your own thing, come here. You can build your own thing here and people will help you build it. You'll be helped in ways you can't imagine and make something 20 times better than you would've on your own in a town like LA, where everyone's all about themselves. You don't have honest support in other places. You have honest support here. Shit, I'll help you! If you want to be behind the scenes building and feeding the engines, get at me! So we can all get rich! Let's all get rich Jerry! Let's all get fucking rich!



SUN SETS ON DALE MCPEEK'S CAREER



Dale McPeek (right) poses with local flora (aged 17).*

FUN FACT: THE SAGUARO IS A TREE-LIKE CACTUS SPECIES THAT CAN GROW TO BE OVER 40 FT TALL. THE SAGUARO'S BLOSSOM IS THE STATE WILDFLOWER OF ARIZONA, AND IS KNOWN FOR NOT WEARING ALL BLACK IN THE DESERT LIKE A DUMB IDIOT.

***DALE MCPEEK IS A GOOD GUY. HE HAS OPENED FOR DOUG STANHOPE AND LOUIS CK. EVERYONE IS JEALOUS OF DALE. YOU CAN FOLLOW HIM @REALCUTEDUDE **

ARTWORK

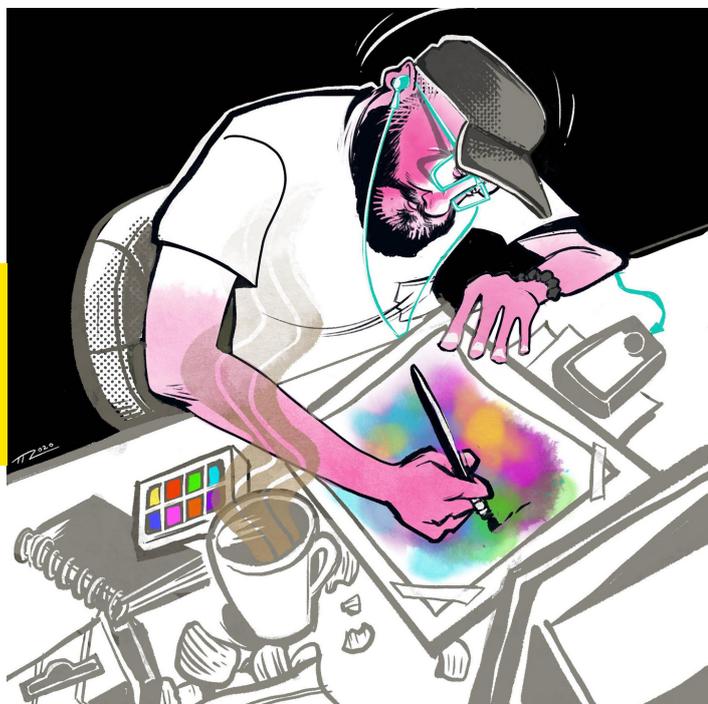
SAM CONCKLIN IS A CHICAGO-BASED ANIMATOR, COMPOSER, AND COMIC ARTIST.

 **@SAM_CONCKLIN**

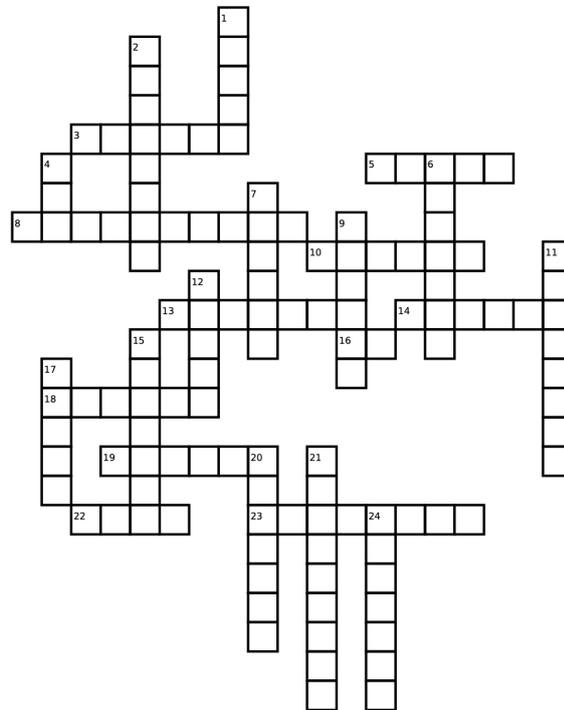


COVER ART BY COMEDIAN / ARTIST TOM RYAN

 **@TIPS.ARE.APPRECIATED**



CROSSWORD: CHICAGO COMICS



Down:

1. Hillary.
2. Successful lawyer
4. Cha-cha
6. Unregistered sex offender
7. Crackhead
9. "You aint shit"
11. "Fuck them kids"
12. Lunchables, yes?
15. Gay?
17. "Daddy likes control"
20. Never seen the Simpsons.
21. Masturbation Jenkins
24. Stoned Thor

Across:

3. Ice Age squirrel
5. Toyota Corolla
8. Bill Burr Presents
10. iPhone accessories salesman
13. High at Urban Outfitters
14. Kohl's cash
16. McDondaldses
18. Boat shoe
19. "CHICAGO!"
22. "YOU GOTTA MOVE!"
23. Bald

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS POSSIBLE.

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE? SELF PROMOTE?

DM US (ME) @COMEDYGAZELLE 