

# Erin Foley's Comedic Sorta Homecoming



I talked to stand-up comedian Erin Foley via telephone from her home in California in anticipation of her two shows in Rhode Island next week. We discussed hoops, stand-up comedy and her love of RI.

TJ: Before we start, I feel like we could actually be friends. I did some recon on you and you played hoops and then studied acting in college and now you do stand-up and all three of those things are true for me as well.

EF: I was actually not an acting major in college. I've done little to no acting.

TJ: Oh, really? Ok, I must have read that wrong.

EF: No, no, I have a minor in theater, but I got my degree in American studies. But wait — you do stand up in Rhode Island?

TJ: Yes, a little. I will be performing at the Comedy Connection on the 29th.

EF: That's awesome.

TJ: Yeah. And you're also a big basketball fan. I am, too.

EF: I love it.

TJ: Yeah, me too. I played my whole life.

EF: Who's your team?

TJ: Well, I am from New England, but when I was younger I always loved Magic Johnson, and then Shaq. So I was a big Lakers fan, but I hate Kobe, so I guess based on geography I am a Celtics fan.

EF: Sorry, I am not a Lakers fan. I do not like the Lakers, but I would root for the Lakers over the Heat.

TJ: Who is your team?

EF: Well, I'm a New Yorker, before I moved to New England, so I'm a Knicks fan. But when I moved to

Rhode Island in seventh grade, my junior high school coach thought he was Larry Bird, and everyone here was such a Celtics fan so we went to so many Celtics games. It was awesome, so I definitely have a little sweet spot for the Celtics.

TJ: The old garden was such a great place to see a game.

EF: I mean, to see Larry Bird when you were 12 or 13 — I mean, or at any age — and you're playing basketball. It was like the greatest thing ever. Those teams were so great, and all those battles with the Lakers were just awesome.

TJ: I totally agree. We're about the same age so I was watching those games as well, and any time we could go to the garden and watch those teams was always great. I mean, even the Knicks who had Patrick Ewing, you never felt like they were going to take it away from the Celtics in the east.

EF: I'd always have one eye on the Knicks, but when I moved back to New York City in '96, the Knicks were somewhat decent. You follow sports teams through good, bad and ugly when they're your teams, but it was fun to be in NYC and have a little resurgence for the Knicks around then too, with Sprewell, and Alan Houston and Starks, and that crew, so it was kinda' fun to see them win a little. I'm more of a college hoops fan than pro. I think after the Bird era, and with Miami and its "super group" I've kinda lost my passion for it, so I watch a lot of college hoops.

TJ: I actually have some real questions that pertain to stand-up for you.

EF: I'd rather talk about basketball.

TJ: Oh, man. I would too, believe me, but if I hand this in, they'll be like, "What the hell is this?" So, have you written any farm to table jokes yet?

EF: (laughs) Working on it. I just feel like I am around all these cooking people.

TJ: Providence is very big with that. It's a huge farm to table restaurant scene. So if you had them, I am sure they'd go over very well.

EF: (laughing) Actually, I wrote it and I thought, "I don't even know what that means. But it made me laugh, because it seems like now you have to get the food as soon as its uprooted from the ground to their mouths, like there needs to be an express service and people are obsessed with this, which is a good thing! Everything local is actually good.

TJ: What are you reading these days? Are you reading anything good?

EF: First of all, let me just say that I am already loving this interview because every single person calls me up and asks "How did you get started in comedy?"

TJ: Well, I kinda stalked you online and wanted to stay away from the obvious stand-up or being gay questions.

EF: I would much rather talk about being gay than how I started in stand-up in 1999, you know...

TJ: Well, you've been doing stand-up longer than you've been gay, so it's a newer thing for you, I'm assuming?

EF: Yeah! I just started talking about the gay stuff and being gay maybe seven, eight years ago...

TJ: Probably because you heard about the Gay Mafia in Hollywood and you wanted in and that's how...

EF: Yes! Let me tell ya, I run this town! (both laughing) But I did want to spend some time back in RI, so I tried to figure out a way to perform there, especially in the summer. I think its going to be a lot of fun, and maybe a little chaotic. I mean, there's a drag queen, standing room, I think its going to be hilarious.

TJ: I think it will be a lot of fun. And you'll definitely have a good time.

EF: It will be totally fun. We've already sold about 100 seats. I can't wait. I haven't been back to RI, really, in about five years, so I am really excited to be there for the week. I am sure the drag queen will do something super fun, and then I will do my set and then we'll have some beers. I can't wait.

TJ: Where in RI did you live?

EF: I lived in South Kingstown.

TJ: Oh, wow. I am on my way down there right after this interview.

EF: Are you going to the beach? Or what are you doing down there?

TJ: My friends are in from NYC and we are going to the Matunuck Oyster Bar. If you are staying down in SK you definitely need to hit that place.

EF: Oh, that place is great. I actually worked for nine summers slinging fish at Captain Jacks.

TJ: Shut up!?

EF: Nope. Not gonna shut up!

TJ: So, are you reading any books?

EF: I am reading a couple books. Really good. If you know George Saunders, he's this amazing short story writer. His new collection is called *10th of December*. I'm knee deep into that one, and someone gave me a book called *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes. So then I'll bang through that one. I usually read a couple at a time.

TJ: What are you listening to right now? What music are you listening to?

