

COMMUNITY

Meet the funny, friendly, self-described "weirdos" of Salem's growing comedy scene

BY JEAN DION - SPECIAL TO SALEM REPORTER · NOVEMBER 8, 2023



Emma Pace Jonas, co-owner of the Infinity Room (Ron Cooper/Salem Reporter)



About 30 comedians live and practice their craft in Salem. They'd like you to join them—and getting started is easier than you might expect.

Start as a member of one of Salem's comedy show audiences. Whether you love the performance or hate it, you'll give the comedian information that can make the next show better.

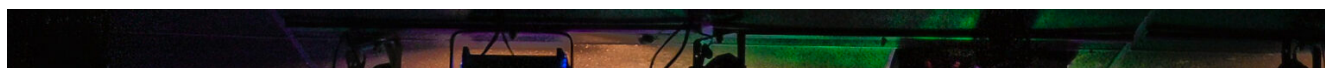
"It's always awesome to see people's responses to comedy shows, good or bad. If it's good, you know you're doing your job right and it's a good time. If it's bad, it's back to the drawing board," said Tony Meyer, local comedian. He's been working the Salem comedy scene for about 5 years and performs in venues like Infinity Room, The Yard, and McMenamins Boon's Treasury.

"The first time I did a show and got laughs from the audience was amazing. I've been chasing that high ever since," Meyer said.

Emma Jonas, comedian and co-owner of Infinity Room, is trying to create more opportunities for local comedians to get in front of a packed audience.

Infinity Room holds a weekly comedy open mic night on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. Established comedians can test out new material in shorter sets. And newer comedians can hop onstage and see what it's like to tell jokes instead of listening to them.

"Part of the motivation in becoming a business owner was that I could have a hand in creating a community space for comedians and performers to work on their craft," Jonas said.





Emma Pace Jonas on stage at Infinity Room (Ron Cooper/Salem Reporter)

Jonas got into comedy when she applied for an open bartender position with a comedy club. During the interview setup, the owner mentioned an upcoming open mic show.

“So I went in and did a set, thinking it was part of the job interview. It turns out that it wasn’t. The owner was just being polite and wanted to let me know about the opportunity. I thought they also wanted the staff to be funny,” Jonas said.

That experience inspired Jonas to create more open mic opportunities for new comics to try out the stage experience, even if they don’t think they’re ready to do so.

“There’s no barrier to entry for anyone to get onstage. I always tell

people who express even a remote interest in trying it: You can do it. You don't need permission. Put your name on the list, and we will give you a microphone," Jonas said.

Salem's comedians tend to be both collaborative and supportive. Ty Boice, local comedian and executive producer at Soul of Wit Productions, says getting into comedy isn't always easy.

"As a comic you may work a new bit or joke for weeks, only to finally scrap it and start all over with an entirely new premise. I have an affection and empathy for comics going through that process. I can celebrate with them if the new bit goes well or encourage them if it goes poorly, because I have been there," he said.

Boice said he keeps working because the impact of a great night can reverberate, both for the comedian and the audience.

"Making a room full of people laugh can feel like a superpower. It is a really rewarding thing. The superpower being to, for a few minutes, help people forget about their lives their divorce, their job, their mortgage, the money for their kid's braces, and just escape and laugh," he said.

But every audience is different, he said. The same joke can hit two people very differently.

"Live stand-up comedy is a living breathing symbiotic thing. It is a partnership with the audience. It dies without an audience. When an audience is not just sitting in judgement but giving back to the

comic and the comic is respecting the audience, it is a living document. Comedy is kind of like a partner dance. It has seemingly limitless potential to bring joy to people's lives," Boice said.

Since Salem's comedy scene is much smaller than Portland's or Eugene's, fewer opportunities to get up on stage exist. Without plenty of practice, comedians don't have the chance to perfect a joke and make an audience laugh. And new comedians may struggle to find mentors.

"A lot of us will hang out after the open mics and shows. We're friends with each other. While it's really nice, it can feel a little exclusive to new comedians," Jonas said.

Jonas and Meyer created the Joke Lab this fall to help. Sessions are held on the third Sunday of each month at 4 p.m. There's no charge to attend. Comedians of all experience levels can come to Infinity Room to practice stage basics, such as mic stand handling, and practice material.

"There's a lot of basic things about comedy that we don't really learn unless we watch. We wanted to provide a place for people to learn those basics, where it's fun and encouraging," Jonas said. "And it's a great way to exercise your funny muscle, to give and receive feedback."

Jonas encourages all Salem comedians to attend.

“We just want to build friendships. A lot of people who are drawn to comedy are lonely weirdos, and it’s nice when we find each other,” she said.

To learn more about local comedy shows, visit [Infinity Room’s online calendar](#). Or visit the [Soul of Wit online calendar](#) to find out about other shows happening in Salem and other venues in the Northwest.

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