Written by Mike Schulz
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Two veterans of Comedy Central will perform in the Quad Cities this month, neither of whom, in separate interviews, had any trouble recalling his beginnings in professional stand-up.

Bombing on stage, after all, does tend to stick in your memory.

"It went well enough for me to be bitten by this bug," says comedian Alex Reymundo of his first three-minute open-mic set, which took place roughly 30 years ago in Arlington, Texas. "So I said, 'You know what? I think I'm gonna do this again,' and I did the exact same set two weeks later. And it went well *again*. And then I did the exact same thing two weeks after *that* ... and I died a horrible death."

He laughs. "Which goes to show that every crowd is different, but I was too green to *know* that. You know, I thought, 'Wow, I could say these same things for three minutes for the rest of my life!' And then I went, 'Oh, well, I guess I *can't*.'"

Comedian Nick Madson's first professional crash-and-burn, meanwhile, occurred during his very first professional gig.

"There was a company that was having some kind of conference," the 30-year-old Madson says of his debut while a student at Oklahoma City University, "and they said they wanted a comedian who could come in and perform about a 20-minute set. And I talked to them, because my stuff's not necessarily ... like, *clean*. But they said, 'Don't worry, it's gonna be in a big conference room, very dark, and we have very wide ranges of senses of humor.'

"And I *get* there, and it's the conference room of, like, a Super 8 Motel, this super-small room, with bright lights and a podium. And at the end of one of the tables was this woman and, like,

her four-year-old daughter on her lap. So I automatically knew I couldn't do half of the material I had prepared. I tried to think of some other jokes I had written that were maybe a little cleaner, and it bombed *so much*. I got a few chuckles, but it was mostly 20 minutes of crickets.

"And yet somehow," he adds, "I wanted to go back and do it again."

To be sure, that desire to go back and do it again is one of the hallmarks of a dedicated stand-up comedian, and local audiences can enjoy the stylings of two disparate ones when Alex Reymundo performs at Penguin's Comedy Club March 4 through 6, and the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse hosts *Game On! A Night of Stand-Up Comedy with Nick Madson* on March 11.

First capturing national attention alongside Paul Rodriguez, Cheech Marin, and George Lopez as one of "The Original Latin Kings of Comedy" for Showtime, Reymundo's career has boasted hour-long solo television specials, a citation from the American Latino Media Arts (ALMA) Awards, and performances with Blue Collar comedian Ron White. ("I'm trying to show the nation that rednecks and Mexicans are the same people," says Reymundo. "Rednecks are just Mexicans with a tanning problem.")

As for Madson, he's forged an occasional career as a professional stand-up while also staying employed as a full-time traveling actor, currently appearing as Potiphar in Circa '21's production of the musical *Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. (Full disclosure: Nick and I have actually been friends since the winter of 2004, right before appearing together in Circa '21's *previous* production of *Joseph*.)

In two recent interviews - one with Reymundo by phone, one with Madson over coffee - the men shared their origins in the art of stand-up, their subsequent successes, their hopes for the future ... and, it should go without saying, the random off-the-cuff joke.

Discover Something: Alex Reymundo at Penguin's Comedy Club, March 4 through 6

Born in Acapulco, Mexico, Alex Reymundo and his family moved to Fort Worth, Texas, when the future star was two years old. "My interest in show business started when I was a kid," he says. "I was trying to play music, and taking theatre classes - anything I could do to perform."

He recalls, however, that his interest in stand-up started when Reymundo was living in Arlington at age 23. "I got a job bartending at a comedy club," he says, "and saw this art form that I had never really seen before. I was a little bit familiar with it from Bill Cosby tapes and seeing Richard Pryor on HBO and things like that, but I had never seen it live, in a room of 300 people. They were names I'd never heard of, but these guys and girls were *fantastic*.

" I was also watching these guys go home, usually, with the prettiest girl in the room," Reymundo adds with a laugh. "And so I was like, 'Uh ... you know what? I'm gonna give *that* a shot.'"

His process for assembling comedic material that first time, says Reymundo, wasn't much different from how it is now. "Usually, if I say something in conversation that suddenly strikes somebody as funny, or strikes *me* as funny, I'll try to use it one more time with an unsuspecting stranger, and then I jot it down. And then I start playing with it. You know, every comic is a little different. I like to play with material on stage and see where it takes me - kind of put myself under the pressure of having to discover something."

After expressing his interest in performing stand-up, the club's owners, says Reymundo, "gave me 12 weeks of work as an opening act. I think I was making, I dunno, $150, $200 a week. But at the same time it was great, getting that much work at once." Great, and as the comedian would discover after taking his act on the road, unusual.

"In those days, you know, there were no cell phones," says Reymundo of his early days seeking bookings. "So I'd literally be driving and planning who I was gonna call at the next rest stop. It was a struggle, like it is today. It's a little more accessible now with e-mail and cell phones, but it was a constant struggle to fill that next month."

Thankfully, he had a frequent partner on the road. "The first time Ron White ever did comedy," says Reymundo of the future Blue Collar comedian, "he walked into that [Arlington] club as an amateur. And before he went on-stage, he walked up to the bar, and asked for a shot of tequila and a Budweiser. And I was the bartender.

"So he and I hit it off," continues Reymundo, "and the first years of our professional careers, we drove everywhere, in his truck or mine, all across the country. We did that for three years, until both of us hit the point of being the headliner on a show, and we couldn't work *together* anymore. He went on to do Blue Collar, and I went on to do the Latin Kings."

