



The Carmel Pine Cone

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“BOOMER HUMOR’ HAS THEM ROLLING IN THE WHEELCHAIR RAMPS

A SECRET about comedy is that much of it is inspired by pain, anguish, frustration, anger, and the grim reality that life can be anything but fair.

Don't believe it? Ask your grandparents, who will probably laugh more than cry when they tell you about arthritis, hair loss, hearing loss, memory loss, fading vision, incontinence, constipation, cataracts, internet frustration, and so many other annoyances, large and small, that come with aging.

Santa Cruz comic Richard Stockton, age 69, and his small army of hilarious friends — all nightclub headliners — have tapped into this bottomless pit of dark material, along with decades-old nostalgia, to create “Boomer Humor,” an ongoing series of shows they perform at the Carmel Foundation for appreciative oldsters.

Warning to baby boomers: Apply plenty of Poligrup before entering ... these guys know where you're ticklish, and aren't afraid to poke you there until your teeth clatter onto the floor. “As a comedian, what you really want is to get an audience to laugh until they lose their air,” Stockton said.

Stockton, a grizzled veteran of the California comedy scene, and rising star Kellen Erskine provided double-barreled humor for a large, appreciative crowd on June 29 — the fifth in the series at the Carmel Foundation.

‘From miniskirts to minivans’

Stockton performed solo in the first show, and has since been paired with Dan St. Paul, Will Durst, female comedian Cat Simmons (amid her “Empty Nest Tour”), and Erskine, who at 37 is by far the youngest of that group — much too young, in fact, to be a baby boomer.

Kimberly Willison, director of development for the Carmel Foundation, said the shows have been very popular.

“We get tremendously positive comments about what a great way comedy is to start off the weekend,” she said. “We even had quite an age range in our most-recent audience, including people in their early 20s.”

Stockton has aged admirably for a guy who has spent most of his adult life staying up too late in smoky barrooms, barking jokes into microphones that reek of whiskey and beer. His grey hair cascades from beneath a cowboy hat and tumbles over his collar. He performs with a guitar, making observations such as:

“We've gone from hi-fi to wifi ... from miniskirts to minivans ... from hot pants to hot flashes ... from Oxfords to orthopedics ... from the senior prom to senior — (long, trouble- some pause) — senior moments! That's it! Senior moments!”

Midway through his act, he retrieves his guitar and breaks into “Sixteen Tons,” the old Tennessee Ernie Ford hit (released in 1947). Everybody sings along ... and they remember all the words. In a previous show, the audience joined him in a rousing rendition of the theme song from “The Mickey Mouse Club.”

“Humor comes from our pain, and boomer humor is easy to write. All I have to do is look at our audience and mention pay phones, and I get a reaction. They miss payphones!” Stockton said. “It's also nice to be talking to an audience who knows what Donna Reed looked like, and remember Roy Rogers and Dale Evans.”

Stockton and his friends are filling a gaping void in the lives of folks who miss seeing Bob Hope, Bob Newhart, Phil Harris, Red Skelton, Jack Benny, George Burns and the generation that followed: George Carlin, Steve Martin, Richard Pryor, Rodney Dangerfield, Robert Klein, Flip Wilson, David Brenner ...

“I miss the old-time comics. I don't relate very well to most of what I see on TV these days,” said Art Keating, 74, a Seaside resident who attended the show with a friend. “These fellas made me laugh. They also made me wanna drive my old hot rod.”

The shows — which cost \$25 at the

door for Carmel Foundation members and non-members alike — are tailored to their audience in at least one other way: They start at 5:30 p.m. and end by 7 p.m. Call them “early bird specials.”

“I have to admit that I'm not really used to performing with so much sunlight streaming through the windows,” Erskine quipped.

Stockton, founder and front man for the Planet Cruz comedy series in Santa Cruz, also performs “Boomer Humor” with Durst and St. Paul at venues like Kuumbwa Jazz Center in Santa Cruz (Aug. 26) and Angelica's Dinner Theatre in Redwood City.

“I also go to Arizona every spring and do RV parks. Oh yeah, my career is on fire,” he said with a laugh. “You walk past their RVs in the morning and hear Fox News blaring through the windows. The most talked about thing all day is, ‘When is Happy Hour?’ These are folks who are thrilled to have a second chance at life with no responsibility. I love performing for them.”

The Carmel Foundation series — which is summertime only -- concludes for the season when Stockton returns Sept. 28 alongside another comic, who's yet to be announced. More about Stockton can be found online at richardstockton.com.