

DareMe: Becoming a Sparkling Beatnik – There Will Be A Show



Hi Katie,

Writing to see if you'd be interested in "infiltrating" the Empire Revue for the November "Behind the

Scenes" show. We'd have you attend a couple of rehearsals, and put you in a sketch, plus the closing song. We thought, if it's cool with you and Motif, that this could be your dare for the month.

What do you think?

Cheers

Keith Munslow

- sent Oct 7, 6:42pm, aka, my birthday

My heart stopped. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the Empire Revue, it is a variety show that takes place on the first Sunday of every month. It is a mixture of sketch comedy and guest acts — usually musicians or comedians. The reason I nearly had a heart attack after reading that message was because in two and a half years I've yet to miss a show and being asked to be a part of it made me jumping-up-and-down happy as well as sick to my stomach. Most of my dares revolve around getting reactions from strangers; this was going to be a dare for my mind because it was gonna force me to overcome some intense fears. I do a lot of crazy things. You may even call me fearless. However, I'm saddled with severe social anxiety. I have so much trouble with my anxiety that if I get too nervous I evict my stomach contents. The thought of acting with these amazing people I've watched for three years made me nervous. The thought of singing in front of any of them made me want to lie down in the fetal position and cry. I almost did not take the dare due to nerves; however, it's basically my job to make myself as uncomfortable as possible for your entertainment, and this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If I didn't take it I'd be kicking myself for the rest of my life.

Challenge accepted!!

Katie Lewis

- sent Oct 7, 6:46pm

The Empire Revue revolves around a core acting group named the Sparkling Beatniks. This group consists of Eric Fulford, Kate Teichman, Casey Reagan, Tom Rajt, Alan Souza, Kelly Seigh, Melissa Bowler, Nicky Mariani and Sam Bell. Then the house band playing between sets is one of my personal favorites, Superchief Trio, which consists of Pam Murray, Joe Potenza, Johnny Cote and the man behind the piano running the show, Mr. Keith Munslow.

Heading to my first rehearsal I arrived at AS220 at 6:30pm on the dot. My knees clacking together with anxiety while I stepped into the performance space, stage manager Nicky Mariani, probably seeing nervousness painted across my face, scooped me up and introduced me to all the beatniks. Shaking hands and introducing myself was such a strange feeling. These are people who I've seen act for years and they had no idea who I was other than that girl who wore bathing suits, Halloween costumes and even duct tape to their show. That starstruck feeling settled in as the beatniks conversed pre-rehearsal. Kate Teichman came over and asked, "How ya' doing?" Words started spilling out of my mouth as if I was dying to tell someone, but also trying to convince myself I was fine.

"Good. Good. Nervous. But good. It's just that I come to the show all the time and I'm really nervous to be in the show with you guys and I'm just nervous," I said. Kate smiled and playfully rolled her eyes. "We're just a bunch of goofs here. Don't worry. Leave the anxiety at the door."

Just then, director and master of ceremonies Keith Munslow walked in. As he began setting up his Nord keyboard, the beatniks scrambled to set up tables and chairs for the group. As everyone came to sit around the table, I found a comfortable spot between Nicky and Kate. Keith explained my purpose to the group, and then they got right to work. Nicky took notes on what skits needed to be written and what needed work. Everyone split up into groups — approximately three per group — to work on writing. I had writing of my own to do. I wandered from group to group observing and taking notes. I was particularly excited to watch as Keith, Nicky and Tom pieced together lyrics creating the closing song, which has always been my favorite part of the revue. As the Beatniks finished their group work, they began to gather around the piano to help sing and write. I sat there in amazement thinking, “Are they speaking a secret music language?” It’s baffling, The wheels turn so fast in the minds of these creative individuals.

The song was finished and we did a full sing-through. I recorded it on my phone so I could listen and learn it for next week. I had a feeling that my memorization skills were not as developed as those in my company. Next on the list was to watch the Beatniks perform their pieces. Keith as director got the first crack at suggestions, then the rest of the Beatniks gave their two cents. They work so perfectly together; they are receptive and grateful for input and pat each other on the back whenever something comes out perfect. Before I knew it, my first rehearsal had come to an end.

As I packed up my notebook, the tone of the room slightly saddened, and the Beatniks’ faces washed over with concern. I realized they were talking about the Empire Revue’s very own star Melissa Bowler who had taken ill. The Beatniks chatted about how she was doing and who had paid her a visit. I felt oddly out of place in a room where such a personal topic was being discussed; however, it took all my energy not to tear up. Although I knew very little about Melissa, other than she was amazing in every form of entertainment she ever tried, I realized that we shared a similar problem. In that moment I was able to relate to what she was probably feeling. Through the years my health has been bad and even though my family has been there for me, I have felt very alone at times. Seeing the love written on the Beatniks’ faces, I could tell that they would do anything for Melissa. That warmed my heart when I realized that the Sparkling Beatniks are so much more than an acting troupe — they are family.

A couple of days later, I noticed my hair was really long, but I couldn’t afford a haircut. So I did what any mature 22-year-old girl would do. I complained about it on Facebook. I got a lot more replies than expected, one of which was from Melissa Bowler offering to cut my hair on stage at the Revue! Should I trust her with my hair? Well, I never was one to turn down a possibly fun/awkward moment. And bam! My haircut was written into the show.

