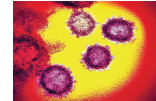




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Christine O'Leary will co-headline the evening. O'Leary teaches and performs at The Ridgefield Playhouse in Connecticut.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY PAUL ANTHONY/LONG ISLAND COMEDY FESTIVAL

Berkshire Comedy Festival: A night of laughter, without the politics

Nationally-known comedians promise an entertaining
evening

Posted Thursday, July 25, 2019 8:21 am

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By Nicolas Davidoff, The Berkshire Eagle

GREAT BARRINGTON — "I'm single and I'm 50, which means I'm ready to cut a deal. That joke basically sums everything I'm going to talk about," said Joe DeVito.

IF YOU GO ...

What: The Berkshire Comedy Festival

When: 8 p.m. Saturday, July 27

Where: The Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, 14 Castle St., Great Barrington

Cost: Pre-sale \$25; \$35

Information: 413-528-0100, www.mahaiwe.org, www.BerkshireComedyFestival.com

DeVito is one of five comedians who will perform at the Fifth Annual Berkshire Comedy Festival on Saturday, July 27, at the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center. Starting at 8 p.m. DeVito and his peers — Frankie Fuhrman, Eric Haft, Paul Anthony and Christine O'Leary — hope to offer an escape from the monotony and seriousness of our daily routine through laughter for at least one evening.

"We're not going to do anything that's politically driven," said Anthony, the host and first act for the comedy festival.

Anthony, who also runs the Long Island Comedy Festival, works with comedians from across the country to offer them a place to showcase their work. He vacations in the Berkshires in the winter, skiing Butternut's slopes with his family. Five years ago, he reached out to the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center to organize a comedy festival in the region.

"I think people are looking for escape," said Anthony. "If you want to watch politics then that's fine by me, but I think that there's enough of that. I think comedy should be a form of entertainment first and foremost. People just want to laugh, they need a break. You know, life will be there in 90 minutes. The

show is designed to give the audience that escape and not to make you think too much."

DeVito, whose set is based on making light of relationships and the randomness of our lives, agrees.

"I would agree with Paul Anthony in saying that comedy is a means of escape," DeVito said. "I see so many people try to do political comedy and I think that it's lame. I think it's a cop out in a way. It's easy, you know the reaction that it's going to get. We've got enough people at each other's throats now. I don't feel the need to bring that into comedy. Everything else is politicized. It's exhausting."

Instead, DeVito believes that comedy, especially when it is performed live, should be a conversation with the audience.

"As a successful comedian, you have to have an awareness of what the audience is feeling, but most importantly you have to be true to yourself," said DeVito. "To me, a really good joke makes people think, 'I never really thought about it that way, but I know exactly what you're talking about.' It's just finding the right way to say something that is a big truth."

O'Leary, DeVito's fellow headliner, echoed that same sentiment.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER THESE ADS

"My work is about how I see the world and the world sees me," she said. "Comedy is a way to tell the truth. Or at least that's what I preach and teach. Comedy can also be a way to solve a problem. A way to do that and get a laugh is by selling your bit with a feeling."

O'Leary started her comedic career performing at a blackbox theater in Portland, Maine. She has performed alongside Tracy Morgan, Chevy Chase and Wanda Sykes to name a few. She now teaches and performs at The Ridgefield Playhouse in Connecticut.

"Here are a few things that you might not know about comedy," O'Leary said. "On average, it takes about an hour and a half of writing for every minute on stage. Very often in a comedy club there is a brick wall behind the sparsely dressed stage. That brick wall is there by design. It's there to simulate an assassination. Because only one of two things is going to happen: the comic is going to kill or the comic is going to die."

DeVito, who has also burst onto the comedic scene in his own right with appearances on "The Late Show," "Last Comic Standing," and "Comedy Central," did not anticipate the difficulties of having a job making people laugh when he quit his corporate job to dedicate himself fully to his passion.

"My coworkers at my corporate job talked me into trying it," DeVito said. "I immediately thought it was the coolest thing. But it was a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. I kept at it and about two years in I thought to myself, 'Hey, I'm going to do this!' I was already in my 30s, I was a grown man. You get better at this thing by just performing. You really have to become obsessed and grind at it until you get comfortable and your jokes get better. You have to put the reps in, there's no way around it."

Anthony knows there's plenty of competition in his business, but he firmly believes that experiencing comedy in a live setting is what it's all about.

"There's nothing like a live performance," Anthony said. "Sometimes, the crowd becomes part of the show. Someone might yell something out or laugh at an inappropriate time and the comedian's job is to call it out and make reference to it. Ninety-nine percent of the time the audience howls with laughter because it lets them know that the comedians are relatable and they're just up there doing [their] job."

DeVito agreed, saying it's not as easy to laugh in a dark room while looking at a computer screen.

"There's something about being in an audience," Devito said. "You get charged off of what other people do. Laughs feed off of each other. It's an exchange between the performer and the audience. You don't get that by watching a video or a TV special. Even if you're not directly interacting with the crowd, the show is like a conversation. After all, a laugh is an autonomous response, it's like a sneeze. You can't overthink it. You have to let yourself get carried away with it."

O'Leary thinks the show is just as fulfilling for herself as it is for the audience.

"Getting a laugh is the highest high I know. It's the best drug and I love it," O'Leary said. "I really think there is something to be said about seeing an act be born and develop right in front of your eyes. That's what this show is really about. I guarantee you that a show like this will provide more entertainment than anything they can binge watch. Any show you watch on TV, you're going to forget about it tomorrow, but not this."

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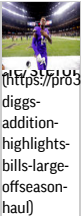
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