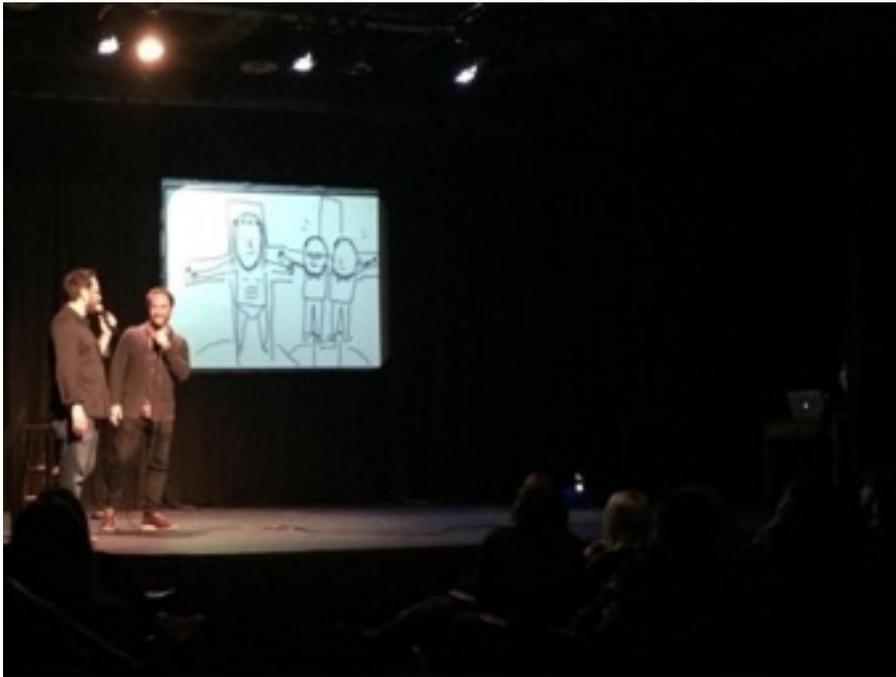


The Comic's Comic
January 29th, 2016
By Sean L. McCarthy

Picture This! with Brandie Posey illustrates stand-up comedy while also commenting upon it



There's a fine line between heckling and helping, and it's drawn via invitation.

A shout from the audience? Unwarranted. No, thank you. You don't have a microphone or a spotlight on you, nor audience members paying to see you, so please, do keep your comments to yourself. Replace those word noises with giggles and laughs and we're all happy. Some shows deflect any negative impulse by incorporating feedback into their very structure, either from the host or from other performers. Think of The Benson Interruption on Comedy Central or in theaters, where Doug Benson sat onstage with microphone still in hand while his guests told jokes or stories. MST3K made it all about the performers enhancing sub-par movies with top-notch riffing.

Now picture this. Or, rather: Picture This!

Hosted and co-created by Brandie Posey (co-host of the Lady to Lady podcast) with Sam Varela, Picture This! features animators and cartoonists on the side of the stage drawing up art on an overhead projector that accompanies, illustrates or comments upon what the stand-up comedian is saying in real time. Or not, even? Picture This! began in Los Angeles in 2012 and since has franchised monthly or regular shows in New York City, San Francisco and Portland, Ore. -- traveled to Melbourne's International Comedy Festival in 2013 and hit five different comedy festivals in 2015.

"This is a super cool show, I'm proud to be a part of it," Jay Larson said after his performance last weekend at SFSketchfest.

A special RIOT LA festival edition of Picture This! on Sunday will feature comedy by Ron Funches, Eddie Pepitone, Guy Branum, Phoebe Robinson, Chris Garcia and The Puterbaugh Sisters, paired up with the likes of animators Mike Hollingsworth (BoJack Horseman), Mike Mayfield (Mr. Pickles), Jenny Fine, Freddy Christy, Aaron Long, Elizabeth McMahill and Colin Heck.

The animators and the stand-ups are not always on the same page, nor the same pacing.

