

Good-Natured Political Satire: Charlie Hall and the Ocean State Follies

Charlie Hall started the Ocean State Follies in 1992. Over the next two decades, it became the renowned and definitive political comedy and satire act in Rhode Island. He retired the show after 20 years, taking a hiatus for five years, but recently revived it.

The Follies have a regular monthly PVD combined dinner and comedy show at Via Roma on Federal Hill, the next on July 28. Other shows in Woonsocket, Cranston and South County are expected to be announced soon, Hall said.



Charlie Hall's Ocean State Follies 2018

"The past four shows that we've had have been sell-outs starting with Chan's... and at that show were [former Trump campaign manager and current independent candidate for governor] Joe Trillo and [Cranston mayor and Republican candidate for governor] Allan Fung. I knew they were going to be there, so I did specific material just about them, and they loved it, the crowd loved it... It was the Ocean State Follies presents 'Lady and the Trump' - [Governor] Gina [Raimondo] and Trump as kind of a Sonny and Cher hosting their own show... The next month we brought [first lady] Melania into the show and [North Korean dictator] Kim Jong-un," Hall said.

"Then this month at Via Roma on July 28, just when you think you've run out of material, Joe Trillo runs aground in the ocean, hits a rock or whatever and takes on water... so this show is going to be centered about Joe Trillo and his little mishap there," Hall said. "I'm writing a parody of the 'Gilligan's Island' theme song... [sings] Sit right down and you'll hear a tale,/a tale of a fateful yacht/that started on a Charlestown beach/and ended on a rock.'"

Referencing Trillo's controversial decision to run as an independent rather than a Republican to avoid facing Fung in a primary he would likely lose, I told Hall, "I made a Twitter comment with a bit of a harder edge about that, 'Metaphor piles upon metaphor as Joe Trillo runs his \$2 million, 65-foot yacht aground in his quest for the white whale that made off with his leg and his Republican Party

membership.” Hall laughed and said of his own comedy style, “That’s very funny, very clever, but I can’t be too ‘inside baseball,’... I’ve had friends, comics who say, ‘You’ve got to get more vicious in your material, you’ve got to hit it, you’ve got to hit their funny bones, you’ve got to go for the jugular,’ and I don’t always do that.”

“If I tried to write these kind of things, they would tend toward the vicious. I’d have Joe Trillo chasing Trump around with a harpoon,” I told Hall. He laughed and replied, “You know what gets tough sometimes is I’ve been around so long. I know Joe Trillo and his wife; I know Allan Fung and his wife... sometimes I know these people and I have to decide just how vicious I want to get with them.

“It’s difficult these days if you do... jokes about Trump, half the crowd likes him and half the crowd doesn’t,” Hall said. “Usually when I do skits about Trump, we portray him as kind of a dummy. He tells the crowd, ‘Things are going well. I just bombed, Sicily, uh, Syria. And North Pakistan, uh, Afghanistan. Them too.’ The crowd still likes to laugh... but you know there’s a big chunk of the crowd that loves him.

“My audience is usually that 35 to 65 demo[graphic] that read the paper or listen to talk radio... As you get older, maybe you get more politically aware and Rhode Island is basically a blue state. I’m all-around poke-fun-at-everybody, nobody gets too hurt and nobody gets too riled up.” Asked whether the current political climate is drawing more people into politics, especially young people, Hall answered, “Whether you like Trump or not, he has done something that has energized... because Trump is such a megalomaniac and a media whore.” Hall said that Trump “is what you call comedy gold. Comedy gold! Just watch Steve Colbert every night do, not even a regular eight-minute, but a 20-minute monologue on Trump. Every night.

“My show is not overly political. Whether it’s the Big Blue Bug, whether it’s the PawSox stadium, whether it’s traffic tickets from the speed cams, it’s stuff that everybody can relate to,” Hall said. “People come to my show to have a good time, laugh at some of the topical events that are happening, and some of the local politics and some of the national politics.”

Rhode Island produces so much material ripe for comedy, Hall said, “If I used all the things that happened and all the scandals, the show would be 12 hours long. We’d have to pass out water and toilet paper for the crowd just to stay there.”

Information and tickets: oceanstatefollies.net

Video trailer: [youtube.com/watch?v=8u3v-Kzzxpo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u3v-Kzzxpo)