

Jamie LISSOW

When it comes to comedy, it's hard to find another artist who takes his job this seriously and is really this funny!

Jamie Lissow, originally from Rochester, New York, decided to make an abrupt start in the adventure of adulthood and entering the work force. "I began the road to entertainment by dropping out of law school to try my hand at stand-up comedy. I got involved with comedy basically through a lack of all other useful and applicable skills. I remember when I was in law school I got this piece of paper telling me they wanted me to pay all of the money from the loans I had for school. I thought to myself 'Uh oh,



they're not kidding here.' So, in order to do this, I decided to take a year off and try comedy. That year became two then three and eventually brought me to where I am right now."

Jamie, now a married man and successful comic in both the club and college scenes, says it was vital to his relationship with his wife that he was already established in comedy before they were one. "It is really important to have already done stand up successfully before beginning anything serious with another person, because it is a ridiculous stress on the relationship if the poor girl doesn't know what she was getting into. It would be like if the girl you were dating or were married to became a stripper. It would be really hard to deal with unless you met them at the strip club, then you would already be fine with it."

You might imagine if Jamie had been with his wife when he dropped out of college to pursue stand up, she would not have been a happy lady. "Yeah, that girl wasn't very pleased. That didn't turn out so well."

But, at that age and experience, what did Jamie's parents think about such a life changing and potentially risky move? "That's the craziest thing. I didn't really know where my parents stood on the whole topic. One day, while I was still in school in Buffalo, I went home to Rochester to talk to my parents and I told them that I had a comedy show that just went really well and a lot of guys had been telling me that they really thought I could do this for a living if I wanted to. I said 'Let me run this by you. I am thinking about taking a year off. I know that I am already moved in and I know I could lose a ton of

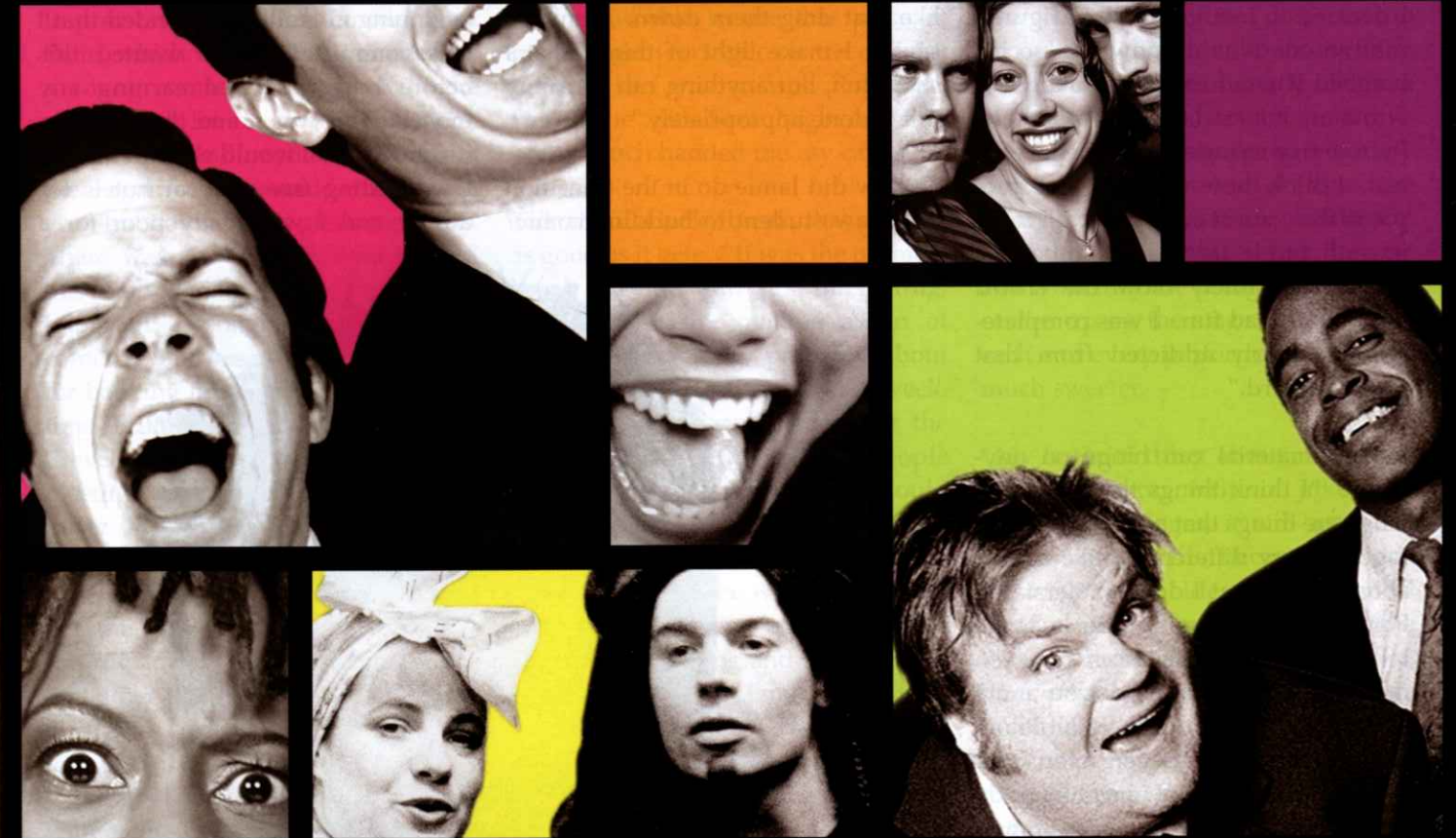
money, but I am thinking about trying stand up comedy. What do you guys think?' My dad was just like 'You know what, I think that is the best idea I have ever heard. I think that is what you should be doing, especially if you enjoy it. I think you are too nice to be a lawyer anyway.' It was amazing, I couldn't believe it. They ended up helping me out a lot with moving back in and in the transition in general. It was really nice to have that unexpected support."