Amy Miller's animator couldn't seem to keep up with her, despite her giving elaborately detailed descriptions of what she was wearing to set up a joke -- which led to Miller cracking wise at the animator's expense -- while "Hombre McSteez" (Marty Cooper) quickly drew up a severed foot that Bucky Sinister was wondering about that had been recently found along the Bay Area's BART lines. The rest of Sinister's set seemed tailor-made for animation. Anna Seregina, after describing one hell gig that put her in a painful corporate party alongside a clogging troupe of men who look like Criss Angel, turned to see what Sean Keeton had drawn. "You're not wrong!" Seregina replied. Earlier in her set, she even made requests of Keeton to illuminate her imagined older self: "Can I get a lover behind me breathing? Perfect!"

Jason and Randy Sklar, whose wonder twin powers already seem wonderfully activated, truly shone as they called back to a previous joke about relative levels of fame to explore the premise of people who may not quite recognize Jesus Christ -- then turning to see what their animator had drawn, and discovering themselves high on the cross, too. Together.

"Even in crucifixion we only get one cross?!" Randy Sklar quipped. "In death, can't we get our own thing?"

You see but don't hear the animators. They're usually off to the side, or behind a curtain.

"The illustrators hiding actually came from our first animators, who said they would only do the show if they could be hidden so they weren't held accountable for the things they'd be drawing," Varela told The Comic's Comic. "Since then we're a little more flexible on it depending on our group of animators and what the venues will allow but generally it seems the animators are more comfortable behind the scenes, so to speak."

The concept itself, though, originated with the illustrators.

Posey told The Comic's Comic that Titmouse Inc. (makers of cartoons and more, including Black Dynamite; China, IL; Metalocalypse; Motorcity; Randy Cunningham; Superjail!; The Venture Brothers) used to do a slightly similar monthly show called The Tongue & Pencil. After they stopped, she approached them about modifying the concept and carrying it forward.

"Our first year we ran it at The Little Modern, a now defunct black box theatre in Hollywood, Posey told me. "Our head animator at the time was an artist named Grif Kimmons (China IL), who works for Titmouse. After a year, he handed over the reigns to our current guys, Mike Mayfield (Mr. Pickles) & Mike Hollingsworth (BoJack Horseman) and have hopped around

venues a few times in L.A. -- The Nerdist Theatre, The Steve Allen Theatre, The Satellite, and now our home is The Virgil."

Mayfield and Hollingsworth sometimes travel with the show, too, to help first-time participating animators orient to drawing for a live audience and live-wire comedians.

Posey said hosting Picture This! has prompted her to riff more, and literally see old jokes from new perspectives.

"Our animators are joke-tellers, too, they just process the same bits visually versus verbally," she said. "It's always so cool to see your bit from a different angle you hadn't thought to explore! I always feel like I'm dealing with the most talented heckler in the room on the show -- once you surrender yourself to the idea that you'll never be as dynamic as the giant dick being drawn behind you, you get to really play around. It takes the ego out of stand-up, which I've always thought is the death of good comedy anyway."

The dynamic between comedian and illustrator can be push and pull, but when it works, they're ultimately moving in the same direction.

Posey described it to me as driving while allowing someone else to also have his or her hands on the wheel. She added: "The sweet spot for me is when the show feels like 30% anarchy."

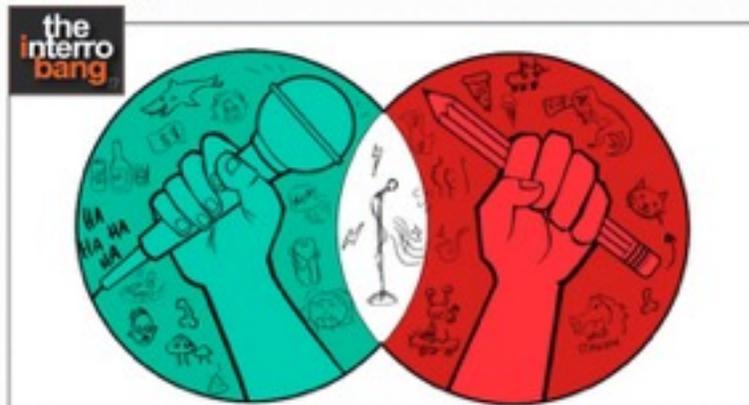
Here's another percentage for you to consider, though, whether you're a performer or an audience member: "Every show is 100% unique - even if I use the same bit, whoever my artist is will interpret it differently, which leads me in different tangents, and it turns into a completely different set than last time," Posey said. "I love that about it so much."

