

## “THE MONKEY DANCE”

by D.C. Benny

June/July 2005

**So the Boston Comedy club closed for a week. Very sad. But now it has risen again out of the ashes like a dirty pigeon, to soar into the comedy horizon and become the Comedy Village, a completely new club that is exactly the same as the old one except for the name. Not quite a phoenix. I am going to wish them the best because no matter what incarnation the Boston takes, I love it and always will. This is why.**

MEMORIES... I remember going to the zoo as a child and having to brace myself when I first set foot in the monkey house. The monkey house always smelled like monkey shit. Pungent, acrid, overpowering monkey shit. But, if you wanted to see the monkeys, you had to smell them too. You could try to hold your breath, try to run through real fast, pinch your nose and breath through your mouth, but the bottom line was that if one wanted to truly experience a monkey, reap the rewards of watching him look eerily human, eat a banana, make a quizzical expression that reminded you of someone you knew, well to see all that, you had to pay a price of not only smelling monkey shit, but risk having it flung at you. I would even go so far to say that if you hung around the monkey house long enough, you became a monkey by osmosis. The point is that the Boston was the Monkey house of comedy. It was the

type of place where you would see a guy in the front laughing so hard he was crying, but when you looked closer you realized that the teardrops on his face were tattoos he got in the joint to keep score of bodies. If the Boston was a nose it would be constantly running and broken in three places.

One of the hardest jobs in the world was managing the Boston, where there are more regime changes than any African government. Same pattern every time—neophyte arrives, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, with a business plan and a freshly shined pair of cherry loafers. “There are gonna be some changes around this dump,” they announce as they order some open mikers to rearrange the furniture. But the only change that happens is to them as their ideas gradually crumble like one of the stale nachos by the bar in the back. It doesn’t take long before the “power” of the position overwhelms them when they realize that the Boston was and is unchangeable. You can hire barkers, start an alternative night, buy advertising in Steppin’ Out magazine, even start a Tough Crowd-style comedic salon in the balcony area, but the crowd that staggers in the door is still going to be a gurgling soup of mooks, drunks, thugs, people who got kicked out of or couldn’t get into other clubs, and a gaggle of confused tourists huddled together for warmth and protection. People unable to turn off a cell phone, tip a waitress, or use the bathroom without writing something filthy and misspelled on the wall of the stall. Comedy connoisseurs. This is the audience that must be made to laugh. And that is what was great about the

Boston; when a comic could make that crowd laugh, you felt like the kid that the tribe abandoned in the jungle, who was told not to come back until he killed a lion with a sharp stick. That was the kind of comedy you had to hit the Boston crowds with...sharp sticks.

I worked the Boston for over 12 years and am proud of it. I got a PhD in monkey dance that one cannot get from more civilized venues. I met many Runyonesque characters including a crackhead who, still to this day, shows up from time to time and borrows money from comics, telling them, “D.C. will pay you back,” and that he is my dad (nothing pisses off my dad more than this but the Boston is still his favorite comedy club).

I don’t know what else to say except that whether or not you like this club, performing there made you strong. Granted, it was not the place to do a joke about the plot structure of Croatian Independent film, but you knew if you did a new bit and it worked at the Boston...it could work anywhere. Especially if it involved diarrhea.

IN CLOSING... I’m going to miss the little fireplace that never was lit. The stinky bathroom too dirty to shit in. The headshots of comics who’d never been there. The complaining old fart who lives upstairs. The barkers waiting their turn restlessly in the back. The bar stacked with rot-gut, labeled as Jack. Accusing any Arab in the audience of having a bomb. Drunk Staten Islanders getting ejected by Tom. It was the comedy treehouse, a foxhole, a locker-room, a fort. Yes, it may have been called the Boston, but this club was all New York.