EF: Well, I have a small problem with cheesy pop dance music. I run this show every month at the Hollywood Improv, and I think sometimes I work on the play list more than my jokes that night...

TJ: Is that the Gays R Us show?

EF: Yeah. It's so fun. One of the fun things I like to do is sometimes I'll go to iTunes and just download the top five cheesiest songs. The other day I found myself downloading Miley Cyrus and I thought to myself, "Something has gone terribly wrong." But I do like the cheesy dance. I just got the new JT, and the new Jay-Z *Holy Grail* album. And when I am not doing the cheesy pop, I love this woman, and I know I am going to say her name wrong (pronounces it perfectly) Emeli Sande'...

TJ: She's great! That song "Heaven" or "Lifetime." Did you just get her CD?

EF: No, I got it last year. A friend of mine saw her in concert somewhere and sent it to me. You know it's a rarity these days when you love an entire album. But her entire album start to finish is just quality. So that's been on replay for quite a while.

TJ: How about stuff that you are watching right now.

EF: Well, I like to take Sunday nights and Mondays off because I do so much club work during the weekends. Sometimes it's Wednesday through Saturday, sometimes it's Thursday through Saturday. By the time I get on the plane Sunday morning, I don't want to entertain anyone until about Tuesday. So I like to take those nights off. Sunday nights have been kinda fun because I have people over and we watch "Dexter" and "True Blood," which seems really dark, but they are both such good shows, and its fun to have them on the same night. And then I went to town on "Orange Is the New Black" on Netflix because it's so good. Have you seen it yet?

TJ: No. I haven't seen it yet.

EF: I've been enjoying the online TV. I've enjoyed watching it like that — the kind of gorge watching. I am never home; I'm traveling and then I get home and get so excited and just keep banging them out.

TJ: I've never seen "Breaking Bad," but I am excited to get started binging on that.

EF: Yeah. I heard that was good. My sister watches it and she said its unreal. I just don't know if I could tackle another show where I know I would have to pony up for seven seasons. It's like, I'll start now and then it's Christmas.

TJ: Yeah. Definitely. Who are your favorite comedians and who are your influences as a comedian? Who do you like to watch?

EF: I love to watch Maria Bamford. She's probably my favorite. Also we've done a whole bunch of shows together now, and she's the nicest woman off stage. I love when you put someone on a pedestal for so long, and then you meet them and they're wonderful. I love Wanda Sykes since the dawn of time. Bill Burr.

TJ: He's great.

EF: He's so great. I do love some angry ranting. Judy Gold I love. Brian Regan is to die for.

TJ: Is there anyone who's career you'd like to emulate? Is there anyone who you look at their career arc and say, "I could jump on that and be happy"?

EF: I don't know about emulate, but you know who's career I think is wonderful? Dennis Leary. That dude is so funny, and its definitely niche funny angry ranting, but he's like, "This is me, this is what I'm gonna do," and he's made fantastic television shows. He and his two producing partners, they don't make these flashy shows, but it's just good television. I think his career is just so impressive as opposed to a cheesy funny dude who makes bad movie choices and it's just like paycheck after paycheck. His is just a respectable career.

TJ: So you decided to do improv for a year as a kind of lark, and almost immediately got cast in a

Cameron Crowe movie (*Almost Famous*). What were your expectations then, and has everything played out the way you imagined?

EF: No. Not at all. When I moved to NY and started doing improv and then got into stand-up, it was just this thing that I did. I never thought it was a career and I had plans to go to grad school because I wanted to teach. My sister is a teacher and my mom and aunt, so this career has just been one surprise, honest to God, after another. So, I got a manager really quickly and she was like, "Go on this audition." So I started taking this acting class and it was terrifying, and I was like, "I can't do this" because it was plays and real acting, which I had no experience with, but I did like the class because it was interesting. I am such a nerd, because I wanted to read all the plays. Not necessarily act in them, but I wanted to read them. And I wanted to see other people act them out. That, to me, was interesting. So I went in and Cameron Crowe was there. I didn't know he was going to be there. And he loves stand-up comics and folks who can improvise, and that was what I was good at. I wasn't good at the acting, but I was definitely good at the improvising. So he liked me and all of the sudden, I was in LA on a movie set. And I was like, "How did I get here? I just started." So there were no expectations, there were no goals, I was just trying not to get fired. The first day I screwed up every line. I was so nervous. And everyone asked if I was going to move to LA, and I said, "No. I just got to New York." Meanwhile, the whole time I was thinking, "Am I gay?" It was a tumultuous time in my life. It's kinda like I did it backwards. It was an ass backwards process, but it was fun. We had so much fun. It was a wonderful experience.

TJ: What would you find more exciting: hitting a shot at the buzzer to win a game, acting in a Mamet show, or giving a mic drop comedy set performance?

EF: Hmm. Well. That's a really good question. Mamet is going to come in number three. If I'm being professional, I would say a drop the mic set, but if I'm really being honest with myself, it's the catch from Eli Manning to win the Super Bowl.

TJ: So it's football, it's not even basketball shot to win it? You're gonna go David Tyree on us?

EF: I'll do the jump shot to win it for sure, but my first love and obsession is football. I'll do the catch, wide receiver, end zone, spike the ball, we win. That's probably number 1, number 2 is probably jump shot, 3 is drop the mic, 4 is a Christopher Durang play.

TJ: Have you been asked to do the show "Drunk History" yet?

