

Dear Friends of Funny,

The day of my Ivy Standupsm show I got a call from a manager at Gotham Comedy Club-- Jerry Seinfeld wants to be in your show, do you have room for him? And by the way it's a secret.

I juggled the line-up to accommodate his schedule. I'd set the line-up weeks in advance-- comics sometimes do several shows a night at different clubs so there are logistics involved, and by the way if you produce a show and comics can trust you to run your show exactly on time they're much happier. (So if your big crowd gets to my show right at showtime and we don't hold the start of the show until you're seated, this is one reason why.)

As Jerry walked in I signaled the comic on stage to wrap it up, and I, the emcee, took the stage. I said "One reason I love my job as the emcee of Ivy Standup is that I get to say things like... 'Ladies and gentleman, Jerry Seinfeld.'"

I stopped talking. Looked offstage. Nothing.

The audience looked off stage- Then at me in disbelief- He said Jerry Seinfeld-- Where's Jerry Seinfeld-- Is that a joke-- There's no punchline-- Why'd he stop talking?

Seconds later Jerry walks out to thunderous applause. Whispers in my ear "They didn't believe you." I said "Nope... not this time."

Kills.

Twenty five minutes of talking about his family, his wife's Blackberry, chatting with the audience.

Normally that's it, when the headliner's done the show's over.

Normally.

But you don't drop the checks on the tables when Seinfeld's on stage, so the club had me perform for another ten minutes while customers paid their bills. This is known as 'the check spot' and comics don't like working the check spot because half the audience is busy paying or questioning or calculating cost per onion ring or yelling at their friends for drinking the expensive stuff.

It's a hard spot in the show.

Going first is also a challenge-- you have to get to know the audience, get them to

know you, win them over. You can't just go out and tell jokes, you have to get them used to the idea that they're sitting and someone they don't know anything about is standing up there talking.

You're starting from scratch, every show.

The check spot is a challenge since people's attention pops in and out. They may start listening again when you're in the middle of a joke. They may hear a punchline without any setup. Or they may hear laughter after they stopped listening, and now they're angrily wondering what they missed that was so funny. Maybe they ask someone, and while they're talking they miss the next joke...

You know how you feel left out when everybody else is laughing and you don't know what they're laughing at? Picture that, plus you paid to be there and laugh and you missed something.

I like both spots. This is how we comics get better, by working the difficult spots. And the spots are different from regular spots— you can't do long stories that require constant attention. You have to hit them with punchline, punchline, punchline. As a competent comedy writer this is something I concentrate on. You have to be prepared for whatever you get— inattentive audiences, foreign audiences, outside distractions, hostile audiences, tired audiences, audiences that just want attention to themselves.

I've written jokes specifically catered to the audience so if they want to be part of the conversation I can include them, make jokes that involve them instead of just talking about what I want to talk about. So if you're a couple in the front row and you interrupt me, yeah I'm gonna ask about your last fight. Interrupt and your dirty laundry gets joked about. You want the show about you, it's gonna be about you. But it's gonna be about whatever about you I want it to be about.

I won't say I did as well as Seinfeld. Even if I did, you wouldn't believe me. But for a check spot, following the country's premier comedy star who stopped in with no notice to the audience, it was a great few minutes for me.

And by the way, big-name comics love Ivy Standup because they like smart audiences. And yeah there's an ulterior motive too— getting hired for corporate shows. You may think "Sure, Shaun, comics like Seinfeld don't need your help" but, actually, you might not have been thinking of hiring a big name (or not so big name) clean comedian for your corporate event, and now we have you thinking about it.

So how about it? You probably can't afford Jerry Seinfeld. Most likely you can

afford me. Shaun@BrainChampagne.com or (212) 252-2888.

Some of my jokes which Jay Leno (or the political website I write for) rejected in the last couple of weeks:

In running for president John McCain is emphasizing his military record. Isn't his military record zero and one?

Political experts are saying not to expect to see Al Gore on the campaign trail... apparently it isn't wide enough.

John McCain has called for building 45 nuclear reactors... but in fairness it takes the energy of three reactors just to power up Al Gore.

Rocker John Bon Jovi has announced plans to give a free concert in New York's Central Park. This would be big news... if it were 1992.

The Post Office has announced a reorganization to make operations more efficient... their first step? Standardizing ammunition.

(if you want to see the jokes Jay used you have to watch his show)

Secret recipe for grilled corn: Do not unshuck the corn. Soak the corn in a bucket of water for a half-hour. Corn floats so if you have a large rock or small child place it on top to help submerge the corn.

Put one ear of corn on the grill. Wait two minutes then put the rest of the corn on the grill (making sure that the water dripping off the corn doesn't put out the fire— Oh, I've tested this only on gas grills; if you're still using a charcoal grill Get In Your DeLorean, drive back to 1995 and buy a gas grill. Then instead of coming back to today, come back to 7/16/08, park in front of Gotham Comedy Club at 6:45 and watch me, the rest of Ivy Standup, and Jerry Seinfeld. Oh, and to whoever already did this, thanks so much for mailing me today's Wall Street Journal back from two weeks ago, but next time consider that mailing me the lottery results instead of the stock pages would've been a much quicker route to riches).

Turn the corn over after ten minutes.

When the first ear catches fire, the rest are ready. Yes, you'll probably have to sacrifice one ear. If that's unacceptable then try 25 minutes at medium-high.

The corn will be HOT when you take it off the grill. Allow it to cool or plunge it into cold water (not the same water you soaked it in) for a few seconds. Having been grilled (steamed) when you strip the husks off, all the silk will come with it, simplifying the whole process (as the one who was always tasked with de-husking corn I very much appreciate this savings of time and effort).

Grilled corn is way better than boiled corn.

If you're getting this email because a friend forwarded it to you, please go to the Contact page on my website and sign up for your own free subscription and roughly every month you'll get some original comedy material along with stories from my corner of the world of stand-up comedy. Don't rely on your friend to keep emailing it to you (and by the way, forwarding my newsletter without this paragraph, or copying the jokes, is a violation of copyright law, and I have a team of heavily-armed intellectual property lawyers just waiting for an excuse to use their lawsuits of mass destruction).

If you want a clean comedy show for your company, charity or other organization-- please contact me (212 252-2888 or Shaun@BrainChampagne.com). Let me know. I'm also available to EMCEE YOUR NON-COMEDY EVENT. As always, my material is clean and friendly, clever and of course funny. And for those who've hired me in the past, I can come back with all new material-- just ask.

NEXT MONTH: The ELEPHANT in the Room

See you at a show,

- - - S H A U N E L I

Brain Champagne dot com: Clever Comedy for Smart Minds (sm)

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(If you don't want to hear from me anymore just write back and say "Every month you put me way over my quota of laughter; sorry but I have to cut back." But first think of what you'll be missing-- monthly emails that may make you laugh and brighten your day. I don't share email addresses with anyone else.)