

Mickey Finn's: A knockout for comedy buffs

By BOB PROTZMAN
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The comics at Mickey Finn's are no longer the best kept secret in town and are no longer doing their stuff for just an "intimate gathering" of a dozen or so people.

Comedy in Finn's, at 312 Central Ave. SE, Minneapolis, looks like it's here to stay, thanks mostly to Jeff Gerbino, whom his fellow funny men (and women) generally agree is the person who's done more than anyone else for Twin Cities comedy.

Gerbino, who has received considerable media attention since he and a bunch of beginners started working in front of 10 or 12 people at Finn's three years ago, is one of three guys now working (and getting lots of laughs) regularly at Finn's. The club, because of increased attendance (about 80 people can be jammed into the place), has gone to two shows on Saturday nights, and may have to go to two on Fridays also.

What's more, the club is now selling tickets at Dayton's, which Gerbino reminds "is a sure sign of credibility in Minnesota."

The club is about to begin booking nationally known comedians, probably beginning in April with Dean Martin's uncle, Leonard Barr, the guy who could pass for a skid-row bum if spotted on the street.



Anderson

Bauer

Halloran

The folks at Finn's are looking forward to a visit this coming Monday from their most famous supporter, Rodney Dangerfield. Dangerfield gave the locals a much-needed boost in morale and confidence last August when he dropped in on them during a special comedy night they were having at Cork's, a downtown Minneapolis bar. After jokingly heckling the guys a little, Dangerfield wowed 'em with just a taste of the act he was doing at the time at the Carlton Celebrity Room in Bloomington. And he had some complimentary things to say about the local comic clan.

Well, Rodney — one of the local comics' real heroes — is back at the Carlton beginning Friday, and Gerbino, the impresario at Finn's, says he's

expecting a return visit from the man who "don't get no respect." Whether he'll perform, no one knows. But it's likely that Dangerfield, ham that he is, won't be able to resist.

A sort of triumvirate has emerged from among the short order cooks, salesmen, machinists, et al, who have worked on Finn's stage. They are Gerbino, Bill Bauer and Louie Anderson.

When the third anniversary of comedy at Finn's was celebrated early last month, the three of them shared the stage (Dan Bradley was the emcee, but didn't do much comedy) with two special guests, Ted Holum and Ed Fiala, who are based at the Comedy Womb in Chicago. It seemed to mark the separation among the localites of the men from the boys, the consistently funny performers from those who more often than not bombed. ("Bomb" is possibly the most often used word at Mickey Finn's and any other place where inexperienced comedians are trying to learn to make people laugh.)

There was important evidence at this event that the local comedians have improved significantly. In the writer's opinion and judging by audience reaction, they generally were funnier (at least more original and inventive) than their higher-paid Chicago guests, although Fiala did some marvelous impressions and sound effects.

The "big three" of Twin Cities comedy demonstrated very different styles and techniques.

Anderson is a short, fat man, who uses his left to full advantage, telling layers of fat jokes. "When I was a kid they used to yell, 'Push Louie down; he'll never get up.'" He bent over, his back to his audience, "Don't show movies on my back," he commanded.

Anderson, a social worker when he's working at a day job, was funny without costumes or props, but when he donned a pith helmet, put on sunglasses, grabbed a whip and imitated a freak-show bark-er, he was hilarious.

He got his biggest laughs, though, working the audience, reacting to the slightest sound from them, insulting them in the manner of a softspoken Don Rickles. Unlike the famous Rickles, Anderson didn't rely upon one word or expression (like "dummy") to get his response. He explained that he likes to hassle the audience "to get back at them" for picking on him.

Someone who has watched Anderson over the past couple of years calls him the fastest-improving comic at Finn's. "When he first went down there, he was doing a lot of sex stuff, but not much else. He seemed to be OK, but there are a million guys who are OK," said Sue Halloran. "Three months later, he's emceeing the show, has thrown out the sex stuff, and is doing this spontaneous thing with the audience. I couldn't believe it."

See Finn's, Page 23