EF: No. I don't know those guys, but it seems so fun.

TJ: I watch that show, and I don't know what this says about me, but the first thing I think is, "These people sure can't handle their booze." But what would you want to talk about if you had your own "Drunk History" episode?

EF: (laughing) Wow, that's a really good question. Well, because I'm a lady and I am interested in women's rights, I think it would be cool to explore Susan B. Anthony or Harriet Tubman. Those type of civil rights or women's rights are really quite interesting to see how these movements got started. When there's so much on the line and you are pioneering... I don't even know if you consider it pioneering because you're thinking, "Shit, we gotta vote!" To me that is important.

TJ: You talk about long distance relationships in your act. Do you have any advice for people in long distance relationships?

EF: Yes. I do. Make sure you write this down. Don't do it! (both laugh) Do not, do not, do not do it!

TJ: (still laughing) That's good.

EF: I mean, we work on it. We try to make it work. We've hit some snags, but the snags are not as a couple; it's more the distance. Who's going to go where what weekend. She's to die for, but to get on a plane to see the person you are in love with, it's the pits. The worst.

TJ: Now here's my obligatory gay question: You have a zealous fan base, and though I feel comedy is truly one of the more meritocratic performance arts because if you're funny, you're funny, are you at all afraid of being pigeon holed as a gay comedian?

EF: I guess. I'm sure there is a lot of potential out there to not get stuff because I'm gay, but the experience I've had since I've started talking about being gay on stage has just been so wonderful and open and welcoming. It's part of my life, so I don't think of it that way. I think you're more pigeon holed as a woman than you are as gay.

TJ: Is there something you wished you talked about in your stand-up set that you just can't figure out how to work in? Is there something you are struggling to write jokes about?

EF: I wish I could talk about my parents more. They're adorable, and not in a bad way. I'm just very thankful to have such a great relationship with my parents. But for me, they're so funny, because they're so ridiculous. And my mom is just so particular and kind of neurotic and my dad is so funny to me. I try to write jokes, but I have to say most of them do not work. And I wish they did, because everything is relatable when you're in the middle of bumble weed and maybe the gay stuff isn't the most relatable, but parents are. I have to say that has always been my biggest challenge: trying to write about how ridiculous I think my parents are, but in a fun way.

TJ: Finally, RI just legalized gay marriage. Any chance that you are actually here to scout locations for your wedding?

EF: (Laughs) I think you'd have to ask my girlfriend that. If I ever were to get married though, I would have to say that if it didn't happen in New York City, which is my other home, it would be amazing to get married in Rhode Island. I love the state so much. It truly feels like home to me. I would be lucky to get married on the beach in Rhode Island.

Erin Foley will be performing at The Dark Lady August 22nd, and the Carousel Grille in Warwick August 25th. For tickets, visit [nbandp.com](http://nbandp.com).

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## Warwick Sewer System Rules Cause Confusion

The 30-year-old raised ranch was a good fit for Greg Chihoski and his wife when they bought it back in 2009. Chihoski had some extra money at the closing, so he paid off a \$1,700 assessment for the sewer line that been installed in front of his house just south of Conimicut, even though he wasn't hooked in.

After all, D.E.M. had tested his septic system and said it worked just fine.

Chihoski said he never expected to hear from the Warwick Sewer Authority again once he settled the debt. But a year and a half later he received a letter from the authority saying he *had* to hook up - and he was facing some serious penalties for not doing so.

"We never had any notice in that year that this was happening," Chihoski tells *The Hummel Report*. "When I called about the assessment, no one mentioned that. It was just boom, here's your violation. You're in violation of this. Right away it said \$1,000 fine and \$100 for every 24 hours. So right away it's like, 'Whoa. What happened?'"

Months turned into years and Chihoski said he couldn't get a straight answer from the WSA or City Hall. Then he heard nothing until a letter arrived June 3 saying his house was moving toward a tax sale in August - just 11 weeks away.

Chihoski panicked and went immediately to the city hall where he said an employee in the tax collector's office confirmed his house was not on any tax sale list.

"He asked to see the letter. I showed him the letter he told me, 'Save this for your lawyer.' He said, 'This is a threat. They're trying to threaten you into paying this.'"

Chihoski's case reflects the confusion we found throughout Warwick about who has to tie into the sewer system, which covers about 70 percent of the city. Many who are hooked into the system want to know why usage rates have increased more than 100 percent in the past six years. Still others want an audit of the sewer authority's books to see where millions of dollars of bond money have gone over the past two decades. And critics say the sewer authority has been overly aggressive in both hookups and billing.

Warwick sewer authority executive director Janine Burke acknowledges usage bills have increased substantially. "There were some major rate increases," she said. "One of the first jobs I got to do when I got here (five years ago) was increase the sewer usage rate. But it hadn't been increased in 10 years."

Burke said she understands why people are upset by the increases, but adds they need to put the rates into perspective. "If you take a look at what a typical resident is paying in comparison to other communities, it's not that outrageous. It just was extremely low before."

While most communities in Rhode Island require anyone with a sewer line in front of their house to connect, a special provision in state law exempts Warwick. Residents here don't have to tie in, unless ownership of the house changes hands. Burke says there are 3,000 households in the city with sewers available that are not hooked in.

So what about Greg Chihoski, who thought his house was going up for tax sale?