Picture This! happens monthly at The Virgil in Los Angeles, Union Hall in Brooklyn, every other month at Doc's Lab in San Francisco, and at Curious Comedy Theater in Portland, Ore.

The Interrobang
February 18, 2016
By Mike Feeney

11 Concept Shows in New York Putting a Twist on Stand Up

By Mike Feeney on February 18, 2016



Picture This!

Brandie Posey and Sam Varria have something very cool going on here. They have created a comedy show where comedians have their jokes drawn live by animators, cartoonists, and other artists as they are performing. The results are organic, highly entertaining and often times hilarious.

Vulture
February 16, 2016
By Katla McGlynn & Elise Czajkowski

VULTURE

the interrobang

Which New York City Comedy Show Is Right for You? Let Your TV Tastes Be a Guide

By Katla McGlynn and Elise Czajkowski

If you like *BoJack Horseman*, you'll like [Picture This](#).

If you like animated comedies, how about animated stand-up comedy? [Picture This](#) pairs some of your favorite comedians with animators who illustrate jokes on the spot. Hosted by Peggy O'Leary, it's just like having your portrait drawn at a fair, only instead of mildly insulting caricatures, you get to see one-of-a-kind depictions of what's going on inside funny people's heads.

Union Hall, 702 Union St., Brooklyn; monthly.

The Village Voice
November 10, 2015
By Julie Seabaugh

VOICE

READING | NEW YORK CITY COMICS DISCUSS THEIR FAVORITE OLD, NEW, AND UNIQUE VENUES FOR STAND-UP



New York City Comics Discuss Their Favorite Old, New, and Unique Venues for Stand-Up

BY JULIE SEABAUGH

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2015 AT 9:37 A.M.



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From the outset, it's all about the stage time. Serviceable material develops later on. But feeling comfortable in front of an audience, adapting to any given room, and evolving — painfully, incrementally — into an assured stand-up comedian requires years of endless trial and error in countless venues.

New York's colorful comedy history comprises spaces old and new, legendary and temporary. Some historic venues that made careers were never actually proper comedy clubs — like Sixties-era coffee shops the Gaslight and Café au Go Go, which introduced luminaries like Lenny Bruce, Joan Rivers, and Woody Allen to the world. Others, like the Improvisation and

Catch a Rising Star — both long shuttered — would create a template for a generation of comedy clubs that popped up across the country in the Seventies and Eighties.

Today, New York is dotted with joints like the Comedy Cellar, Carolines on Broadway, and Gotham Comedy Club that are still thriving and bringing in some of the biggest talents in the business. Meanwhile, newer venues such as the Bell House in Brooklyn and the year-old Astoria café space Q.E.D. are allowing stand-up to reach the outer boroughs like never before.

Because of these venues and the multitude of others forgotten to time, the city remains the most diverse, challenging comedy incubator in the world. Here, the best of the best compete for finite bookings, and careers can gel with a single pivotal set.

With the annual New York Comedy Festival under way (running citywide through November 15), several of the event's participants spoke with the Voice about venues that inspired important moments in their own careers — the places that will themselves be recalled with historical fondness by generations of comics to come.

...

Samantha Varela: Union Hall and the Bell House [149 7th Street, Park Slope, 718-643-6510] are the backbone of the NYC comedy community, and they both hold a special place in my heart. Union Hall became the home of my touring show, "Picture This! NY," and has consistently had some of the most enthusiastic audiences our show has seen.

