



Comedy Battle Littered with Misogyny, Racism, Mocked as ‘Woke Comedy Night’

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Have you ever watched a Michael Cera movie and felt physically uncomfortable because of a deep and earnest second-hand embarrassment?

That was me at a recent “Battle to the Funny Bone” at The Comic Strip in West Edmonton Mall – a comedy club that could be easily mistaken for a jazz club had there not been dad rock blasting through the speakers before the show. The style of this comedy battle did not seem to make an already hard profession any easier. Topics were selected from audience suggestions – and the comics had just minutes to come up with routines. There were some obvious and unfortunate themes for the night. Hey, it’s 2021, and stand-up comedy has probably become at least a little less problematic, right? Wrong. The night was just absolutely littered with misogyny and racism.



Host Will Hannigan encouraged the audience – all 16 of us – to react to the comedians in any way we feel, be it positive or negative. The winner of the battle gets \$25, or as Hannigan referred to it, “bus fare.”

Then he went into his opening routine – with what felt like a lifetime of describing how he loves the “free the nipple” movement, but hates when women try to talk to him and expect him to listen when they’re not wearing a bra. “How am I supposed to pay attention with tits in my face?”

Naturally, I groaned. He asked why. I said that’s what he told us to do if we don’t like a joke – and from this point forward the comics mockingly described the event as “Woke Comedy Night” – as if being uncomfortable and disdainful of misogyny regardless of setting is a massive buzzkill.

The first comics to battle were Adriaan Kriel and Brad Semotiuk using the topic "My Wife's Phone Number." The visibly shy Kriel made a joke about his mom's contact in his dad's phone being "Madeline from work." His set was sweet and made me unrealistically optimistic for the rest of the night. Semotiuk didn't seem to care whether he was there or not. His humour could be described as somewhere between dry and downright lazy. And this guy REALLY doesn't want a wife. Never mind her phone number. I think you're good, Brad.

People cheered louder for Kriel, which brought him into the next round.

Matthew Rey and Simon Glassman (right) battled next. The topic was circumcision. Rey's bit was about how one of his friends "never cleaned his pocket pussy" and got a really bad infection on his penis, which resulted him having to get circumcised as an adult. Not really a joke, but a fascinating and comparatively unoffensive story nonetheless. Then there's Glassman – so much potential carelessly disposed of by blatant and shockingly casual racism. He started by relating his Judaism to the topic, and joking that "women are lucky female circumcision doesn't exist." He left a beat, and added, "I don't know, I don't read the news outside of Canada." Glassman won this round.



On the topic of "deal-breakers in a relationship," Cindy Rivers battled Leif Oleson-Cormack (top picture). The former was by far the funniest comedian of the night and possibly (probably) the only saving grace of the show. Rivers introduced herself as a trans comedian and joked about cheating on her ex with the man her ex cheated on her with, once Rivers transitioned. Her delivery was convincing. She was comfortable and confident and made no jokes at other people's expense. Oleson-Cormack likewise kept it comfortable, another comic who was actually funny without being what some people may consider harmful – and he stepped into the next round.

Steven Darnell and Brandon Vanderwell battled on the topic of stealing. Darnell's set seemed to suggest he's gently in favour not only of stealing but school shootings – and he escaped to the final round just barely. Both receive scattered applause.

It went over the line when Glassman returned to the stage with a callback from his last set – about hamster circumcision, gesturing to an Indigenous couple and asking if, as an Asian couple, they were "familiar with this cuisine." There was a clear shifting of seats throughout the room, even from people who were laughing at off-colour jokes earlier. Everyone was appalled. Glassman simply left the stage (and a few audience members walked out) – and by some sort of witchcraft won the round.

The Battle raged on. Hannigan came back to tell the audience that we "not address it" – it presumably being Glassman's racist joke. Darnell and Oleson-Cormack ironically riffed on the topic of social skills. And the topic of burning churches was addressed by Glassman versus Oleson-Cormack – shock-value versus good writing. Who will pull through and win that sweet, sweet 25 bucks?

At one point, Glassman stood centre stage and feebly apologized for his racism, saying he is “shaking for fear of saying something wrong.”

Who’s going to tell him that he’s in full control of that? I don’t know about you, but when I get up in front of a group of people I am never concerned that I am going to accidentally, whoopsy-daisy, say something racist or misogynistic. It just isn’t that hard.

Take an example from Leif Oleson-Cormack – who, with genuine humour instead of bigotry, won the bus fare at this Battle to the Funny Bone. The event runs **every Monday night** at The Comic Strip.

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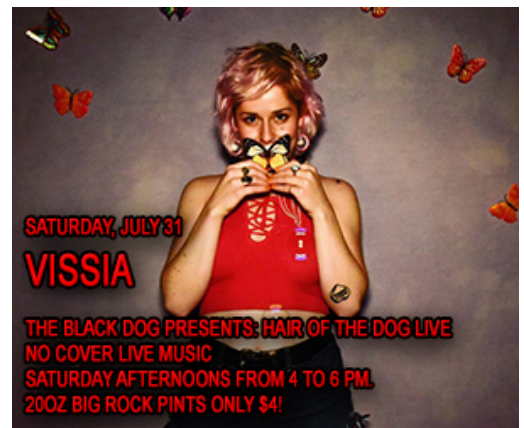
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