**Hummel:** I have heard from more than a few people that the WSA has been aggressive, in terms of hookups, fees, all of that. Is that a fair characterization?

**Burke:** No, I don't think so. I think it's a changed method.

**Hummel:** How in the world did that wording ever make it into a letter?

**Burke:** This is an unfortunate mistake, you know. I'll be the first one to tell you.

**Hummel:** These are some of the stories that get out in the community of 'Boy, you know what? They're really aggressive there and they want to get as many people hooked up.' But in my mind, that kind of crosses the line.

Burke did not respond, but nodded in agreement.

"It's like dealing with the Mafia," Chihoski said. "It felt like, okay they've got some power, they can make the rules. I'm paying my bills, I pay my mortgage, me and my wife work full time; it just feels like you're almost helpless. Something like this comes along and they threaten to take your house when you're doing everything else right."

The day after we interviewed Burke, she sent Chihoski a letter of apology and said he still has to hook into the system, but could apply to have the penalties waived by the board when he does.

Burke told us the authority is trying to do a better job informing people through local realtors about the mandatory hookup after a sale.

And what if Chihoski had know that back in 2009? Would it have been a deal breaker?

"Yeah, it would have been if we were looking at a \$3,000 to \$4,000 tie-in, we probably would have thought twice."

*The Hummel Report is a 501 3C non-profit organization. If you have a story idea or want make a donation to the Hummel Report, go to [www.hummelreport.org](http://www.hummelreport.org). Or mail Jim directly at [jim@hummelreport.org](mailto:jim@hummelreport.org).*

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## How Do You Turn a Bad Beer Good?

The Fifteenth Annual Newport Storm Luau drops on Fort Adams this weekend. RI's first microbrewery has been throwing this shindig for as long as I can remember, but that's not saying much with my memory.

Not only is this yet another beer event to benefit a good cause, the Fort Adams Trust itself, but it's going to be a great big bash, as always, when the Coastal Extremists decide to throw down. It'll feature live music from Roz Raskin and the Rice Cakes and the Torn Shorts, two local groups that have been livening up the New England Music scene.

There'll be even more food vendors than ever, a game pavilion, and of course, plenty of Newport Storm Brews and Thomas Tew Mai Tais. If you're not doing anything Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup>, head on over the bridge and have a blast. I hope to see you there.

Cheers.



What do you do with bad beer? I don't mean the generic, manufactured, cookie-cutter pilsners put out by the big boys. But what do you do when you pay seven or eight bucks, or an hour's wage, on a 22 oz. craft brew and it turns out to be ... well ... let's say less than exceptional?

It's a question that plagues many a beer nerd in search of the latest and greatest who find themselves with a very foul sour, or a stout that's been sitting on a shelf for so long it can be carbon dated. It happens sometimes, that a good beer from a great brewery will fall by the wayside and accumulate cobwebs while its flavor diminishes and it becomes nothing more than a bittersweet shadow of its former malty self. By now the hop flavor is all but unrecognizable and you find the prospect of finishing this yeasty abomination to be a daunting task that makes you eye the nearest drain and wonder, "Will I be ashamed later?"

Of course you will be. But fear not! Many a time I've picked up a brew that, while not exactly skunked, is significantly less than advertised, or maybe just too old to have that young zip it once did. I've found many a solution to this conundrum that most beer nerds may find a good way to put that lost money to good use.

1. Experiment: I've found that mixing beers can often yield significantly more profound results than your average Black & Tan. Mixing an old stout that's become little more than sugar water and alcohol with a younger, fresher IPA can yield you a very crisp little Black IPA that is a pleasure to drink. One can even combine one or more old brews that have been neglected by time to create whole new beverages that appeal to the more distinguished palate ... or you'll have a gross foamy mess that tastes like bong water. But damnit, it's worth a shot, isn't it? What do you have to lose?
2. Cooking: Need to get rid of that Cranberry Lambic from 2009? It should make an excellent turkey glaze! Have a Russian Imperial stout that you can't bring yourself to finish? Toss it into beef stew for a nice roasty flavor. Can't stand the wheat beer in the back of the fridge? Whip up some fried chicken batter with it. There's no end to the ways you can cook something amazing with old beer, even old bad beer. Combining stouts with things like brownies or even cookies can result in an interesting creation for your next party.
3. Turn bad beer into good beer: If you're a homebrewer, and of course I am, you find yourself experimenting with your brews all the time. Why not toss that ancient Belgian White into the mash of your next pilsner and see what results? You might be surprised. Or dump that malty porter into your next Irish Red and see it turn a richer shade. Sometimes this might not work, though. You'll want to think twice about pouring your old oatmeal stout into your next IPA, for example.

These are just examples, of course. Feel free to be creative and try something new. That's half the fun of craft beer in the first place after all. Until next time, cheers!

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## Trinity Opens its Doors and Performance

# Spaces to All



The happening on August 17, at 201 Washington Street in Providence, is a celebration, an anniversary, a Free-For-All, a ... BLOCK PARTY! Starting at noon, Trinity Repertory Theater, often viewed as the professional, perhaps a tad stodgy, theater at the center of town, is getting down and partying with everyone and anyone.

It is Trinity Rep's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and they want everyone to enjoy the occasion. The theater has not only survived change and challenges, but thrived amidst the broader family of theaters and artists growing in the Ocean State. On Saturday, from noon to 8 pm, Trinity will throw open its performance spaces both inside and outside to other theaters and artists throughout the state, as well as to the public. The entire event is free.