A week later I attended my second rehearsal. I walked through the doors slightly more confident, having taken the first leap already. All the Beatniks came back with their skits transformed, knowing exactly what their adoring crowd wanted for comedy and how to deliver. A couple skits still needed revising, so the Beatniks split into groups. Once again, I wandered between the groups wondering how they put on this amazing show with only four rehearsals. I was particularly intrigued by a sketch that Kate Tichman and Casey Reagan were working on that spoofed a romance novel. Funny and sexy seemed hard to pull off at the same time, but these two masterminds pulled it off beautifully.

Now was the moment I was dreading. It was time to be put up on stage and placed into a skit. I’ve done some acting in the past, but this was a whole different ballgame. What I never knew about the Empire Revue is that a lot of their writing is improvised. Why wouldn’t it be? The Beatniks are master improv performers. But thinking on my toes? Not my strongest suit. So there I am, sitting on stage, dead silent

as Eric Fulford attempted to improvise with me. The poor guy just kept talking and talking, waiting for me to interject, which I never did. I just kept staring and nodding at whatever he said. Keith eventually cut in, realizing I needed clear instruction. I ended up in two scenes — one with Kate and Tom as a waitress in a cafe and then one with Eric as his patient. I now knew what to say and when I was on. The worst was over.

Before I knew it, rehearsal was over. I could have stayed forever watching and learning.

Sunday had arrived, the day of the show. It was 10:30am I was ready for morning rehearsal with all my costume gear in tow. We did a full run-through of all the skits and I was pumped. Stuart Wilson came in to help with choreography for the closing song. He gave me a ride home after rehearsal and I explained to him how nervous I was, and asked if he thought it was a good idea to let Melissa cut my hair. Stuart told me everyone is nervous their first time in the Revue, which I guess is true because every Beatnik I confided in shared a similar experience. Stuart talked about his experience with the show and told me how much he enjoyed being a part of the Revue whether with costume design, choreography or acting. "Keith is someone who will always help you out. He sets you up for success," Stuart said.

It was 6pm; the show was only two hours away! I went back to AS220 and watched as the band learned new songs on the fly. I helped the cast raid the Empire Revue closet for costumes and I was even awarded my very own bright red Sparkling Beatnik t-shirt! When Melissa arrived looking amazing, she asked me about what we were doing for the haircut. I told her I wanted layers and she assured me, "That's easy. I looked it up on YouTube. It takes like 20 seconds."

We were all business while we talked about the skits, but all I could think about was how much I wanted to share my health problems with her. With no chance of stopping it, the words bolted from my vocal cords, past my teeth, off the tip of my tongue and out of my mouth. I spilled how I heard she wasn't feeling well, and I knew what she was going through, and I've been there, and if you ever want to talk about it I'm here. She seemed a little bit shocked that I was so forward with my troubles and I'm not sure if all that came out of me with the hope of making her feel better or me feel better. Feeling alone is the worst feeling in the world. Sometimes having someone tell you their story is the exact medicine you need.

I waited downstairs in the green room. Guest stars, comedians and musicians began to arrive. The show started. I could hear the band playing that song that I've heard a million times. I heard Eric Fulford giving his introduction announcing the Sparkling Beatniks' names and I waited with anticipation to hear my own. I put on my white apron for my first scene as a waitress. Done! It went off without a hitch. Next up was the doctor scene. I just got to tell you I make a hospital Johnny look good! Then came the haircutting portion of the evening. I was nervous, but putting 100% trust in Melissa. We stepped out on stage and I took a seat in the high top stool that was waiting for me. Melissa was on stage having a couple of whiskeys and saying that this could be a disaster. I felt her begin to twist my hair on the top of my head into a ponytail. Not being able to see what she was doing was a little nerve-wracking, and all I could hear was the audience laughing. I felt her take a fistful of hair and chop it off. The audience gasped, but my hair came out pretty fabulous, I've got to say. Well done, Melissa!



It was time to do the closing song so I got up on stage and had a blast! Then it was curtain call and the pictures show me smiling ear to ear like I just had the best day of my life. When exiting stage left, a strange feeling hit. It's over? I don't want it to be over yet. That was so much fun! I want to do more! I want to see more! I want to sing more! I was riding on an all time high and I was ready for another hit.

I greeted my parents and boyfriend in the audience and they told me what they thought and how excited they were for me. Then we sat at the bar as we always do after an Empire Revue drinking Moscow Mules. Life was good. Before too long it was time to say my goodbyes and thank yous.

This was one of the craziest, most fun, fantastic dares I've ever done. If you've seen me wear duct tape and have seen my modeling pictures, you might wonder if acting was really that difficult. But this was a personal fear for me to get over and I did it and I loved every second of it. The most amazing part of being a part of the Revue was not seeing how fast they can write or how witty they all are, but it was seeing how strong the bond is between all of them. Seeing that they are in fact a family, and they stick together and produce a show every month without fail for eight years. As the closing song said, "Come hell or high waters, there will be a show."

The Empire Revue continues to perform the first Sunday of every month at AS220. They will also performing their second annual New Year's Eve show titled "Ring in the Night." The show will start at

10pm; however, there will be activities all day.

I can't thank the Beatniks enough for inviting me to be a part of this show and for sharing their stories with me. It's been a pleasure.

Check out the show! youtu.be/aCsePuLf2GU