

Times-Herald

Jeff Applebaum on the Zio Fraedo's comedy menu

By Rich Freedman

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Jeff Applebaum headlines Matt Larson's 'Vallejo Comedy Circuit' show at Zio Fraedo's March 19. (Leo Hochberg/Courtesy)

Forget martial arts or a weapon. Growing up in Queens, N.Y., Jeff Applebaum realized it was a good joke -- and a swift pair of legs -- that worked well against the perils of the street.

"If you get a mugger to laugh, you'd distract him long enough so you could run away," said Applebaum, a veteran stand-up headlining Matt Larson's monthly "The Vallejo Comedy Circuit," with the next installment March 19 at Zio Fraedo's restaurant.

Then again, it's a toss-up whether Applebaum would rather stare down a couple of clenched fists or perform at some of the more challenging gigs he's played.

Take that dental convention.

"It was early in my career and the dentists and their staff were sitting four hours in the morning when I arrived at noon," Applebaum said. "They wanted to rinse, not listen to me. Thankfully, one table laughed and I escaped with all my teeth."

Eventually, the South Bay resident polished his act that somehow complemented his "real world" training in hi-tech and business.

While juggling several entrepreneurial projects, Applebaum still performs 10 to 20 comedy shows a month.

"I'm able to combine some of my interests by using humor and comedy to drive home specific points," he said. "I have some exciting things in the works around all of this."

As loyal as Applebaum is to his craft, he's ultimately devoted to his wife, three kids, and his Jewish heritage. The performer takes appropriate religious holidays off -- "Unless the money is good," he joked -- his children's birthdays, and the day of his son Josh's Bar Mitzvah.

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It's Applebaum's family that indirectly is responsible for the comic keeping his act clean.

"Most of what I talk about are observations that I have as a native New Yorker living in California, mostly about my wife and children or my daily experiences that should be relatable to the audience," Applebaum said. "I've tried to avoid using profanity on stage because I take my children to some of my shows and I'd like them to avoid much of the vocabulary I had growing up. Also, more TV and corporate work is available if your act is clean."

However, Applebaum noted, "I think it's important to express anger or frustrations about a topic when appropriate and it can be done without describing the functions of your body parts."

Though he appreciates most of the non-comedy jobs he's had -- including his role as Joey Bishop in the Sandy Hackett production of "The Rat Pack" -- Applebaum knows the power of humor.

"Laughter is one of the greatest joys in life, next to sex and eating pizza in New York, in that order," he said. "If you have the ability to make people laugh, you can break down walls and open up communication. People tend to feel connected to you if you can make them laugh."

Besides, he added, "starting in junior high school, if you could be funny, the girls would like you."

Applebaum sees only good in performing comedy in Vallejo and if it's at a restaurant, the better.

"I'm glad it's not in the kitchen. Much too noisy," he said.

As for Vallejo's challenges, "so many cities are going through the same things right now," Applebaum said. "Vallejo's a great place and it has hard-working people who love their town."

If you go

What: The Vallejo Comedy Circuit

Who: Jeff Applebaum, Maggie Newcomb, and host Matt Larson

Where: Zio Fraedo's, 23 Harbor Way, Vallejo

When: 8p.m. Friday, March 19

Tickets \$15

Info: comedyatthecantina.com

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