Lenny Schwartz's Daydream Theatre Company kicks it off at 12:30 pm with a short play written exclusively for the occasion, *The Nights We Spent*. Says Schwartz, "Daydream and I are excited and honored to be kicking off the events that day in the Chace Theater. And it's really exciting to have so many artists together in one block. And my play is family-friendly!"

What to do while waiting for a performance to begin? Take a tour of the building, learn backstage secrets, take an acting workshop, see a demo, mingle with the resident actors, buy a prop or costume or hit the food trucks! There's also live music scheduled through the afternoon and evening.

Other companies represented will be the Barker Players, Contemporary Theater, Elemental Theater, Epic Theater, the Gamm Theater, Manton Avenue Project, Mixed Magic Theater, Ocean State Theater, Community Players, Wilbury Theater Group, and Trinity's Young Actors' Studio Group. Trinity's Young Actors' Group, which enjoyed its largest enrollment ever this summer, will present *Fifty Years in Five Minutes*.

Myah Shein, PR manager for Trinity, says, "This is also about reaching out and making those connections with other theaters, as well as the community." Of course this event also celebrates the kick-off of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season of plays at Trinity. Their Box Office will offer special pre-sale

discounts of 10% off *Oliver!*, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* and many of the other great plays in the 50<sup>th</sup> season.

“To say that I am thrilled to be inviting Rhode Island to join us in celebrating Trinity’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season is an understatement,” says Curt Columbus, artistic director. “This season has a strong, theatrical heartbeat.” Excerpts from some of the productions will be presented on Saturday. The full season starts in September with John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, the quintessential American story of the strength of family and the enduring human spirit.

Together, general manager Katie Byrnes and associate artistic director Tyler Dobrowsky shouldered the huge task of bringing the celebration to fruition. Says Brynes, “Whether you are a long-time Trinity Rep enthusiast, have kids in the education program, take in a show every now and then, or are new to town, we want you to join us (on Saturday).”

This is truly a special occasion when one well-established theater company openly invites other theater companies, new and old, to create a real-time event. Don’t miss this one-time-only party for residents and visitors alike in Rhode Island. For more information and a schedule, visit Trinity’s website at [www.trinityrep.com](http://www.trinityrep.com) or visit Trinity Rep’s Facebook page.

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## Scene and Heard: It’s Almost Time ...



Way back when I joined the Hollywood East community, I happened upon a movie trailer that made a lasting impression on me. The level of filmmaking was rarely seen in RI, and the effect was downright bloody disgusting. Under the moonlight, amidst the thick fog creeping in, we see cold glittering eyes, a spray of fresh blood and the promise of something deep inside that’s almost, well ... *Almost Human*.

I posted the trailer to as many groups and pages as I could, because I was proud that this film came out of our little state. I later learned that the producers lived right here in Rhode Island. Enter Anthony Ambrosino and Nick Delmenico of Project 989, and Josh Ethier and Joe Begos of Channel 83 Films. They all have produced other films, but this one continues to draw attention for them. It's been hailed as a cross between *The Thing* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.



Writer/Director Joe Begos said, "I've always wanted my first film to be a gritty, dirty, low budget splatter movie made with my friends, just like Sam Raimi and Peter Jackson did for their first features, and it feels amazing that it actually happened and that people are responding to it." About shooting in his home state, Joe added, "I love the feeling New England adds, I grew up loving Stephen King and in his stories the setting of Maine is like its own character. I wanted to elicit that same feeling with Rhode Island." That he did - the film feels like a throwback to the old school retro horror flicks, from the coloring to the creepy sets to the monster movie fog reflected in the eyes of the person - or thing - that is terrorizing the people of the small rural town.

Getting into one of the five most important film festivals - The Toronto Film Festival - is a pretty big thing for the boys from RI. Josh Ethier is lead actor and also editor on *Almost Human*. He added, "Joe and I have been making films together since we were teenagers, and to go from Western Coventry to the Midnight Madness program at TIFF is a dream come true."

Rhode Island is represented very well both behind the camera and in front of it. The cast includes some great New England actors -Vanessa Leigh, Tony Amaral III, Susan T. Travers, Michael LoCicero, Jami Tennille, David Langill, Diana Porter, Andre Boudreau, Kevin Cahill, and many more. Graham Skipper, a California resident, is in a lead role as Seth Hampton. I've had the pleasure of working with some of these folks, like Tony, Susan, Kevin and Andre, and I hope I do so again.

The Toronto Film Festival runs from September 5<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup>. Soon *Almost Human* makes its debut to the world in the Midnight Madness lineup. Check out their trailer and get a sneak peek into what this madness is all about. <http://tiff.net/filmsandschedules/festival/2013/almosthuman>

I see a road trip coming up soon for the makers of this film, but more importantly, I see a bright future for the cast and crew of *Almost Human*.

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# Scene and Heard - Chad Verdi: Fly Low, Soar High

Flying under the radar is his style. The result, however, is soaring high among the stars. Literally.



For Chad Verdi and his home-grown East Greenwich company, Verdi Productions / Woodhaven Production Company, this is certainly the case. He has produced six feature films in Rhode Island over the past four years. *Bleed for This* is his most ambitious project to date, with an estimated budget of \$16,000,000.

