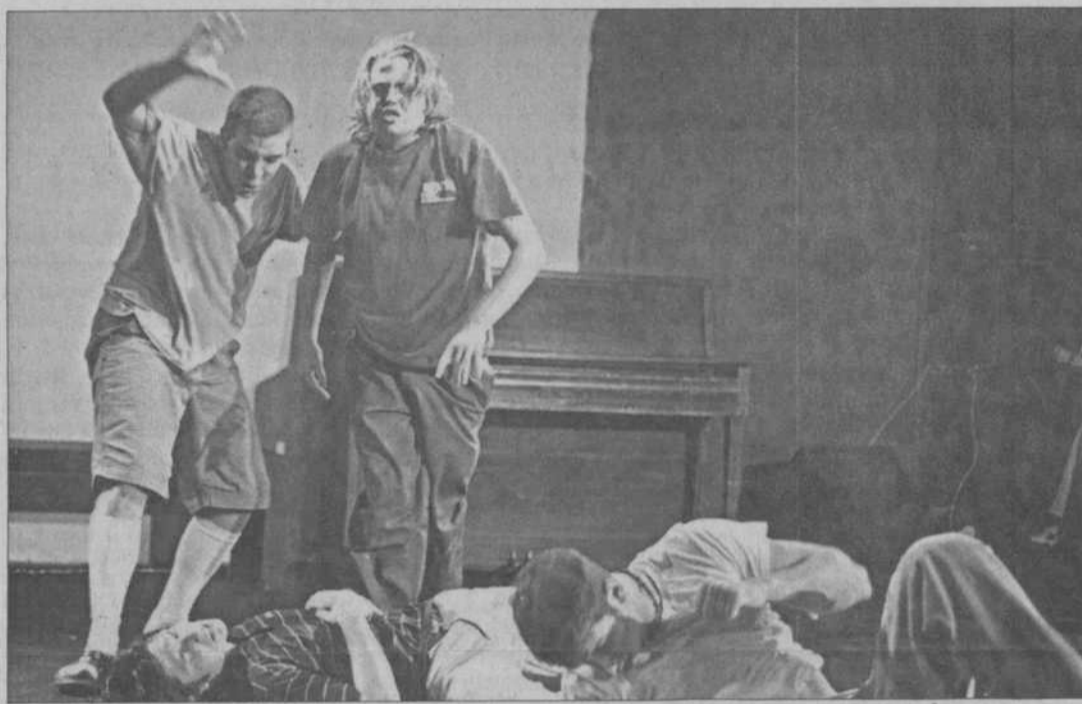


SHOW REVIEW

Toast gives hot performance



"TOAST AND JAM"
Benson Theatre
★★★★ out of ☆☆☆☆

BY NIK RAMACHANDRAN
THE GAMECOCK

As Karl Denson and Moe performed their brand of jam music at 3 Rivers on Saturday night, a completely different type of jam was going on in the small, hot room of Benson Theatre. Toast, a group of USC students, performed its own brand of seriously twisted, excruciatingly hilarious, and always-energetic sketch comedy and improvisation.

Saturday night's show, "Toast and Jam," was packed; some patrons were forced to stand or to sit on the ground. There, they read a fake newspaper article given with their ticket. It detailed the death of Toast in a fatal clown-car crash on its most recent tour, a theme that would reoccur throughout the night's performance.

As the lights came on for the opening scene, a solitary man appeared on stage. He claimed to be part of a Russian improv group that wanted to recreate the "genius" of Toast because of its untimely demise. Other troupe

members entered the act and explained the rules of comedy. It involved a lot of pie tossing, water hosing and other forms of physical absurdity. The skit evolved into a parody of "The Benny Hill Show," complete with theme music.

"It really wasn't what I was expecting to see," said Christina Williams, a USC graduate and actress. "The energy and timing was great."

