

## WHAT'S ON

THE LAS VEGAS GUIDE

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## FUNNY PEOPLE WANTED

Find Laughs At The Improv At Harrah's

by Megan Riggs

In the vein of the Adam Sandler/Judd Apatow comedy *Funny People*, which shined a spotlight on the rough road to fame for aspiring comics, The Improv at Harrah's, in conjunction with ijoke.com, held an online contest this past December, searching for the next funniest person in America. Comedians submitted videos of original material to ijoke.com, were narrowed down to five finalists and, by online visitor vote, whittled down to three semi-finalists—Alysia Wood; Carlie and Doni; and Jason Marcus. The winner will be determined on Jan. 27 onstage at The Improv, and will win the experience of a lifetime: a six-night stand-up stint at The Improv at Harrah's.

The world-famous comedy club's founder Budd Friedman will be one of the judges of the finals.

"I'm wearing a few hats here," Friedman says. "Being the guy who produces the shows for the Improv at Harrah's, and being the guy that discovered Adam Sandler—and Judd Apatow worked as a doorman, that's where they met [at the Improv in Hollywood]—and then having a substantial part in the movie, we were trying to come up with some idea...to promote the release of the DVD."

Friedman clarifies that the part about his role in *Funny People* is a joke.

"My wife and I missed me in the movie at the [premiere]," he says.

The man who launched the comedy careers of dozens of funny men, including Rodney Dangerfield, Jay Leno and Andy Kaufman, hasn't seen any of the videos of the comedians who entered the contest.

"I have not looked at [the videos] because I'm going to be a judge in the finals," Friedman says. "I've tried to keep myself virgin pure, so when I see the finals, I'll have a fresh, objective viewpoint. I hear we have some pretty good guys there."

More than being witty, the finalists have surely also tackled the ultra-competitive world of trying to make it big in stand-up comedy.

"You gotta be tough; you gotta be resilient and you have to be persevering," Friedman notes. "On top of that, intelligence helps a lot, too. The more intelligent you are, I think, the funnier you are."

He also knows that the best comics make it look simple.

"The first night I took my wife out, I took her to the club—this is 28, 29 years ago," Friedman recalls, "and she's beautiful, she's charming, she's everything a man could want and she was not in [show] business. So we go to the club, drink a little champagne and we're watching this performer

and she says, 'You know, I think I could do that.' Oh, my God. So the next night we go back to the club and the same guy was on and she saw him and she said, 'You know, maybe I can't do that. He makes it look so easy and he's having so much fun.' He being Robin Williams. She saw how easy it was for him. ...But it's a tough business and getting material together is a full-time job in itself and then putting it on the stage is a whole other world. You have to test it out every night—sometimes, if you're lucky, a few times a night."

As most of today's top comics are men—Jerry Seinfeld, Chris Rock and Jeff Dunham are three of the highest earners—Friedman might be surprised to discover that two-thirds of the *Funny People* contest's finalists are women.

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"I think they should stay in the kitchen where they belong," Friedman jokes when asked about whether women are underestimated as comedians. "Underestimated? Gee, maybe underrepresented. I try to look at performers as performers regardless of race, color, sex, creed, and all that stuff. So there should be more women performing, absolutely. People say that it's tougher on a woman. I say that yeah, maybe it's tough for them on the road and all that, but I think it's easier because they're a minority and when you want to book a balanced show, if you can get a good woman on the show that's terrific."

Not knowing the material the comedians will present at The Improv also poses the question, are there any subjects in comedy that might not be appropriate?

"Yeah, certainly when I was a lad there were a lot more, but now almost anything is up for grabs," Friedman says. "I have my own fringe

factors that I don't like to see made fun of, but here we have Sarah Silverman making jokes about the Holocaust. She almost makes it funny, a despicable subject, but she pulls it off."

And in his more than four-decade career, there's no doubt Friedman has heard it all. He still fondly remembers, though, his favorite comedy ad-lib.

"This goes way back when Rodney Dangerfield was starting out at the New York Improv," Friedman says. "While he was performing, somebody broke a glass chandelier, sort of Art Deco glass and the busboy came out with a dustpan and broom and swept up the glass, went to the back of the room—it was a small room—and threw the contents, without regard to anyone being onstage, into an empty metal garbage can. It echoed and clanged throughout the room. Without missing a beat, Rodney looks up and says, 'It sounds like a robot a just threw up.'"

**Funny People contest finals | Jan. 27, 8:30 p.m.; regular Improv performances, Tue.-Sun., 8:30 & 10:30 p.m. | \$29.05, \$49.95 VIP | The Improv at Harrah's | 702-369-5223**