Says Reymundo of 2002's *The Original Latin Kings of Comedy*, the hit comedy special that had its origins on the stand-up circuit: "I owe that a hundred percent to Paul Rodriguez. He'd kinda gotten a glimpse of me way back when, working in clubs in L.A., and he liked what I was doing; he thought it was solid, and different from him, and different from anything else he had seen. So he took me on the road and let me open a few shows for him, and there were a few other comics that he liked to mix and mingle in that lineup. And before you knew it, we were a kind of traveling show."

The cable network Showtime expressed interest in a filmed version of the tour, which Rodriguez went on to co-produce, and which featured some of the country's most famous Latino comedians. It also turned into, as Reymundo says, "Showtime's most successful comedy special at the time," and took his career to a new level.

"Any time you're able to stand next to Cheech [Marin], Paul Rodriguez, and George Lopez - as I like to call 'em, the Mexican Beatles - people suddenly go, 'Well, *you've* got to be worth watching.'"

Following years spent traveling as part of the Latin Kings, and several more as a headliner for comedy venues nationwide, TV executives eventually asked Reymundo if he'd be interested in performing an hour-long special of his own. He was, and the resulting stand-up concert - 2007's *Hick-Spanic: Live in Albuquerque* - not only ran on Showtime (and later Comedy Central), but earned its star a 2008 ALMA Award for "Outstanding Comedy Special."

"Yeah, that's kinda *cool*, isn't it?" says Reymundo upon mention of the accolade. "You know, you work on this stuff forever - we literally spent a month-and-a-half editing that thing - and when you watch it that many times, and you dissect it that much, after a while you start to go, 'Is this even *funny*?' But sure enough, they called my name. No one was more surprised than me, I'll tell you that."

With a new stand-up special set to debut on Showtime later this year, Reymundo is currently enjoying the chance to tour, even though - as it calls for much of his time to be spent away from his wife, 11-year-old daughter, and seven-year-old son - that enjoyment does come with occasional hardships.

"Oh my God, they work me like a Mexican," he says, jokingly, of his schedule. "I'm probably on the road 47 weeks out of the 52. But I don't want you to feel sorry for me, because when I say 'week,' I usually leave Thursday, and I'm home by Sunday. I'm doing what I love *and* taking care of my family."

And as far as the life of a comedian is concerned, Reymundo says, "There's kind of a thrill in knowing that, nine months from now, I might be completely unemployed. Because it's a motivator, and it's a freedom I enjoy. You know, it's *scary* - I'm a married man with two children, and there are private schools and mortgages and all those things you deal with. But it's nerve-racking and exciting at the same time, which I think keeps it fun for me.

"I see myself as continuing to grow in this business," he adds, "whether it's a personal project or a project that I'm just a small part of - every chance I get, I'm gonna learn something, and just keep moving forward. I like knowing that I'll always do stand-up, though. Something about that live room is just magic."

Alex Reymundo performs at Penguin's on March 4 at 7:30 p.m., March 5 at 8 p.m., and March 6 at 7:30 and 10 p.m. Information and tickets are available by calling (563)324-5233 or visiting Q CFreightHouse.com/penguinsComedyClub.upcoming.php
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Drinking Stories on Stage: Nick Madson at the Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse, March 11

"Some of my friends," says Nick Madson, "are like, 'How are *you* a *comedian*?' Because an open-mic-night set is, like, three to five minutes. Now I can't even tell a
joke
in under five minutes."

You may think he's kidding, but Madson insists that he's (mostly) serious. "Even when I'm talking to friends and clearly sober," he says with a laugh, "I have a tendency to start at point A and go to point B. Except I'll start at point A - 'This one time, when I was in college, there was this guy named Rob. And you have to understand that Rob was ... . Okay ... . Rob was like six-foot-one, and he grew up in Georgia, and like ... well ... um ... .'

"And 20 minutes later I'll *still* be at point A. So friends are like, 'How do you stand up in front of people and talk? You're the worst talker *ever*!'"

If that's true, though, he appears to be doing a fine job of fooling people. A Colorado Springs native with a musical-theatre degree, Madson began participating in open-mic nights while in school, has subsequently performed comedy sets in Colorado, Oklahoma, Chicago, and New York City, and in 2007 was named one of the country's Top 100 Amateur Comics by Comedy Central.

"They were kind of having this thing where you could take footage from your shows and send it in," he says of the acknowledgment. "I got a little certificate that means nothing, but still ... ."

Madson's stand-up success, he says, is all the more surprising for his not actively seeking it. "I haven't necessarily been selling myself as a comic, because I still have this idea of, 'That's not what I'm trained in. I should pursue what I'm *trained* in.' So I've been pursuing theatre more. But if the chance arises, if I'm traveling and I know the friend of a friend who can get me in a club, then I'll go in and do a set."

After all, Madson adds, a comedy set "is definitely an extension of stage performance. You know, when you're singing and dancing, you see people applauding and smiling because you just took them on this journey for two hours. But when you can get that kind of gratification up there by yourself, and entertain people and make them laugh for an hour through things that happened to you ... . I mean, that's *amazing*."

His interest in the art, however, began long before his university days. "I remember watching stand-up comedy when I was growing up, and just loving it," Madson says. "I would actually record all these random comedians and just watch their sets over and over - how they set up their jokes, how they *molded* their jokes, how they delivered punchlines - and I just thought it was *genius*. And I was like, 'I want to make people laugh that hard, so that they just cry and their stomachs hurt.' And sometimes I do."

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