The Interrobang
November 10, 2015
By Interrobang Staff

Enjoying the New York Comedy Festival: The Definitive Guide

We cover the country, but New York's our home, so it's an exciting week when the New York Comedy Festival comes around. It's unlike any other festival in the country. It's gigantic, but it's also decidedly unfestival-like because it's spread out through the entire city without a central focal point. Any week of the year there is a massive festival-worthy list of great comedy happening in New York City so by the time you add in a few extra headlining events, what you really have is a gigantic list of impossible choices and tough decisions. What you should do this year during the festival really depends on your comedy personality. Are you a New Yorker looking to see things you don't normally get to see in New York City? Are you an out of townner looking to experience real New York comedy? Or are you a casual comedy fan and just want to check out the best of the best of the best. Whatever your preferences, this guide will help. Scroll to the bottom for a night by night guide to the best comedy in New York City.

Top Five Shows Out of Towners Need to See

Picture This. Wednesday November 11th at 8:30pm at Littlefield. Granted this is originally a Los Angeles show, but producer Sam Varela set up shop in New York and the show is growing fast. Comedians perform while comedy's best illustrators create masterpieces based on what

they're hearing on stage, live. You get to watch the process and it's a really fun time. There's an amazing line up planned including Michelle Buteau, Chris Gethard, Ilana Glazer, Matteo Lane, Aparna Nancherla, Sean Patton, and Brooke Van Poppelen.

LA Weekly
February 18, 2015
By Jane Borden

DARE COMEDY: SHOWS THAT PUT STAND-UPS IN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS



In *Prompter*, a comedian improvises a fake TED talk, guided by a teleprompter that sometimes goes blank. Here Reggie Watts performs with audience members, who came onstage when the script called for a barbershop quartet.

In *Prompter*, a comedian improvises a fake TED talk, guided by a teleprompter that sometimes goes blank. Here Reggie Watts performs with audience members, who came onstage when the script called for a barbershop quartet.

Photo by Hannah Crichton

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Suddenly, there are several stand-up comedy shows in L.A. that are, as producer Troy Conrad describes it, "putting performers in a situation where things go wrong." He created the long-running and wildly popular *Set List: Stand-Up Without a Net*, which forces stand-ups to improvise jokes on the spot, based on a "set list" of joke titles given to them onstage.

Maria Bamford in *Picture This*

Courtesy of Sam Varela (@SamMVarela)

Stand-up producer Sam Varela thinks such shows are a result of L.A.'s comedy boom leading to a comedy glut: "More shows are popping up, so people want something other than the million traditional stand-up options."

Varela offers one of her own, *Picture This!*, at which an animator — typically Mike Mayfield (writer/animation director on Adult Swim's *Mr. Pickles*) or Mike Hollingsworth (supervising director on Netflix's *BoJack Horseman*) — illustrates a comic's set, live, on a screen behind the microphone. "Sometimes the chemistry between the comic and the artist is electric," Varela



says. "Sometimes the comedian and artist don't gel, and then it's fun to see the comic basically deal with a cartoon heckler."

Stand-up comedy typically hinges on performers maintaining total power and control. Yet these shows put a premium on experimentation and vulnerability, humanizing the comics in the process. Skinner points out that the trend extends to TV, too — shows such as @midnight and Drunk History — and wonders if the explosion of dare comedy is a result of the growing availability of video and podcasts: "Recorded stand-up loses the magic of being in the moment. These shows up the magic."

"DARE SHOWS" AT A GLANCE

Picture This!, NerdMelt Showroom at Meltdown Comics, 7522 Sunset Blvd., Hlywd, March 21 at 9 p.m., future showtimes and locations vary. (323) 851-7223, picturethisshow.com.

LAist

June 27, 2014

By Juliet Bennett Rylah

Picture This! Combines Comedy And Animation (And Free Beer)

David Koechner, with illustration by Collin Heck (Photo by Sam M Varela)



Picture This! combines comedy and animation to provide a one-of-a-kind experience for the audience and performers alike. And there's free beer.

Comedians perform their set in front of a screen, which fills with illustrations from their artist partner. Often, the drawings are just as funny as the standup, enhancing and occasionally stealing the show. Often, the pictures are genitals.

