



# FUNNY business

WITH COMEDY CLUBS ON THE VERGE OF A NATIONAL RENAISSANCE, WE SPOTLIGHT SIX OF THE BEST U.S. VENUES

## CAROLINES ON BROADWAY

1626 Broadway, New York, NY 10019  
(212) 757-4100 [www.carolines.com](http://www.carolines.com)

Carolines has moved a few times, starting out as a cabaret in the Chelsea neighborhood in 1981

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## COMIX

353 W. 14th St., New York, NY 10014  
(212) 715-9660 [www.comixny.com](http://www.comixny.com)

This massive club in New York's famed Meatpacking District is not set to open until the fall, but it's worth mentioning because if its success even comes close to matching its ambition, then it'll be huge. Partner (and longtime stand-up comedian) Bobby Collins says Comix will be housed in a 14,000-square-foot building, 5,000 of which will be dedicated to a main showroom that seats 320. The complex also will include a gourmet restaurant and TV studio. The comedy? Collins says Comix will serve up "the biggest alternative-comedy scene in the world," including puppet and musical performances. "If Frank Sinatra and Johnny Carson were alive, Comix is where they'd want to play," he adds.

An artist's rendering of the interior, below, and exterior of Manhattan's new Comix comedy club



Golenberg adds that executive presence at club shows also has slipped. "It used to be the presidents and heads of comedy development," he says. "Now, it's mostly manager-/director-level."

Part of that might owe to the experience a comic at Aspen or Montreal brings to the table; prescouting by festival managers means that by the time a per-

## THE COMEDY UNION

5040 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90019  
(323) 934-9300 [www.thecomedyunion.com](http://www.thecomedyunion.com)

Enss Mitchell opened this club in Los Angeles' Wilshire District in 2002, planning to specialize in urban stand-up comedy. Damon Wayans is a regular, as are Mark Curry, D.L. Hughley and Mike Epps. But Mitchell notes that his six-night-a-week club (closed Sundays) also features plenty of nonurban shows. The cozy showroom accommodates 120 audience members, and the line for seats snakes out the door on weekends. Don't be surprised to see MTV taping something here on any given night.

he says. "We don't rely on people to send in tapes; we find them now. We're very proactive."

In addition, while finding the next Drew Carey or Tim Allen or Roseanne Barr used to be the Holy Grail for a comedy performer rep, the game has become much broader of late — with far more opportunities for comics outside of sitcoms and films.

"They can host shows on E! and Comedy Central, which cuts down on the pressure to find the next Jerry Seinfeld," Golenberg says.

In the end, with all of the options available to comics today — in self-promotion and career choices alike — a mix-and-match approach might prove most successful. Mercer sees irony in that possibility.

"More comedians than ever before are making a great living performing in theaters and arenas, so whereas that was once solely a means to an end, it's an end in itself now," he says. "You might find a guy doing a sitcom to help his notoriety on the live circuit."

## THE IMPROV

8162 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90046  
(323) 651-2583

[www.symfonee.com/Improv/hollywood](http://www.symfonee.com/Improv/hollywood)

There are 21 Improv comedy clubs scattered throughout the U.S. Budd Friedman established the original location in New York in 1963, but the Los Angeles branch, opened in 1978, is the real king of the road. When Robin Williams performs stand-up, this is his home club. Ditto for Jerry Seinfeld. On any given night, you can still find Michael Richards or Ray Romano taking the stage, and Adam Sandler and David Spade were regular players here for years. The club serves up its stand-up in traditional style, with alternative acts mixed in. It also is an industry hang-out, with agents and managers scouting for talent.

## THE LAUGH FACTORY

8001 W. Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood, CA 90046  
(323) 656-1336 [www.laughfactory.com](http://www.laughfactory.com)

Owner Jamie Masada's club has been at the same prime Sunset Boulevard location for 27 years, offering a straight-ahead stand-up comedy menu. He says performances still sell out on weekends, when some tickets are so coveted that they get scalped on eBay. It's the club that launched MySpace phenomenon Dane Cook, and most weeks you can catch Jon Lovitz and Bob Saget — often more than once — but the likes of Jim Carrey, Chris Rock, Adam Sandler and Robin Williams have been Laugh Factory regulars since they were unknowns, Masada says. "Everybody comes in here," he insists. "Everybody!"

## ZANIES

1548 N. Wells St., Chicago, IL 60610  
(312) 337-4027 [www.zanies.com](http://www.zanies.com)

There are two other Zanies clubs in the Chicago area, but this is the first and biggest (it has been in the same location for 28 years), as executive vp Bert Haas likes to say — even though it seats only about 100. Open seven nights a week and offering traditional stand-up comedy, Zanies has long been a prime Midwestern stop for comics ranging from Richard Lewis and Tim Allen to Sam Kinison. Haas also claims that Zanies is where Jeff Garlin (HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm") "invented" alternative comedy. Of course, as Haas adds, "Back then, we called it 'not having an act.'"

— Ray Richmond