The group took suggestions from the audience for its improv games, which were placed between sketches. A coffeehouse poetry reading about a cow, a game in which members recreated faces of audience members' ID cards, and a tale of bickering wonder twins battling an evil genius and his hamster-boy sidekick were just some of the extemporaneous comedy Toast performed.

"You can tell they're improving with working off each other," said Mark Virticio, a first-year theater student who has seen Toast perform before. "Each performance keeps getting better."

The second set took off like a rocket, starting with a scene involving a grocer who had a sick obsession with beards, and also with putting degreaser into food

products. Between set changes, witty pseudo-commercials were played through the speakers, which served to maintain the comedic flow. "Spray-Be-Gone," to get rid of those old dudes who hit on you at bars, or "Caveman," to give you that Cro-Magnon strength in bed, kept the audience in stitches.

A big song-and-dance number featuring a French Don Juan and his eight-armed mutant lover was stopped mid-routine so that the female members of Toast could add their feminine touch. Wilson Phillips started playing and a pillow fight ensued as the scene segued to the cast's tragic final moments. The troupe went into slow motion as they blindfolded the only member with car keys. In the final scene, a pie is thrown at a mourner kneeling at the foot of their grave.

First-year art-studio student Brian Bermudez summed up his feelings on the show: "No one really knows about these guys. Once word gets out, they're going to need a bigger place to perform."

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecockmixeditor@hotmail.com



PHOTO BY AISHA AHKAWALA/THE GAMECOCK

Toast, an improvisational and sketch-comedy group comprised of USC students, performed to a standing-room-only crowd at Benson Theatre on Saturday night.

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singsong melody lead by a steel guitar helped fans forget the hot and humid interior of the stage area. Fohl, with his creative lyrics and clear guitar work, was another event highlight.

Many performances were delayed. At the outdoor stages, acts started late and sets were reduced in order to get events back on time.

At the BellSouth/WOLO Stage, the J Edward's Band performed its Southern rock for a small crowd. By the time the Atlanta Rhythm Section took the stage, however, the crowd had grown to a decent size, comparable to Friday night's turnout. The band's performance popped with a classic-rock sound. Mother's Finest also filled the night air with its free-spirited songs.

The "New Orleans Comes to 3 Rivers" showcase took over the State Farm Stage, with Chief Bo Dollis and the Wild Magnolias,

Terrance Simien, Davell Crawford and Dr. John.

Chief Bo Dollis played to a small but growing crowd, followed by Terrance Simien, who gave an amazing performance. Nicknamed the Zydeco Master, he excelled at his brand of Creole-infused jazz.

Davell Crawford, "The Piano Prince of New Orleans," really brought in the Cajun flavor, with a strong piano focus supported by electric guitar and drums that sent the audience into the Louisiana bayou. The stage closed with Dr. John playing his brand of funky, rhythm-and-blues-tinged jazz.

With a variety of styles represented elsewhere, most students were at the Coors Light Stage. Columbia's Thomas Reed Band played a shortened three-song set, before the San-Francisco-based Ten Mile Tide took over with its blend of smooth acoustic groove-rock.

Captain Easy, another jam band-esque, guitar-powered group, played next, followed by Umphrey's McGee. But the crowd didn't really come in until Karl Denson's Tiny Universe took the stage.

Denson, a sax player for Lenny Kravitz, played his usual mix of jazz-funk, evidencing classic influences, but in a conversational, jam band style. During Denson's show, activists from Midlands-NORML threw pamphlets and buttons on stage, and his trumpeter put on one of the buttons.

The group Moe. ended Saturday's Coors Light Stage lineup. The show featured mainly instrumental tunes, but a few did include vocals. Psychedelic lighting played across nearby buildings as people danced in the empty parking lot and the street, Moe. closed its set early, but came back for an encore.

The final day of the festival brought internationally acclaimed blues acts Keb' Mo and B.B. King. Daniel Howle and the Tantrums, Queens of the Stone Age, and the Impressions also made appearances.

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