The event created Brandie Posey and Sam Varela takes place in East Hollywood's Trepany House (which is in residence at the Steve Allen Theatre, which is in Center for Inquiry West). What I enjoyed about the event is that it adds an element of surprise to stand up. A comedian might have a prepared set that gets thrown totally into a tangent when the illustrator adds their own input or sketches a crude figure that takes the joke to the next level. There's also a high potential for verbal vs. visual banter. Several of the comedians present also took the opportunity to try out some new material.

Last month's installment featured Emo Phillips and David Koechner (Anchorman), among other stand-ups. The free beer courtesy of sponsor Angel City Brewing was flowing, and the intimacy of the theatre allowed for the kind of shared experience that makes live comedy worthwhile. Picture This! will be back tonight with comedians Guy Branum (Totally Biased, Chelsea Lately), Alison Stevenson (VICE), Jeff Wattenhofer (Holy Fuck), Jay Weingarten (Sleepaway Camp), Tess Barker (Lady 2 Lady), Jade Catta-Preta (Californication, Manhattan Love Story); and artists Mike Hollingsworth (Netflix, BoJack Horseman) Mike Mayfield (Adult Swim, Mr. Pickles), among others. 21+, \$10, Doors at 8:30 p.m. Get your tickets here.

Spinning Platters
February 8, 2014



By OJ Patterson

SF Sketchfest Review: Picture This! on 2/8/2014



Mike Lawrence by Sam Varela

Picture This!, the amicable marriage of sight, sound and more sight just made it's San Francisco debut hours ago at the Dark Room Theater. Concocted in Los Angeles by comedian Brandie Posey and animator Sam Varela, the show paired stand-up comedians with illustrators, each performing their due diligence to visualize this crazy thing called funny.

Afternoon comedy is always weird. You leave and return to daylight like a strip club patron who wanted to see tits before the graveyard shift. You could drink, but do you really want to try maintaining a buzz until the rest of society catches up? Parking meters are still threatening to narc on you. A rainy day and early start demanded dedication, and the full house at the Dark Room obliged the oddity.

Dragons imagined with loving embrace. Angry men metamorphosed into angry birds. A precession of casual coolness, savory and silly, rumbled with gall. Sentient scribbles ghostwritten with stylistic minimalism. Picture This! amassed a hodgepodge of talent: some emergent fresh faces (Clare O'Kane, George Chen), some repute local luminaries (Sean Keane, Caitlin Gill), offshore sluggers (Mike Lawrence, Jake Fogelnest), and a sextet of professional illustrators. Comedians took the lead; their performance, whether well rehearsed or off the cuff, catalyzed the animators, armed with a tablet, a stylus and a projector, to sketch by the seat of their pants.

An inherent irony existed in the disparity between two disciplines identified by the term “comic”. Drawings have intrinsic value; they’re the life-blood of industry, the visual womb from advertisement to zine. Stand-up comedy is often compensated in nachos. Comedians wish they could draw. Illustrators wish they were funny. The truly talented are proficient at both. Everybody is credited as “artist”. Hurray!

Storytellers, like Keane and Chen, benefited from layers, their graphics built up piece-by-piece through a steady theme (giving artists a chance to give up). Self-deprecators, like Lawrence and O’Kane, co-opted visual clues, chiding their illustrator for their accuracy (or lack thereof). Riffers, like Gill and Posey, opened a dialog with their storyboarder, interacting with the shadows on the wall, augmenting reality with clever irreverence. Some caricatures took creative liberties to antagonize the wordsmiths. Other illustrations, premature or glorious, were whisked away to compliment the comedian’s erratic flight of fancy. Most of the spectacle devolved into an excuse to draw boobs—SO MANY BOOBS!

It goes to show that drawing, from the Paleolithic horses in French caves, to scarred bathroom stalls across the world is as integral to the human existence as oral tradition. And, unlike the painters I’ve seen at nightclubs, standing next to the DJ in weird, dual disjoint, the collaborative acumen of Picture This! made a greater, fresher, more novel sum than its amazing, amazing parts.