There are two kinds of comics commonly seen in entertainment. The guys that are naturally born funny and have made it their goal to make people laugh since they were a tot, and the comics that have had a dark and tortured existence and figure out that making light of their troubles is humorous. Jamie says he falls somewhere in between. "I am a mix, like half and half. I started doing it because I always wanted to. My entire life I thought it would be great to entertain. Then I ended up actual-



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ly doing it on a whim. I was sitting in my dorm room thinking and scared about the future. There was some comedy competition that was going to be taking place that night in Niagara Falls, which wasn't far away. I decided to just go for it. I figured that no one would know me so if I bombed it wouldn't really matter. I wrote my material on the drive there. I wrote five minutes and did the contest. I think there were like five people in the contest and I believe I came in sixth, but it didn't matter. I didn't win or absolutely blow the crowd away, but I had fun. I was completely and utterly addicted from that point forward."

Jamie's material can hinge on anything. "I think things that make me laugh are things that are very interesting and very different. I like to talk about things that I don't understand. For example, you will never hear me talk about the differences between men and women. I think you and I and everyone else out there all know the differences between men and women. I learned that in eighth grade health class. I think things are funny that I feel no one else ever thought of. Like when I get an idea, I think 'Could someone else have thought of this?' I say to myself 'Yeah, five other comics have already done something like this. If I can then take that topic to another level, I will do the joke. If it is something I feel like people have never talked about before, or at least never talked about the angle before, then I am comfortable going forward and writing that into my act. I mean your whole life can't be like that. I am sure that I have covered common ground with other comics plenty of times, but that is kind of what I am striving for. To have every single joke be original and different."

As far as specific topics go, I think everything can be funny. I think death can be funny taken in the right context. I have had a lot of people die in

my life. For example, my dad died shortly after that fateful meeting in the living room happened. I think that I still keep a sense of humor. Although it was painful, there is no reason for people to let things in life like that drag them down. I am not saying I make light of things that I shouldn't, but anything can be funny if it is done appropriately."

So how did Jamie do in the transition from law student to budding comic?



"There wasn't one specific point in time after I started comedy that I said to myself 'I can do this and support myself in it.' It is kind of funny, because I think that is something that became set in my mind from the beginning. I really just decided that I was committed and I wanted this before I even started earning any money. This was it and there was no turning back. I would sleep in my car. I was eating free soup at hotels for dinner and I was really poor for a

while, but I did get one turning point early in my career that really empowered me and just affirmed that this was the way my life would go.

