

From The D to the DYT

Mike Stanley lets loose at Wiley's

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN

Have you ever been watching standup and thought, "What's holding this comedian back?" Surely they must hold opinions on some of the bigger issues taking place in the public eye, but something is keeping their comedy sterile, politically correct, "safe." They seem held in check by someone else's rule. Well, not Mike Stanley. This guy has sovereignty. Beholden to nothing save his conscience, Stanley routinely lets loose on puerile politicians, unctuous celebrities and modern hypocrisies. But, you know, in a funny way.

It's not always smooth sailing. More than once, Stanley has found himself in the position of attempting to entertain those who are not in the mood to be entertained, say if he was brought in to a venue as a last ditch effort after a karaoke night failed to draw in a crowd. ("Picture the town from Roseanne, but everyone hates you for being there," Stanley describes.) We can safely say that will not be the case during his run this weekend at Wiley's Comedy Joint, a setting that has been bringing in throngs of laugh addicts since the early '80s. In anticipation, Mike kindly took the time to respond to some of *Dayton City Paper's* most probing queries, from politics to fashion picks.

Tell me some about your involvement with Detroit Comedy Underground. What opportunities do a place like DCU offer comedians?

Mike Stanley: I started DCU when I moved back from L.A. because I needed a place to perform regularly. I also felt like the scene needed a room with higher production value than a regular bar show or open mic (it's in the Elizabeth Theater). It's a showcase style show. I'll put up six or seven comics a week. Locals and friends from L.A., N.Y., Chicago drop in all the time.

The opportunities are there for comics at all levels. If you're new and only have a funny five minutes, I'll put you up for those five minutes. I do my best to give newer comics a place to perform in front of an actual paid audience, and, unless it's a guest spot, I pay all the comics.

There needed to be a room in Detroit proper. We're the only major city I can think of that doesn't have a club. At one point, we had clubs. They were all located in the suburbs. Nothing in the actual city of Detroit, though. Then, with the exception of the one club in Royal Oak, they all went belly up. So, if you're not working that one club, you're pretty much doing bar shows your friends throw.

I wanted something that was ours. A solid show. A place where comics don't have to pay a cover to hang out, even if they aren't performing. A rad theatre. That's what we've created at DCU. I'm proud of what we've done there.

You've been vocal on Twitter about your support for Bernie Sanders. What qualities does a candidate need to possess in order to get your attention? Where does civic duty fall on your hierarchy of needs? Have you considered running for office?

MS: Hahaha. My browser history and overall intellect would prevent me from running for office.

Bernie makes sense to me. He's not a pandering cluck that uses religion or bullshit scare tactics as leverage to get your vote. He's consistent. He's been consistent for 30 years on every issue. Racism, discrimination, political/economical accountability, environmental awareness...

We have politicians that don't believe in science. Fu--king science. Are you kidding me? Because you're too much of a simpleton to understand something so it doesn't exist? It's baffling to me. How are you alive?

Bernie is peeling back the curtain for those that were somehow unaware or maybe just too young to understand until now, that political landscape we've created is predicated on millionaire lobbyists lining the pockets of our government for future favors that in no way help, but conversely f--k the people that work for them/elected them.

It's this f--ked up circle built on the backs of the poor and middle class.

Who bails out these companies that produce nothing and gamble on Wall Street? We do. F--k that. It needs to stop.

How often do you get inquiries regarding your nearly ever-present hat? Is it a conscious fashion accessory, or is it more of an instinctive habit, like Teddy Roosevelt's gun or my mom's Fitbit?

MS: Ha! Finally! A real question that cuts to the core of what's really important in this country!

The hat thing started about 10 years ago in Chicago after I started shaving my head. It wasn't shame related. I performed with a shaved head all the time. There just happened to be another comic out of Chicago (that since moved to L.A.) that would play all the same clubs that I did and people were getting us confused. He was way more established than I was, and it started getting annoying.

It would be my first time at a club and people would say, "You're really funny, I loved your new stuff. I wish you would have done [insert one of his jokes] like you did last time!"

I would say, "That wasn't me actually, that was [other bald comic]."

"No... No it was totally you! I remember."

Followed by 10 minutes of me explaining to a drunk couple after a show that I had never been there before nor am I that person they think I am. It kept happening. Welp, guess I'll throw on a hat. I did and it's been vulcanized to my tiny skull ever since. I'll be buried in it.

What's on deck? It seems a book or a foray onto the big/small screen would be a natural fit for you. Is there anyone out there you're jonesing to work with?

MS: Well, I just finished a pilot with another Detroit comic that we'll be pitching shortly. I'm pretty proud of it. I think it's really funny, and there's nothing else out there like it. We'll see what happens. As far as anything else goes, this interview is the most intrigued anyone has been about my career in about five years. Seriously. That's not a joke.

I have a new album coming out this year sometime called "SHINER" on Stand Up! Records, so keep your peepers peeled for that if you're interested. Otherwise just flinging around and doing shows.



Mike Stanley holds nothing back at Wiley's June 24 and 25; photo courtesy of Mike Stanley

Mike Stanley will perform at Wiley's Comedy Joint, 101 Pine St. in Dayton, at 8 p.m. Friday, June 24 and 7:15 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday, June 25. Tickets are \$10 and available at wileyscomedy.com. Follow Mike on Twitter @MikeStanley1 or on Facebook at facebook.com/MikeStanleyComedian.



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