## Meet the Finalists

## Carlie and Doni

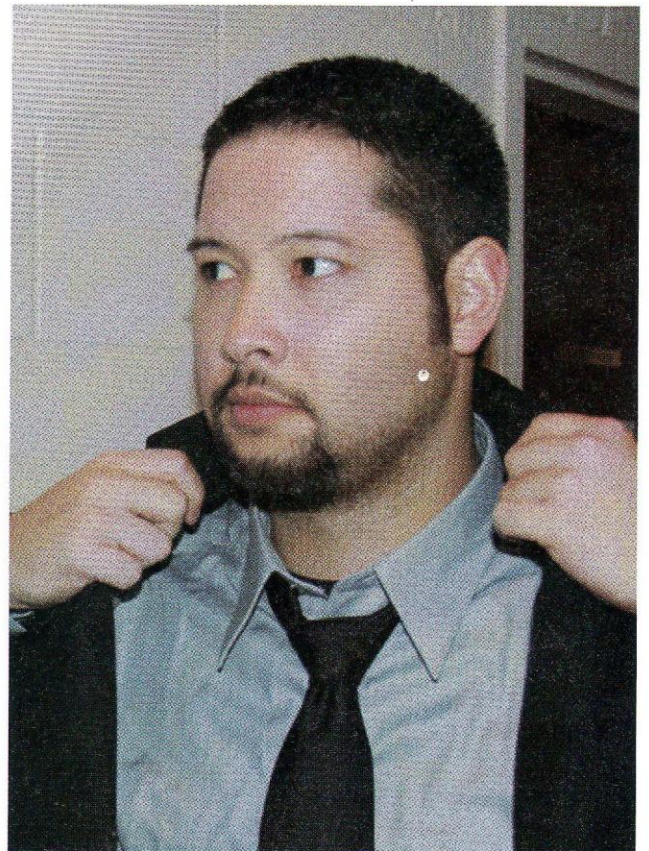
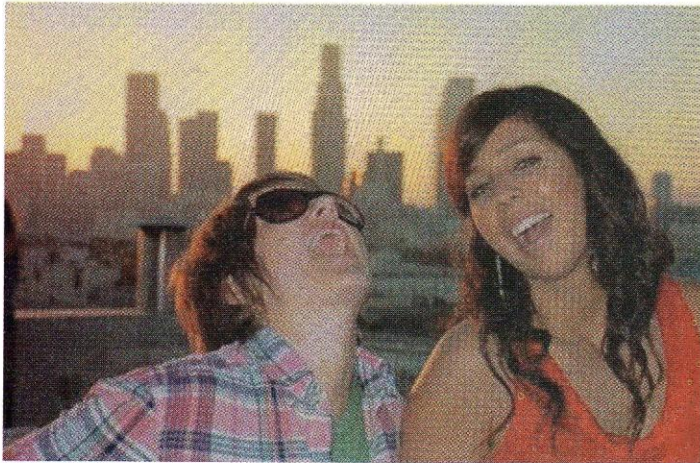
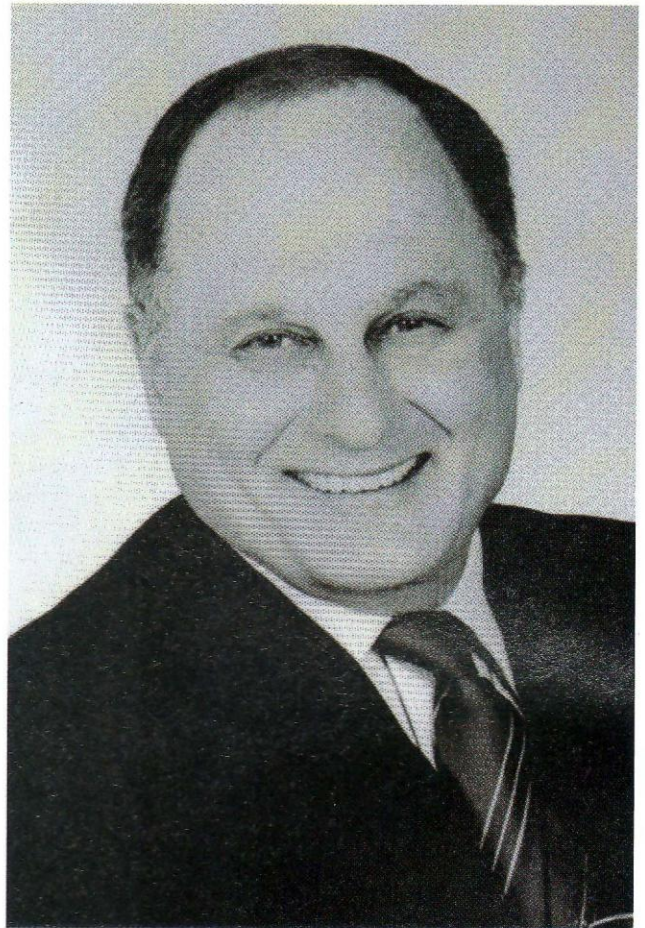
Two best friends who met in college, Carlie and Doni sing their way to comic gold. Carlie strums the guitar and Doni plays a host of other instruments while both ladies sing about such subjects as camel toe, bikini waxes and gangsta waitresses.

## Jason Marcus

This Boston-based stand-up comic grew up in a middle-class household with a Hawaiian father and a white mother, from which he derives some of his comedy. In 2009 Marcus was named "Best of the East Coast" at the Detroit International Comedy Festival and he performs at clubs, colleges and for corporate events around the country.

## Alysia Wood

The Louisiana native is a regular at Hollywood's comedy hotspots, and was selected as "Hot Comedian of 2009" by *Campus Activities Magazine*. She contributes her wit to Internet columns, comedy podcasts and radio programs such as "The Bob & Tom Show" and National Lampoon Comedy Radio.



Clockwise from top left: Comic duo Carlie and Doni, Budd Friedman, Jason Marcus and Alysia Wood.