"I was working at the Cleveland Improv and I did an emcee week there, which was kind of a big deal as a young comic trying to get off the ground. A lot of guys would do a week there and would never work there again or they would work once a year, but not with any great regularity. There was one woman who booked this club and she was kind of an important person in the world of club comedy. She was actually responsible for booking four comedy clubs at the time, Buffalo, Miami, Evansville and Cleveland. I was really nervous about meeting her and I had heard all of the crazy things about her, so I was scared. We ended up getting along really well. I ended up running into her the week that I was doing the Improv and we talked about comedy and other things. I told her about this girlfriend I had, incidentally the one that got upset when I dropped out of law school to pursue comedy. I was telling her about how the girl told me that I had to either choose her or comedy. How do you just choose comedy? I can't just say 'Okay, screw you, I am choosing comedy' because I had nowhere to go. No one would hire me yet. It's hard to say 'screw you' and then two weeks later I'm waiting a table and she is in the restaurant with her mom or something.

"So anyway, this woman, who was kind of scary in the comedy world at the time because she had so much influence over who got work and who didn't, asked me 'Are you sure that is what you want to do?' and I said 'Yes, of course.' Well, the next morning she calls me at nine o'clock at the condo where they put the comics up and asked me to come to her office. I walk in and she hands me a piece of paper and says 'This is your schedule for the next six months.' It was six months of

work, almost every day. I was booked at all of her clubs. For example, I became the house emcee at the Cleveland Improv, the Evansville Funny Bone and the Buffalo Funny Bone. So I had six months of work and I was able to use that piece of paper to get work all over the country because she was so well respected. Her name was Sara Nigh and she pretty much handed me my career."

Talk about a lucky break, that is about as good as it gets. "It was the ultimate break for me and it's interesting, because I wasn't making a ton of money or anything, probably about two hundred and fifty bucks a week. Twelve grand a year. It wasn't the money, it was the gigs. People respected that so much that I would fax over my availabilities and all the owners and promoters would be like 'Holy shit! You are working for Sara Nigh six months out of the year?' It changed everything and that is how I got in everywhere. From that day on I would work fifty two weeks a year. I didn't even have a house because I didn't need one. If I had a week off, it was only because someone cancelled me on short notice. I have been rolling ever since. It's funny, I was just talking to some of my friends here at The Comic Strip and we were discussing how a young and ambitious comic would want to be booked every single night of the year. Now, as established comics, our dream is to only have to work Saturdays and have really good shows. Then we could come home during the week with our families or whatever. It's funny, because you want to make the same money in one night that you used to make in a week."

Jamie mainly focuses on the comedy clubs and the college market, but does a few corporate shows here and there as well. Colleges are where his heart is and some of his roots. "Do you know what I love about colleges? The kids. First of all, they are smart, or

they wouldn't be in college. I think comedy has a lot to do with intelligence. They are always in class and can get in big trouble if they miss anything, so they are trained to pay attention. That carries over to watching me as a comedian, because I don't have to spoon feed them or dumb anything down. You can get any and all types of people at comedy clubs, from doctors to your average garden variety drunken idiot. But with colleges, the crowds are consistently intelligent and enthusiastic about where they are and what they are doing. That energy carries up on the stage and it makes each and every performance I do that much sweeter.

"My favorite thing about colleges is that once you write a joke that works for colleges, it will work for the rest of your life, because the kids never get any older. Sure, topical stuff might change, but with the kind of humor and insights I make, it is perfectly adaptable for every incoming class. This allows me to find out what works and what doesn't and I can fine tune and keep my set razor sharp. Colleges are great. It is my favorite part of the job."

Jamie Lissow is currently hitting colleges and clubs across the country and eating it up. Be sure to check out this hot comic with a real world perspective, intelligent insights and an intimacy with students that is rare.

BOOK IT! For more information about the comedy of Jamie Lissow, call Scott Talarico at Neon Entertainment at (800) 993-6366 or go tour our website for a virtual link at www.campusactivitiesmagazine.com. Also be sure to check out Jamie's comic strip, Lissow the Comic, located elsewhere in this magazine.