

[RISE Explores the Ripple Effect with Blithe Spirit](#)

Woonsocket is home to one of the state's coolest local venues for community theater, The RISE Playhouse. I've been to the theater to see a few traveling shows and even to audition for a local film (if you are a performer, I recommend checking out their audition schedule). This was the first show I've seen from Rhode Island Stage Ensemble proper, and I was thrilled to be invited.

RISE is entering its 30th season, and I'm interested in seeing how the rest of the year expands on this season's theme, "The Ripple Effect," showcasing productions that focus on how small actions can have enormous unintended consequences, or how one person can change the world.

This round kicks off with *Blithe Spirit*, a farcical, supernatural drama from the 1940s by British playwright Noel Coward, who was described as [having] a combination of "cheek and chic." This modern presentation is from director Eric Barbato, who previously directed *Proof* and *Doubt* with The Community Players in Pawtucket. Although Barbato is known for tackling hard-edged drama, it's no surprise to see how well he transitioned into dark comedy.

Blithe Spirit follows the evening exploits of ill-tempered author Charles Condomine as he arranges a seance to inspire characters for his new novel. Like most murder mystery farces of the time, *Blithe Spirit* takes place in one room. The characters are free to enter and exit, but the parlour is the main location. Charles and his wife, Ruth, host a dinner party that includes the skeptical Dr. and Mrs. Bradman, who are joined by psychic extraordinaire, Madame Arcati. The group is tended to by the hapless house servant, Edith. As the show unfolds, we find that the Condomines are in over their heads as their tinkering with supernatural forces may have conjured up more than literary inspiration. Charles begins to have visions of his ex-wife, Elvira, who has been dead for five years. Is he hallucinating? Did the eccentric Madame Arcati actually summon a spirit? What follows is a truly funny comedy of errors, known for its fast, funny (albeit dense) dialogue. The jokes come at a blink-and-you-miss-it pace.

The evening I attended hosted some truly remarkable performances. Michael Martins as Charles Condomine navigates the subject matter wonderfully to build an egotistical self-centered cad driven to madness. Kimberly Rau Harper as Ruth Condomine holds her own against her obnoxious husband and delivers a strong female lead, giving Charles a run for his money. Dr. and Mrs. Bradman, played by Steven Small and Rebecca Tung, respectively, cosign the Condomines' skepticism and often try to offer a voice of reason. Even as the de facto "straight men" of the play, the Bradmans supply some of the laughs, as well. The dryer aspect of this show's wit is broken up wonderfully by its two more physically funny characters — Madame Arcati, played by Erin Coughlin Tower, and Edith, played by Brittney Simard. Tower portrayed Arcati in high school 25 years ago, so this was a welcome revisiting for her. Brittney Simard, as Edith, breaks the tension of any scene with her portrayal of an awkward and seemingly witless maid. And then there is Elvira, played by Sarah Reed. Is she a ghost or a vision? Is she even really there? Elvira presents another woman to challenge Charles' ever-present masculinity. She has a plan in store for her mortal ex husband, and Reed delivers a great performance as the vengeful apparition.

Barbato (who also succeeds here as scenic designer) kept things at a brisk pace — the scenes were

engaging, the actors captivating. There were, however, long scene breaks that, I imagine, can be shortened as the run goes on and the crew becomes more familiar with set changes. The intermission ran long as the theater chose to do a raffle between acts. Another small point of contention is that, during the intermission, two crew members were talking behind me and I could hear about upcoming effects in the play. Since it was my first time seeing this particular show, that was a total spoiler alert moment. I tuned them out but, as Act Two played on, I could hear some of the calls being made in the tech booth (this could be because it's a small theater and I was in the back). Again, this chatter revealed some things for me and I felt like I was watching a play with a live commentary track. There were a few effects that may have misfired but, overall, that's the thrill of live theater and these sorts of kinks are worked out over time. I highly recommend seeing this show for yourselves, but you may want to sit up front.

Rhode Island Stage Ensemble presents Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit. June 8, 9, 15, 16 at 7:30pm, and June 10 & 17 at 2pm. For more information, go to ristage.org

[A Night of Comedy with Barry Rothbart and Greg Barris](#)

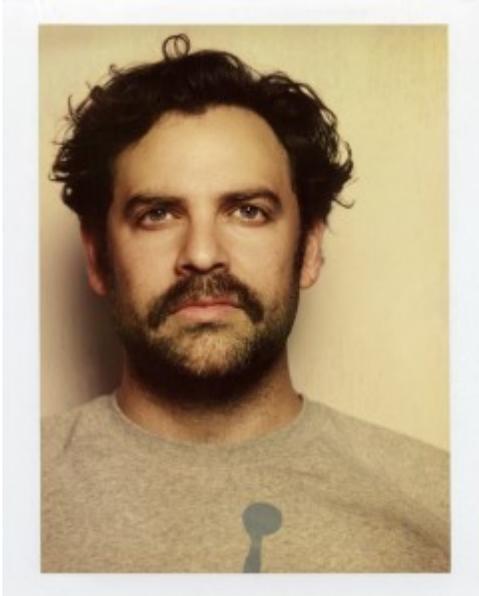


Greg Barris

On Wednesday, June 13, two comedians will bring their unique brand of humor to The Comedy Connection in East Providence.

