

By Steve North

If you're thinking of "getting into comedy" these days, one thing you'll notice is the confusing array of stand-up comedy schools, workshops, comedy teachers and stand-up coaches. This is designed to give you an idea of what you should be looking for and what questions to ask – not only of the teacher, but others who have taken the class. There are important things to look for in a stand-up comedy class and teacher:

- **Helper or Critic?** Many teachers think they're helping you by simply "critiquing" your material. This is the easy, unhelpful way to teach, the only one who benefits is the ego of the "teacher." A good standup comedy teacher will help you write the piece of material by focusing on what you were trying to do, and help you do it. Most comedy ideas are good, but many don't appear that way upon the initial attempt. A good stand-up comedy teacher or coach will encourage you to "amplify" or clarify what you're trying for, and has the tools to help you modify it and make it work. If they can't help you write it, and perform it – they're no help at all.
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- **Was the Teacher a competent Stand-up Comedian?** In the case of teaching standup comedy, the old adage, "Those that do, do – and those that can't, teach" is absolutely false. For the most part only a coach or teacher who performed stand-up comedy – and was successful at it -- can really teach it. There are simply too many truths learned by actually doing stand-up comedy to be effective if you haven't done it. I don't mean a teacher has to have been a big stand-up comedy star, but they certainly needed to be good and effective at it. Also, many teachers of standup comedy are really "writers", and while they can help you write comedy; most are clueless on the performing end of it – which is at least half the battle.
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- **Is the Stand-up Comedian a Good Teacher?** Many standup comedians who are -- or were -- good stand-ups teach classes or coach these days. However not all good stand-up comics are good teachers. The biggest problem is that many try to teach you to be funny like they are funny. A good standup comedy teacher or coach knows that each comic is different, and brings out the developing comic's personal style. Think of three of your favorite funny people. Now picture them in your mind. Notice how different their attitudes, deliveries and personalities are. A teacher has to hold this as the most important chore – helping the the performer find his "voice".
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- **Is there Life after the First Performance?** Is the class a one-time wonder? Unfortunately, too many of the classes are mills that hand you the super-duper six-week "diploma," give you one performance in front of your friends, and then throw you out to

"open-mike nights" (read: the wolves). That approach is like handing a guy a knife, then telling him to go out and do brain surgery. Does the teacher(s) offer on-going or advanced comedy workshops so you have a place to continue to develop other than open-mike nights? Are regular, on-going performing opportunities offered? Is the standup comedy teacher good enough to keep students over a long period of time? That's the best test of a valid stand-up comedy "university." If they've been around for a number of years, and graduates are recommending them to others, that is key to knowing you're getting involved in a good program.

