

Short Sets and Some Serious Bloody Marys: Open-Mic Brunch at the Hideout



The scene at the Hideout is about what you'd expect to find at a neighborhood watering hole on a Saturday afternoon. Scruffy regulars hunch over the bar, nursing pints of Gumballhead and A Little Sumpin' Sumpin' Ale. Smokers cluster around the front patio's picnic tables, puffing on Pall Malls. Lilly, the cheerful bartender, trades quips with customers and whips up some serious bloody marys with all the fixings—celery, olives, cubes of cheese, and a stalk of pickled asparagus for good measure. But one thing separates this otherwise standard Saturday drinking tableau from any other: instead of shouting at football matches on TV or huddling around pool tables, the clientele are flipping through notebooks and scribbling down jokes. It's a few minutes until the start of The Late Late Breakfast comedy open mic, and everyone is putting the finishing touches on their set.

Tyler Jackson—one of the founders and cohosts of the open mic—mans the front-stage area, setting up chairs and readying the equipment. "This is the first time we're running this show," he explains before hurrying out to usher in audience members. He gives an optimistic grin. "I hope it goes all right."

Tyler announces that the show is about to start, and the crowd slowly makes its way to the seats, finding places among the rows of folding chairs and wobbly high-tops. Tyler hops onstage

and grabs ahold of the microphone.

"Are you guys all hungover right now?" he asks playfully. There are groans and whistles of assent. "Thank you guys for coming to this—this is awesome. Welcome to the Late Late Breakfast."

"The way this works—" he pauses, considering his audience. He then brushes off his introduction. "Well, you guys know exactly how this works. You're gonna do four minutes, and I'm gonna wave my cellphone at you from the back when your time is up."

But first, Tyler tells a few jokes of his own. He describes the struggles he faces, as a man, with crying, considers the similarities between OkCupid and Netflix, and concludes with a discussion of his favorite TV show, Legends of the Hidden Temple.

By the time Tyler finishes up and brings on the first comic, his audience is awake and laughing—the mark of a successful host. The show is short and sweet, with about 16 comedians trying out four minutes of material each. Kaitlyn Grissom talks about the origins of her unusual shirt. Joel Boyd dissects *The Hunger Games*. Joshua Murphy muses about cows and hats. And in between comics, Tyler revisits the stage to riff, lead games, and keep the audience energized.

If Tyler appears at ease onstage and quick with a joke, it's due, in part, to years of practice. He's been performing in open mics for three years now.

"I did an open mic three years ago on a whim," he reflects, once the show had ended and he'd joined the other comics outside for a cigarette. "It went OK, but even 'OK' feels great when you're onstage and people are laughing right after you say something. That instant feedback is very nice to have. [I] just thought, 'I wanna keep doing this as long as I can.'"

Tyler was in medical school at the time.

"I hated it," he explains. "The comedy open mics ended up being the only thing I looked forward to all week. Eventually I dropped out and thought, 'Well, if I'm dropping out of medical school, I should probably make a real stab at this and try to do it for real.' I just jumped into it and I've been doing it ever since. "

Today, Tyler coproduces two comedy shows: the newborn *Late Late Breakfast* open mic and a showcase called *Black Star Comedy* at *Estrella Negra* Restaurant. Like many aspiring Chicago comics, he also frequents the city's more than 30 weekly open mics.

"There's two I go to regularly, but some people hit like five a night," Tyler says. This, he maintains, is key to a comic's success. "Write and perform as much as possible," he advises. "Nothing replaces going on stage as often as you can."

Want to take the stage and try out some jokes of your own? Tyler recommends checking out these open mics:

Late Late Breakfast at the Hideout

Tyler cohosts this Saturday-morning show with Danny Maupin. Interactive games and quirky challenges keep audience members engaged; a hangover brunch with \$5 bloody marys keeps them well-fed and watered.

pHree for All Open Mic at phComedy Theater

This BYOB open mic takes place in a cozy theater on Wednesday nights. Standups are picked by a random-order draw at the beginning of the show.

Championship Open Mic Comedy at Merkle's

At this Monday-night mic, comedians compete for a championship title and a \$25 worth of bar credit before a panel of civilian judges. And the specials—\$3 draft beers and \$3 burgers—are some of the best of all the open mics in the city, Tyler says.

Open Mic at Cole's

The Wednesday-night open mic at this much-loved neighborhood dive is so popular, it begins at 9:30 p.m. and often lasts well past midnight. Be sure to arrive before 5:30 p.m. if you want to secure a spot on the list.