This film is scheduled to begin principal photography in Rhode Island this fall. *Bleed for This* tells the true-life story of world champion Rhode Island boxer Vinny Pazienza as he recovers from a near fatal car accident and goes on to win three additional world boxing titles, one of the most incredible and dramatic comebacks in sports history.



Oscar-winning producer Bruce Cohen (*American Beauty*, *Silver Linings Playbook*) will join Chad, along with Oscar-winner Martin Scorsese (*The Departed*, *Goodfellas*), Emma Tillinger Koskoff and Noah Kraft as producers on the project. Writer/Producer Ben Younger (*Boiler Room*, *Prime*) will direct the film, slated to start principal photography in Rhode Island this fall.



As I chatted with Mr. Verdi from his Martha's Vineyard home, he surprised me by saying that film is not his first love. Technology is, as he has made a name for himself in nuclear waste and homeland security. He is also the largest independent shareholder in a tech company called NXT-ID. The company will soon be trading on the stock exchange as early as next week under the symbol NXTD, just having received SEC approval; business partner Gino Pereira serves as the CEO.



"I don't need much sleep - only two to two and half hours per night - and I've never missed a soccer game or anything my kids were involved in," Verdi says. As a matter of fact, he chatted with me while doing an 8-mile walk that he does every day - and never misses a breath. His energy is just as impressive as his accomplishments, but he puts his family first always. In fact, his family plays a big part in his film business. Chad's wife Michelle is his talent supervisor, and his son Chad Verdi Jr. often puts in 15- to 18-hour days on set.

Verdi has been very successful in his other endeavors as well, including companies in property, food and the restaurant business after graduating East Greenwich High School in '85. He makes it a point to meet the key players in anything he becomes involved in to make his vision happen. In fact, after taking it easy for a bit in 2004, he learned all about the film business while working on the Vinny Paz story, and optioned the rights to it in 2009. He maintains a low profile here in his home state, but is well-known in LA and the entertainment business there. Verdi's latest two productions, *A Bet's a Bet* and *Army of the Damned*, have just wrapped. His two previous films, *Infected* and *Self Storage*, are being released through Screen Media and each will reach more than 100,000,000 homes through Universal's VOD platform, starting this month with *Infected*.



Steven Feinberg, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Film & TV Office, who is presenting Verdi with the Producer of the Year Award on August 8 at the Biltmore Hotel, said, "Over the past four years, Chad and his talented team have consistently invested in Rhode Island, putting hundreds of citizens to work, utilizing local resources and building a filmmaking foundation. He has created an amazing infrastructure by mentoring students and helping

local crew learn the business from the ground up. Chad has one of the most aggressive production schedules we have ever seen," added Feinberg. "He plans to produce six feature films locally over the next 24 months. With his proven track record, we know he will succeed. We could not be more proud of him for making so many dreams come true for so many Rhode Islanders in our beautiful Ocean State."

Verdi cites Senator Sheldon Whitehouse as being instrumental in helping him develop his projects. "I was introduced to Martin and Emma through Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, who has been a great help to me in developing these films," Verdi said.

I'll have to agree with Mr. Feinberg. We know he will succeed, there's just no other alternative for Verdi. He continues to bring jobs to RI - and more importantly, he inspires and brings the dreams of many Rhode Islanders to fruition. One of those Rhode Islanders is Tom Paolino, an up-and-comer in the acting biz. Paolino has been in all six of Verdi's films, and he hopes to have a role in the Paz film as well. I'll be doing an article soon on Mr. Paolino, so stay tuned for that, as there are some very exciting things coming up for him in the future.

Verdi's success in the film industry, along with the many new projects that are being done in the area only prove that Rhode Island is becoming a hot spot for the industry and is able to draw big names.

With that being said, remember that the RI International Film Festival is this month, from the 6<sup>th</sup> through the 11<sup>th</sup>. And check us out on "Take Two," the film review show I do with Nick Iandolo online. Nick gets to pick the next film, and I'm really hoping he picks *Pacific Rim*.

Film is rolling, people.

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## Alt-Nation: This Week's Hot Shows



**Slim Cessna's Auto Club**

In doing my column for the print edition, somehow I overlooked that Slim Cessna's Auto Club were coming to The Met Café this Wednesday. This promises to be easiest one of the best shows of the summer! Cessna and company roll into the town for the first time since 2011. Their shows are always

barnburners featuring a mix of country, rock, folk and gospel. It's really a band that's impossible to pigeonhole. When I interviewed Cessna in 2011, I asked how he explains his band to people who don't know them. He laughed and said, "I stick with rock music because it would take too long to understand the other stuff." Slim Cessna's Auto Club started out in Colorado, but have since split to various areas of the country with Cessna taking up residence in Pittsburgh. Cessna did live for a couple of years in Cranston where he fronted a side project called The Blackstone Valley Sinner's Club. That time in Rhode Island made its way into the Auto Club's repertoire with tunes like "Cranston" and the ever show-stopping "He, Roger Williams." The Auto Club remind me of a traveling dustbowl troupe of musicians that mine the deep roots of all things American music. They are also one of the best live bands of the past 20 years. Don't miss them!

Slim Cessna's Auto Club, The Sterling Sisters, and The 'Mericans rock The Met Café on August 7.