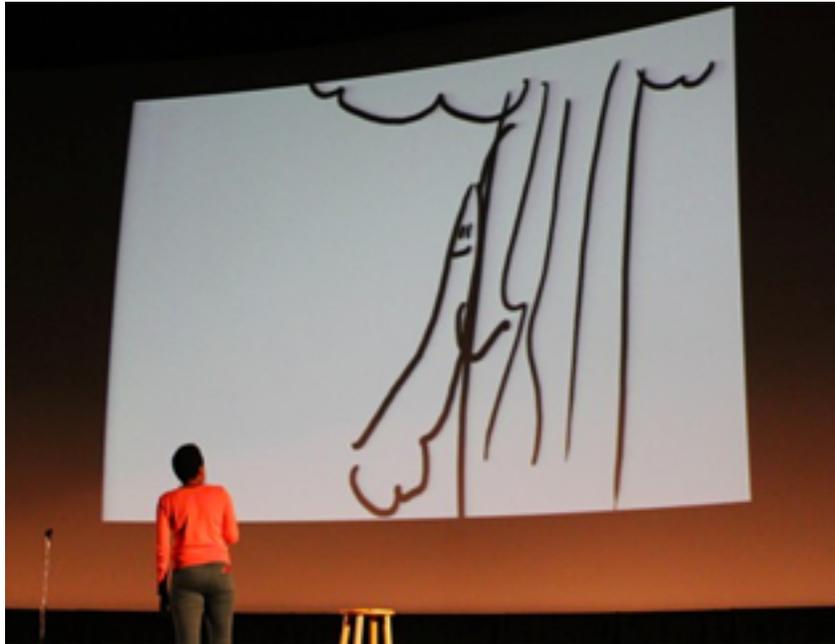
Random Notes:

- Angry eyebrows were lifesavers for the illustrators. If there was a sudden shift in tone, two diagonal lines recontextualized the entire piece.
- Clare O’Kane has a joke about having RBF (Resting Bitch Face) wherein people prejudge her aloofness. Her illustrator, Chris Lam, took the liberty to depict Clare as an anthropomorphized dog, just when you thought you couldn’t want to be her friend more.
- The Bay Area game development industry has a lot of hip, comedy-loving artists in their midst: Sean Keeton, Chris Lam, Brian Kistler. We also have great non-gaming artists: Marty Cooper, Jon Magram, Timothy Tang.
- A speed round of unlisted comedians closed out the show. Some of the featured comedians took turns drawing. Then the professional artists came back, showing, quite quickly, why they get paid to compose lines and shapes.
- Brandie Posey, a hero and badass, explained 49ing is 69ing in a chair.
- A lot of jokes, visual or spoken, were anecdotal. You’ll have to see Picture This! live to appreciate its magic.

Portland Mercury
April 21, 2013
By Marjorie Skinner

Picture This: When in Doubt, Draw A Penis

How awesome would it be if Bridgetown had a shuttle bus or two to take people to the non-Hawthorne shows and back? It would be pretty awesome. I walked faster than TriMet could get me to the Hollywood for Picture This, which takes your normal stand-up routine and adds a simultaneous illustrator whose tablet sketches are projected on the wall behind the performer. It's a deceptively simple idea that can be difficult to make work. When in doubt, just add a penis:



Pat Moran (animator) & Phoebe Robinson (comedian)

Phoebe Robinson up there may have enjoyed the process most, if her own hearty laughter was any indication. It's an awkward thing. The performer has to turn their back to the audience to see what's going on on the screen, which is usually a riff on whatever they're trying to say. "Is that me?" they inevitably ask in response to something crude or unflattering being drawn, derailing them from their joke and sometimes leaving them struggling to get back on track. Last night's comics, who also included Moshe Kasher, Myq Kaplan, Chris Fairbanks, Jermaine Fowler, Mike Bridenstine, Cornell Reid, Brandie Posey, and Jared Logan did best when they let it be a bit messy. It certainly seems like a good exercise for the performers to keep their improv instincts sharp and it's good entertainment watching funny people goof off. I'm not totally convinced that it makes for a better comedy show, but it's an interesting change of pace. Plus it gave the world this penis tree. Thank you for that.