

# GLOWN HIGH

School of Comedy grads set their sights on the big laughs



—Fred Thornhill, SUN

**YOUNG COMICS** Neil Bansil, Renée Percy and Mark LeRoy, yuk it up in a bus shelter outside the Humber College Lakeshore campus. The three performers, graduates of the comedy course there, are trying their best to get people to laugh — and make a living at it.

**W**est Nile, SARS, mad cow, Jakob, SARS The Sequel, school lockouts, AirCan, on and on.

Gimme a break. Time to lighten up. "First SARS, then West Nile, now mad cow," Neil Bansil, 24, is saying. "Never has it been so scary... to go to the cottage and barbecue beef."

**Ba-dum-bum.** We've met at the Williams Coffee Pub, Kipling and Lake Shore. Next door to the old Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, now a Humber College campus, including the School of Comedy.

Bansil, Renée Percy, 26, and Mike Mark LeRoy, 23. Graduates, class of '03.

"Name's Renée," says Renée. "Lemme tell you a bit about myself. I'm an actor, a dancer, a writer, a comedian." Pause. "A really well-rounded waitress."

**Ba-dum-bum.** "I'm Filipino, right," says Bansil. "So my dad says 'I like 'ph.' When I played hockey, he got kicked out of the rink." He puts on the accent. "Neil, Neil, the puck is in the corner! Get the puck out of there!"

**Ba-dum-bum.** "Hear about this numbing condom?" says LeRoy. "Prolongs sex. I figured a woman invented it, but then I was thinking about Michael Jackson and Bubbles the Chimp and ..."

Well, no, I can't tell you that one. "I sent it in to Leno," says LeRoy.

"Ewww," says Renée Percy. LeRoy is off to an audition. Dude 1 or Dude 2 in a Coke commercial. He's from Richmond Hill.

Percy has been in showbiz since she was 13. Played a small role in *Degrassi*



## Strobel

Impish grin. "You can always say 'busy.' I mean, who's gonna call and say it's not busy."

He makes a helicopter sound, slapping his trousers.

"Travelling on the 401, you're gonna find both directions in pretty good shape." (Slightly nasal, like from 10,000 ft.) "A little busy as you make your way westbound on the collectors through Yonge Street. That's because we've got construction. It's down to a single lane. Once you get past that, though, it's problem free right over toward the 427 ..."

His classmates are falling over, howling. Jeex, that traffic report sounds familiar.

Aren't these trade secrets? I ask. You gonna get fired? "Well, they know I'm a comedian," he grins.

Freddy Thornhill arrives, cameras in hand. He herds the rookie comics into a

High for two years.

One cabaret night at Factory Theatre, a friend dared her to climb onstage and do standup. "Best show I've ever done," she says. "I got the bug."

Her first big tour is next week. A string of Yuk Yuk's one-nighters through northern Ontario.

"I'm terrified. Some of these places, they've never seen a woman on stage without a pole."

If you listen to AM 740, you will know Neil Bansil. He does traffic.

From a plane or a chopper? "Well, not a lot."

So how do you know what to say? "I could do it from here."

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"Faces right up against the glass," he barks. They obey, as you can see.

"Yeck," says LeRoy, tongue to glass. "You can get SARS this way."

**Ba-dum-bum.** The three will play the Brantford Comedy Festival July 25-27 with Robert Klein and other comic greats. It will be their professional coming-out, though they've done clubs awhile.

Is Brantford on the road to comedy stardom?

"I just wanna get famous," says Percy.

Whatever it takes?

"Well, not Monica Lewinsky famous. "But if I can get up and make 200 people piss their pants laughing, well, there's no drug that gets you that high."

**Two-woman schtick**

She looks at her watch. She and pal Jen Radomsky, 27, call themselves Ham Job Productions.

They are rehearsing their two-woman schtick for the Toronto Fringe Festival.

Mardi Bra, it's called. *2 Girls, 4 Boobs, You Do The Math!*

There is a production fundraiser this Sunday night at Blues on Bellair. The lineup of comics includes Bansil.

Tough business, comedy, eh, Neil? "Yep, we're one step below homeless," he says. "We could be homeless, if we really tried."

"The only difference between us and the homeless," says Renée Percy, "is that we wear our hats."

**Ba-dum-bum.** Mike Strobel's column runs daily, Monday to Thursday. Call him at 416-947-2265. E-mail: mike.strobel@tor.sunpub.com

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