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# Jokes for folks who put lives on the line

Comedy show supports troops

By Mike Hughes  
Lansing State Journal

The worlds of comedy and war will blend tonight.

The event is billed as "Standup For the Troops." It's a free show - with donations taken - at various clubs around the country, including Connxtions in Lansing.

"I sent the idea to lots of people," said Wild Bill Bauer, a Minneapolis comedian. "The first person to respond was Frank Stevens."

He's the Connxtions owner. He's also an Army veteran who endorses the general notion.

"There are a lot of different opinions about the war," Stevens said. "But once you make a commitment, you have to get behind it."

That's the idea of the stand-up night, said Bauer, a Vietnam vet.

People assume that show-business opposes the Iraq war, Bauer said. "I'd say that over half the comedy people are in favor of it."

That may be especially true in the Midwest. The stand-up night has lined up 14 comedy clubs, half in Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio.



NBC

## Combat comics

Looking for laughs dealing with the Iraq war? Possibilities include:

- "Standup For the Troops," 8 p.m. today, Connxtions Comedy Club, 2900 N. East St. No cover charge; donations will be taken, with the money going for the USO, the VFW's "Operation Uplink" and a national newspaper ad supporting the troops.
- Other stand-up acts at Connxtions occasionally have topical material. Shows are at 8 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays (\$8), 7:45 p.m. and 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays (\$12).
- "The Bob and Tom Show," 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. weekdays; radio syndication, including WJXQ (106.1-FM).

Comedy and warfare don't always mix, of course.

"They say that the formula for comedy is tragedy-plus-time," Stevens said. "We haven't had the time yet for this war."

So comedians approach the subject gingerly. "There are so many opinions and emotions coming down on this," said Mark Irish, the Connxtions manager.

Rico Bruce Wade, a comedian who lives in Lansing and will perform tonight, echoed that. "The support for the troops is definitely there," Wade said, "but not necessarily support for the war. There are so many different opinions."

Still, Wade said, there's always something that's funny.

"The Iraqi information minister is great for material," he said. "Wouldn't it be great to have that guy with you when you come home late: 'No, no, he is definitely not drunk.'"

War-related material can work in comedy clubs, Stevens said. "When you go through these doors, anything goes," he said. "It's a politically correct world, but between these four walls, it's not."

In the rest of that world, people are cautious. War-related comedy is avoided by some spots, embraced by others, including:

- "The Daily Show," on Comedy Central. It mocked TV news coverage, with its ongoing reports, "Iraq: Are We There Yet?"
- "Saturday Night Live." Recently, it had Saddam Hussein "proving" a videotape wasn't made in advance. He did this by holding up a desk calendar.
- "The Bob and Tom Show," which is syndicated on radio. It even claims to have an Iraqi comedian, Shecky Azziz.

- "The Daily Show," 11 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, Comedy Central cable channel.

- Late-night talk shows, especially "The Late Show With Jay Leno," 11:35 p.m. weekdays, Channel 10 (NBC).

- "Saturday Night Live," 11:35 p.m. Saturdays, Channel 10.

#### Overheard

The people who are doubles for Saddam Hussein were called in and told there is good news and bad news. The good news: "Our glorious leader is still alive." The bad news: "He's lost his right arm."

-- *"The Bob and Tom Show"*

Martin Sheen is telling us to oppose the war. Taking political advice from Martin Sheen is like taking parenting advice from Martin Sheen.

-- *Wild Bill Bauer, stand-up comic*

The Tigers need this Iraq information guy. He'd tell us, "They have not lost a game all year. They have defeated the infidels at every turn."

-- *Rico Bruce Wade, stand-up comic who lives in Lansing*

The French have helped us after all. We dropped pamphlets on Iraq, telling how to surrender. Actually, that's the first page of the French army manual.

-- *"Bob and Tom"*

Advertisement

"It was different after Sept. 11, when there was an attack on our home front," said Bob Olson, program director for WJXQ (106.1-FM), which airs the show. "Bob and Tom went for weeks without much comedy relief. ... I think what they found is that people really need to laugh."

The idea for the stand-up day started with comedians Craig Allen (who has two siblings stationed overseas) and Bauer. Stevens jumped at it quickly.

Tonight's show will have a 15-minute set by Wade and a 45-minute show by Awkward Silence, a sketch-comedy troupe.

Stevens hasn't been to war, but he has an idea what the soldiers are facing. For 28 months in the late 1970s, he was in a training unit in Panama.

He also has an involvement shared by many local people: His family roots are in the Arab world.

"My grandparents came over here from Lebanon," Stevens said. "We've got quite a few people in the family who speak Arabic. ... I've always appreciated the food and the language."

Stevens often watches news of warfare in his ancestral homeland. "People have been fighting there for generations," he said.

That's a serious business. Tonight, however, there will be time for comedy.

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