

## Tickle Me, Feingold: Ron Feingold, at the Penguin's Comedy Club, October 5 through 7

Written by Mike Schulz

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As part of his stand-up routine, Florida-based comedian Ron Feingold - appearing at Bettendorf's Penguin's Comedy Club October 5 through 7 - performs what he calls "mockappella," in which he apes the stylings of such singers as Joe Cocker, Axl Rose, and Nat "King" and Natalie Cole. And during a recent phone interview, Feingold did appear to possess an uncanny gift for mimicry.

Of course, the only character voice I heard him do was Elmo's.

Discussing home life with his young son Drew, Feingold says, "I have to do things like use Elmo to get him into the bathtub," referring to the cuddly *Sesame Street* character with the frighteningly high-pitched falsetto. "So I chase him around the house singing, 'La la la la, la la la la, get in the tuuuuub ... la la la la, la la la la,

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*get in the f---ing tub*

! And he goes. He listens to a little furry, red, cursing Muppet, but not me.

"I just never saw myself doing that, you know? I just never imagined myself as a 35-year-old man chasing after a naked three-year-old trying to get him into a bathtub."

A surprising development, perhaps. But considering that Feingold possesses bachelor's and master's degrees in guidance and counseling, there's very little about Feingold's career as a professional stand-up comic - and a *cappella* singer, to boot - that *isn't* surprising.

For Feingold, the performance bug first bit in high school, when he was cast in comedic roles in such musicals as *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Anything Goes*, and when he landed employment at Bob Young's Cabaret in Cascade, Colorado. "I was 17 years old," he says. "It was my first professional theatre job, and I was the youngest person ever hired there but the oldest character in the show. I had to get there an hour early to gray up my hair and put on fake eyebrows and a fake mustache - which I couldn't grow myself."

Two summers of dinner-theatre work followed - Feingold held a performing-waiter job that, for this author, sounds eerily similar to his own experience as a Bootlegger for the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse - and then, Feingold says, "on my 19th birthday I went on stage as a stand-up comic in a contest called the U.S. College Comedy Competition." His debut earned him third place, and a new career goal. "I knew that I was pretty much gonna go into stand-up after I tried it. I knew that that was where I was gonna go."

Colleges and universities, though, don't have a *major* in stand-up (maybe at *clown* college they do), and at Colorado State University, Feingold instead opted for one in the psychology department. "Actually, I had a theatre scholarship," he reveals, "but I knew I wasn't going to go into theatre. And it [psychology] was just something I found interesting to study."

While at school, Feingold continued to hone his nascent stand-up routine - "I was kind of doing the relationship jokes and impressions and things like that" - and after graduation, he says, "I hit the road immediately." But despite some success on the comedy circuit, the performer knew that his act was lacking one essential element: a hook.

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"I realized that I needed to come up with something that was *different*," he says. "So I put my mind to thinking about what kind of niche I could carve out for myself. And I've always been an *a cappella* fan. Always. Ever since I heard what the human voice could do, especially in harmony with other vocals, I just ... I *love* it.

"So I said, 'Well, why can't I just combine them [music and comedy]? Kind of like a guitar act with no guitar?'"

Feingold's stand-up still includes impressions and material on relationships, but ever since 1995, with the release of his CD *One Man A Cappella Jam*, the comedian's performances are rife with *a cappella* song. (Also with *a cappella* vocal percussion, though Feingold freely admits, "I'm pretty horrible at it. There's a guy named Jeff Thacher who's the vocal percussionist for Rockapella. ... I don't come close to even being a *tenth* as good as him.") At any given set, he'll perform Jim Croce hits, an R&B medley, commercial jingles - even, he says, "Kermit the Frog singing '867-5309'" - plus his "blow the roof off" ending, with Feingold's Axl Rose performing "Live & Let Die." ("There are a lot of people flickin' their Bics up," he says. "It's pretty cool.")

And daring to be different certainly paid off for Feingold's career; in addition to releasing a second CD, entitled *Solo Effort*, in 1999, nationwide bookings at comedy clubs, corporate events, and cruise lines had him, he says, "on the road 46 to 50 weeks a year."

These days, though, Feingold says he's "not gone *half* as much as I used to be," as time on the road is less time spent with his wife Lora, Drew, and the new baby on the way. "Maybe 20 weeks out of the year I'll be gone."

The comedian reveals that he actually did consider abandoning comedy in the late '90s - receiving a master's degree in guidance and counseling from the University of Wisconsin-River

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Falls, and working as a high-school guidance counselor for a year - but retirement was not meant to be. "I was *totally* going crazy," he says. "I start going into convulsions and shivers if I don't get on stage after about a month. It's a sickness."

Thankfully, he says, Lora has been "completely supportive of me," and considering that the couple met *via* Feingold's comedy, that seems only fair.

"I met my wife *on* a cruise ship, actually," he says. "This was my first week *ever* working a ship. And you know how they take your picture when you get there, and they sell it back to you for, like, 80 bucks? She wanted to get her picture taken with this old man that she didn't even know, but he just walked past her, and

*I*

happened to be walking by and said, '

*I'll*

take a picture with you.' So we have a picture of the very moment we

*met*

."

*Awww ...*

!)

"It's a dream come true," Feingold says of his current, more intermittent schedule. "I spend time with my son. We go fishin', boatin' ... also, I'm Jewish and live in Florida, so we've invested a little bit in real estate - it's a rite of passage.

"It'll be *gone* in about two or three years once I *blow* it all," he says with a laugh, "but so far, so good."

For information on Feingold's Penguin's appearances, visit ( <http://www.penguinscomedyclub.com> ).