### **Wheatus & Math The Band**

Wheatus were one of those one-hit pop-punk wonders in the 90s that has managed to trudge on. Everybody knows the hit "Teenage Dirtbag," but few other catchy numbers off that debut album. Wheatus isn't going to go all serious or pull a Flaming Lips where they have one novelty hit and turn into everyone's critical darlings. You're pretty much going to get what you know as far as fun loud pop-punk with Wheatus. Math The Band from Boston is also one hell of a time as far as fast indie dance pop 'n' roll that makes this a very attractive show.

Wheatus and Math The Band will rock AS220 on August 7.

### **The Evens**

The Evens are an indie rock band composed of Ian MacKaye on baritone guitar and Amy Farina on drums with vocals duties shared. MacKaye is, of course, a legend from his time in the seminal DC hardcore band Minor Threat and later with Fugazi. A diehard believer in D.Y.I. ethos, MacKaye founded Dischord Records, which has since put out many brilliant records through the years. Moshers looking for something similar from The Evens aren't going to find it. The Evens come off as more an acoustic indie rock outfit. Still I have faith; Mackaye is a talented mofo and an engaging performer.

The Evens return to AS220 on August 9. Please note this is an early show with doors at 7:30 pm and no opener. The Evens will be onstage by 8 pm.

### **Foo Fest**

AS220's annual takeover of Empire Street known as Foo Fest will once again happen on August 10. There will be live music all day and night, indoors and outdoors, as well as the usual assortment of games, vendors, records and food trucks. The lineup can be a little hit or miss from year to year, but this is one of the stronger ones in recent memory. Among the local bands, I recommend checking out the garage rocking Atlantic Thrills, 70s tinged Clyde Lawrence band, roots rocking Dylan Sevey & The Gentlemen, the headed for certain doom punk of Lolita Black, local punk legends Neutral Nation, Vudu Sister, VulGarrity, Whore Paint, and even a Saint Jude reunion. At this time there is no big national headliner, but it does say that more acts are likely to be added. I don't think Foo Fest needs one given the quality of local acts already booked. Foo Fest is always a summer highlight!

As220's Foo Fest will take over Empire Street on August 10. The event runs from 1 pm to 1 am. The



current list of scheduled performers is as follows: 14 Foot 1, Atlantic Thrills, Black Pus, Cannibal Ramblers, Clyde Lawrence Band, Downtown Boys, Dylan Sevey & The Gentlemen, Father Finger, Littlefoot, Lolita Black, Lunchbagg, Medusah Black, Neutral Nation, Saint Jude, Timeghost, Unicorn Hard-on, Vudu Sister, VulGarrity, Whore Paint, and Zukrewe.

### **Odds & Sods**

Chain and The Gang, Ravi Shavi, and Pixels are at The Columbus Theatre in Providence on August 7. Psychedelic Clown Car is winding up their time of a band with a few last shows, including this Thursday, August 8, at The Met Café with Soma Nova and Comic Book Keith. Psychedelic Clown Car had a good run releasing over 50 CDs(!) during their weekly residency at The Spot. Singer/guitarist Matt Martin will be focusing his music efforts on his other bands, The Wippets and Lying Bitch & The Restraining Orders. The Nymphidels and Groundhaws are at The Parlour on August 8. Sick Puppies, 10 Years, and Satellites Fall are at Fete on August 9. This is a big week for Satellites Fall as their new single, "Strange New Day," is debuting on WBRU this week. Del The Funky Homosapien, Symmetry & Dox, Eddie Rap Life, and DJ Nook bring the hip-hop to The Met Café on Saturday August 10. Skinny Millionaires and Tall Tall Trees are at The Tavern on Broadway in Newport. Against Me singer/guitarist Laura Jane Grace comes to Fete on August 13 in an event billed as the "Transgender Dysphoria Blues."

*Email music news to [mclarkin33@gmail.com](mailto:mclarkin33@gmail.com).*

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## **A Second Wave of One-Act Plays at The Artists' Exchange**



Ramping up the pace established by the pleasantly disjointed Wave One, The Artists' Exchange continues its 8th Annual One Act Play Festival with a second wave of original short plays at the new black box space at 82 Rolfe Square. Where Wave One seemed a little hit or miss, Wave Two is a much more consistent affair, with more attention to production values, making these plays seem less like skits and more like fully realized works. Tom Chace mans the helm for most of these, lending a consistency of style, with two pieces directed by Kate Lester and David Tessier, respectively.

The first half kicks off with one of two plays authored by the ubiquitous Ben Jolivet. *The Resurrectionists* is a darkly funny buddy piece centering around two old friends who meet for a little

tomb raiding but mostly discuss their directionless lives and failed dreams. It's *Clerks* in a graveyard, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Nick Viau and Alex Rotella establish an effortless rapport that almost sounds like improvisation at times and this bittersweet little piece peters off with the knowledge that nothing may change for these two, but it's still been interesting to eavesdrop on their Tom and Huck stoner banter for a little while.

Jolivet's second offering, *Hair of a Dying Winter*, is an interesting concept with a delightfully amusing performance by Barbara Murray-Johnson as a hostess whose dreams of the perfect Christmas party are dashed by an unexpected blizzard. The solution? Invite Winter herself to the failed bash (since she would obviously have no problem navigating the roads) and make the best of things. It's a quirky little play right up until the last notes (with director Chace providing cocktail carols in the background) and might be a fair cautionary tale for all the anxious hosts who need to put down their issues of *Martha Stewart Living* and relax.

