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## Pat Craig XML

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**PAT CRAIG: THEATER**

### Sketchy groups strike comedic gold

By Pat Craig  
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Occasionally, it's not even funny. Most of the time it switches frenetically from mildly amusing to downright hilarious.

But with sketch comedy, the moments you live for are when the actors hit a vein dripping with 24-karat funny. That's when everything works. The acting, direction and, most importantly, the material intersect at some sort of comedic critical mass, and for a moment or two you feel you have sipped from humor's holy grail.

OK, that may be overstating things a bit, but there were moments at the San Francisco Sketch Comedy Festival that traipsed close to the genius area. The annual festival, which opened over the week from throughout the country and indicated that the burgeoning sketch comedy movement is both growing.

A mix of veteran and newer groups made up the Friday opening night ceremonies, which was got new fans of the form. Since there were about a half-dozen groups performing, nobody had the opportunity more than three or four sketches, which, for most companies, is not much more than a throat to meet the audience.

Saturday's show -- which featured two groups: Seattle's Some Kind of Cult and Totally Looped, a group led by Dan Castellaneta, the voice of Homer Simpson -- was more satisfying because it gave a longer look at what the performers had to offer.

Some Kind of Cult was on the Friday bill, but the group's series of brief sketches weren't that great however, the group was able to perform a full act, and was hugely impressive with a range of material through the edges of pop culture and twentysomething angst for laughs.

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Castellaneta's group sat in the audience for their performance, adding dialog to random film clips stage. The gimmick has been done for years. (Woody Allen even redubbed an entire Japanese movie released in the United States as "What's Up Tiger Lilly?") But what made *Totally Looped* so amusing was the fact the actors were improvising the dialog, and occasionally they did hit that magically gold area

The improvisation made the group different from the other performers on the bill, who work from scripts often written by the performers themselves and reflecting, mostly, things observed in daily life, the ridiculous extremes.

One example of this was in a sketch by San Francisco's *Totally False People*, which parodied a commercial where two women were talking about how eating a particular brand of yogurt was right life's best moments ("like getting up on Christmas morning," "like a new puppy"). The group continued to improvise logic getting more and more skewed until the whole thing dissolved into hilarity.

Most successful in the short-form of opening night were two veteran groups, both San Francisco based:

*Kasper Hauser*, which draws its humor from the dark side of human life, performed brilliantly, particularly in a sketch that had the Pope lamenting because he had never won the Nobel Peace Prize (after all, like Mother Theresa and Bishop Desmond Tutu had both won it, and they work for him).

The 18 *Mighty Mountain Warriors*, an Asian-American group, struck for big laughs with a bit that had Japanese and Korean soccer players negotiating over hosting the World Cup competition. In the few minutes more than a century of often-embarrassing history was dredged up and used for maximum comic

Tickets to the festival are relatively low-priced, and for the money, offer an excellent entertainment. Shows also offer a chance to be in on what just might be the next big thing in entertainment.

Pat Craig is the Times theater critic. Reach him at 925-945-4736 or [pcraig@cctimes.com](mailto:pcraig@cctimes.com).

**THEATER REVIEW**

- WHAT: San Francisco Sketch Comedy Festival
- WHEN: Wednesdays-Sundays through Feb. 1
- WHERE: Eureka Theatre, 215 Jackson St.; and Cobb's Comedy Club, 915 Columbus Ave., S.F.
- HOW MUCH: \$8-\$25 (depending on attraction)
- CALL: 866-468-3399, [www.ticketweb.com](http://www.ticketweb.com) or [www.sfsketchfest.com](http://www.sfsketchfest.com) for information only.



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