Your headliner for the evening, Barry Rothbart, has performed his stand-up on "The Tonight Show," "Conan," "The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson" and his own Comedy Central Presents Special. Currently, he can be seen on the new Showtime series "Kidding with Jim Carrey" and in the upcoming Melissa McCarthy movie, *Happytime Murders*. He was named a "New Face" and "Best of the Fest" performer at the Just For Laughs Montreal Comedy Fest, and as one of Variety Magazine's 10 Comics to Watch. He has also co-starred in the ABC series "Downward Dog," as well as making appearances in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, on MTV's "Punk'd" and in Demetri Martin's indie feature, *Dean*.

The other featured comedian is Greg Barris. Greg is a staple in New York's downtown stand-up scene and is the creator of Heart Of Darkness, "The World's Most Important Live Event" — a psychedelic showcase of comedy, live music and fringe scientists, which has been a frequent *Time Out New York* Critic's Pick, much loved by *BrooklynVegan*, and hailed as "excellent" by *The New Yorker*. PAPER describes Greg as "the perfect combination of very good looking, hilarious and super-weird." Greg's comedic shorts have been featured on "Funny or Die," "College Humor" and "Jay Leno's Laugh Squad," to name a few, and his debut comedy album *Shame Wave* is available on aspecialthing Records.



Barry Rothbart

Now that we've gotten introductions out of the way, I had a chance to sit down and chat with the boys through the wonders of technology.

Dan Martin (Motif): Hey guys, how are you?

The Guys: Great. We just shared a peach. It was super ripe.

DM: Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions?

TG: I'm going to mind soon, but not yet.

DM: How long have you guys been performing respectively/together?

TG: Separately around 15 years. Together we did one tour a few years back. We didn't argue once.

DM: Is this your first tour together?

TG: Yes.

DM: Greg, have you always been good looking?

TG: Yes. Barry has never been though.

DM: Is this your first time in Providence?

TG: No, Passed through for a reason I can't remember.

DM: Do you have any favorite facts about RI?

TG: Yes, I just heard its the home of the fifth longest orgasm ever recorded. Amazing.

DM: Barry, you were named a "new face," what was your old face like?

TG: Riddled with eczema.

DM: Do you have any other stops in New England?

TG: Boston and Chicopee, MA and Brooklyn, NY.

And there we have it — the unflappable Barry Rothbart and Greg Barris. Inspiring us all to pursue our dreams. I'm glad they could find the time in their hearts and busy schedules to teach us the values of eating healthy and sharing. Joke's on them, however, as I asked way more than a couple of questions! Greg gives me a sense that he is not only modest about his looks, but honest about Barry's appearance as well. Which, of course, is probably why they get along so well. The key to a lasting friendship, after all, is honesty. So, please come on out to the Comedy Connection and put a former rash-covered face to a name. If all else fails, maybe we can try for Sixth Longest Orgasm ever recorded. And, if that fails, we can string seven together and lie about it.

A NIGHT OF COMEDY WITH BARRY ROTHBART AND GREG BARRIS. Wednesday, June 13 at The Comedy Connection. 39 Warren Ave, East Providence. Doors 7pm, Show 8pm. Tickets and info available online at ricomedyconnection.com

[McGyvering Your Summer](#)

Evil Russian spies have implanted remote-triggered heart-attack causing device in you. So using candlesticks, a microphone cord and a rubber mat, you construct a rudimentary defibrillator to jumpstart your heart.

Sure. Easy. We've all been there too many times to count.

But what would you do if you went out for your favorite summer activity and forgot your supplies? If you are anything like me, you avoid sunburn the old-fashioned way — by never leaving the house. Some believe that if you forget your sunblock, you can slather your body in mayonnaise, but what if you forget your favorite egg-based dressing? It can be difficult to find a laying hen at the beach. Perhaps you can convince someone to let you root through their purse and fashion a crude sunscreen from lip balm, hand sanitizer and melted Werther's Originals.

Now that you have skin protection handled, you check for your bathing suit. It's M.I.A and you have two options: work on you trucker's tan in your jeans and t-shirt or go skinny dipping on family beach day. This could be a great opportunity to alienate your in-laws and get that vacation from responsibility that only prison time can bring. If hard time is not your thing, then you need to think on your feet. Scan the beach and locate the nearest "bag lady" or "bag person." You know the type, more bags than things. Once spotted, relieve them of their bag closest to your waist size. Preferably with large handles. Next you'll need something to cut with. Gather some seashells and set them aside; they will potentially serve two needs. Using a jagged seashell edge, cut two holes in the bottom of the bag along the seam on either side leaving the middle or "crotch" in tact. Now slip off your clothes and slide your legs into your newly constructed holes, pull the bag up and secure it by using the large handles as suspenders. If need be, use pressure from those suspenders to secure two appropriately sized seashells over any areola one may want to obscure. Voila! You are ready to sunbathe and or take on the high seas.

And if you get all the way to the beach and realize you've forgotten your children? Just relax and enjoy the day.