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## LOCALLY YOURS

April 25, 2014



### Keith Alberstadt: Nashville Native Funny Man by Emily Steele

Comedy isn't usually the first word that comes to mind when people think of Nashville. But there is quite an impressive pool of local comedians and comedy acts right here in Music City. (If you don't believe me, check out one of the local showcases at Zanies. Your cheeks will be sore by the end of the night from how hard you'll have been laughing!) One such local legend who has risen to fame extending far beyond the borders of Middle Tennessee is funny man, Keith Alberstadt. And no, that is not a stage name.

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Emily Steele had the distinguished privilege of sitting down with Alberstadt and finding out just what makes him one of the funniest (and friendliest) men in comedy.

Alberstadt has been working as a professional comedian for the past 12 years. But he's been part of the comedy scene for much longer. He began what he refers to as “dabbling in comedy” when he was still in college at Vanderbilt University.

Like a lot of comedians, Alberstadt's pursuit of comedy stemmed from a lack of athleticism. “I realized I wanted to be a comedian in high school. I was riding the bench on a travel baseball team but was having fun making my teammates laugh.” While he may not have been hitting home runs on the field, he hit it out of the park at his high school's talent show, where he was given the privilege of hosting the event. “I knew for sure [then that I wanted to do comedy]. I thank God everyday that there are no curveballs in comedy, at least the literal kind.”

A lot of people assume Nashville is a difficult place to break into comedy but Alberstadt disagrees. “Nashville was (and probably still is) the best city to start a comedy career.” Alberstadt believes Nashville's close proximity to cities like Birmingham, Louisville, and Chattanooga, which are big comedy club cities, made it possible to work a 9-5 job while being able to spread his comedic wings. “I hit the road quite a bit, doing open mics, showcases, and guest sets, so by the time I went full time I had a decent foundation already set.”

Alberstadt worked out of Nashville and on the road for about 4 1/2 years before moving to New York City to gain more exposure. “It was either New York or Pigeon Forge. If Dollywood had a late night show, things may be very different for me.”

In 2008, Alberstadt began contributing to *Saturday Night Live's* Weekend Update. “I read the news everyday and make jokes about it for Twitter, Facebook, etc. So it was a good fit for me to try out.” While he is grateful for the gig, he admits that writing contributions for a comedy show is much different from writing stand-up. “A lot of my stand up is personality-driven and jokes are longer. The set-up/punch formula for a monologue/news joke doesn't really fit that style too often.” If Seth Meyers (head writer for *SNL*) rejects one of Alberstadt's jokes, Alberstadt is free to use it in his stage performance, but he finds that it usually doesn't mesh with the rest of his routine. But that's not the only reason he avoids politics or current events in his act. “We're so polarized as a society that talking current events and politics on stage only makes certain ideologues enjoy the show. I'd rather do the kind of show that a majority of audience members can enjoy.”

Alberstadt admits that the thought of working full time at *SNL* would definitely be appealing, but he still prefers stand up. “I love being on stage, having fun being me.” But there are obstacles he has had to overcome, such as the unfavorable stigma that can follow a “clean” comic. “My comedy is relatively clean (PG-13) but audiences who have seen it have called it very adult and clever.” He feels there is a very misguided perception within the comedy world that clean comedy is hokey and generally not as funny as dirty, grittier comedy. Alberstadt recalls it taking some time before bookers would see him as being funny, without having

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to include the 'clean' label. "At which point I said, 'Hey, it's about f\*cking time.'"

When asked how long he has been perfecting his current routine, Alberstadt confesses that a comedy routine is never really perfected. "My current show is about an hour long and consists of jokes I've been doing for years as well as stuff that's only a few months old and stuff that's not even a week old. The bits that are a week old now will no doubt be vastly different a year from now - if I'm still doing them." The key is being able and willing to constantly write and rewrite while trying out new material. When it comes to putting together enough material to perform a two-hour show, Alberstadt claims the secret is writing down every funny thought you have. While he believes there is no one right way for practicing comedy, he does suggest writing and performing as much as possible. "The more you work at it, the more it becomes a part of how you live." Additionally, he feels comedians are creative, if not slightly eccentric, which gives them a unique ability to put things into words. "It's very much second nature for us to write internally, at a computer, or on stage. I suggest only the first two if you're at a Starbucks."

It has helped to have the continued support of his family, whom Alberstadt describes as being "supportive from day one." Or at least since he paid off all his debt! Having parents who act as cheerleaders, rather than encouraging him to pursue other avenues, has made all the difference. "My parents always told us that they would be happy if we were doing something that made us happy." Lucky for us, what makes Alberstadt happy is being a comedian. And his family is behind him 100%.

While Alberstadt has achieved a significant level of success in the comedy world, he admits the journey has not been without a few stumbles. There were a lot of horrible gigs along the way. One in particular Alberstadt recalls was in East Tennessee at Roane County Community College's "Welcome Back to School" show. "I drove to the address they gave me and discovered it was a park. There were a couple of hundred people milling around. Mostly kids. A radio station had a remote location set up with a truck blasting top 40 songs and handing out T-shirts. I thought, 'I must have the wrong place. Maybe the gig is inside one of these buildings.' Nope. That was it. Turns out the 'welcome back show' was for the entire community, not just the college.

"A gazebo served as the stage. A karaoke machine was the sound system. I had to follow a magician who made Gob Bluth (played by Will Arnett on the TV series *Arrested Development*) look like David Copperfield. Five minutes into my set, the magician began to tear down his equipment directly behind me. I did about 20 minutes to nothing but stares. I got one laugh when the magician dropped his linking rings and they rolled past my feet. I quickly said 'goodnight' and left. Gotta end on a high note."

Still, those few awful shows pale in comparison to some of the highlight performances of his career thus far. Alberstadt recalls performing for the troops in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places around the Middle East as being some of the most incredible experiences of his life.

To other aspiring comics who are just starting out, Alberstadt imparts with this sound advice: "Don't ever, ever, ever stop doing what you love - unless you love crack. Be patient. Write everyday. Persevere. Ignore the

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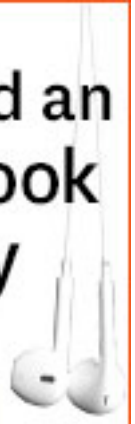
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haters. And learn to love late-night driving, talk radio, and tons of coffee.”

For more information on Keith Alberstadt, check out his website at [keithcomedy.com](http://keithcomedy.com). Follow him on Twitter [@keithalberstadt](https://twitter.com/keithalberstadt).

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