Greg Mandryk's *September in Biddeford* starts slow, almost uncomfortably so, with a mother-daughter conversation on a porch that meanders through family issues in a humdrum manner (although, Mom is conspicuously smoking a bowl, which may or may not shed light on what follows) that goes on just long enough to allow us to write off the piece as trite and underdeveloped. Just when we start to doze, all hell breaks loose and the National Guard storms the beach to mount a desperate battle against killer mutant lobsters ("...and they're pissed off about the rubber bands!"). Really. Complete with mad scientist and meta-aware soldiers, this plucky group of defenders realizes that the only means of defeating the crustaceans is Lifetime TV-style overloads of estrogen. Really. So, mother and daughter are spurred on to greater catharsis about dad's death and long lost lovers while Guardsman Jenner "mans the acoustic guitar." And, lest we think that the lobsters remain outside of the fourth wall, we get to see one in all its glory (apparently pre-cooked) like something from a B movie outtake, crashing its way onshore for the kill. This is silly, clever fun that manages to send up several genres at once while keeping tongue firmly planted in cheek.

Mark Harvey Levine's *Workin' on the Railroad* closes the first half with a charming exercise in wordplay set in a saloon where the proprietor (a wonderful performance by Bob Macaux, who also pleases as the Scientist, McTavish in the preceding lobster war) and his customers, all converse in old-timey song lyrics. It shouldn't work, but it does, mostly because we see the setups a mile away and are laughing before the punch lines even land, which is the point. Clearly an audience favorite, *Workin'* winds up as one of the most solidly realized pieces of the evening.

The second half delves into weightier territory with the Kate Lester-directed *Civilization*, written by Jason Irwin. A slightly longer effort than the rest, *Civilization* attempts to pack hours of treatise into a small package and mostly succeeds. It's a *Mad Max* world where Samuel Beckett reinterprets Pink Floyd's *Animals* and throws three archetypes of the Western paradigm into a wasteland on the way to an elusive, and possibly illusory, paradise in the desert. Us and Them, the circular logic of history, the subjective nature of safety, love and conflict ... it's a lot to cover in a short tale, but Blanche Case, Alex Duckworth and John Carpenter grasp this slightly overwritten material with gusto and Lester's direction keeps the tension high. *Civilization* is one of those works that seems custom-built for a post-show talkback and will play well in academic settings, but almost swallows its own tongue in this particular package.

The Alex Platt-penned *Mercy Me* is a beautifully crafted piece cleverly directed by Chace. What starts as a *Stand by Me*-type encounter with a dying dog tests the relationship of two boys who are forced to

confront mortality. What could have been a simple tale fluidly evolves into a poignant and wonderfully delivered journey of continuing loss. David Kane gets to shine as the boy who grows to discover that questions of life and death do not get easier with age.

*Colors*, by Robin Stone, poses one question: what if art were deemed too subversive to exist and its mediums were classified as controlled substances? It's a one-joke play, but still entertaining and Jim Shelton, who appears throughout the evening, gives his strongest performance here as a law officer who breaks up a shady deal by an underground "art dealer" selling contraband painting supplies ("if you like that sample, come back and I'll get you some raw sienna"). Shelton's monologue says what Stone wants to get across about the conservative backlash to freedom of expression, and while we're not quite sure where any of *Colors* is going, it's still fun to watch.

The closing piece, directed by David Tessier, borders on the insane and winds up as the evening's most accomplished production in terms of design. Jeff Pothier's lighting is used more effectively than in the first wave of shows and the set recreates a comic book store down to the tiniest details. Alex Rotella gives a bravura performance as a fabulously wealthy comic book geek who has reinvented himself, *Kick Ass*-style, into his favorite character, complete with costume and sound effects. *Shrewman VS Shrew Man*'s plot is almost irrelevant, but it includes plenty of (identically) masked heroes and villains (Zach Searle's glasses over his mask is particularly genius) and a wickedly vaudevillian performance by Joe Mecca. Like or hate it, *Shrewman* ends with a kick line and a nod to a 70s superhero icon, so how bad could it be?

The second wave of One Acts at Artists' Exchange is a strong collection of well-written, directed and performed pieces that are unlike anything else on RI stages at the moment. Running through August 4<sup>th</sup> at their Theatre 82 space, Wave Two delivers a vibrantly eclectic showcase of work that may have you questioning that next Christmas party - or at least if you should serve lobster.

Performances at 7 pm, Sunday matinees at 2 pm. Theatre 82, 82 Rolfe Square, Cranston, RI. Visit <http://www.artists-exchange.org/oneactfest> for more details and tickets.

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## HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu in Motif



Cthulhu, the legendary ancient creature conjured from the imagination of HP Lovecraft looms large in this month's issue of Motif. Here are three parts of our feature coverage. Look for an upcoming interview with Cthulhu later this month:

Lovecraft's Legacy: Cthulhu's Call Still Echoes, by Adam Schirling

Necronomicon Rising - info on the August Convention, by Mike Ryan

We Are Providence - the local Lovecraft Community, by Michael Bilow

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## **VOTE in the 2013 Motif Theater and Film Awards**

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- They send us nominees from each category within their particular expertise.
- We throw the results into a survey and deliver it to you, the, "We the people."

- Get your vote on

So chose wisely, its your civic duty.  
Thank You!