

## **Sitting down with Andy Ofiesh**

By Rich Trombetta

Naked, alone and with a bottle of beer in his right hand, Andy Ofiesh stepped on stage to begin his comedy routine in front of an audience of strangers.

On Tuesday, Oct. 3, Ofiesh, 51, did what he has been doing almost every month for the last 14 years. He hosted the Naked Comedy Showcase at ImprovBoston in Central Square in Cambridge, where he and a group of comedians delivered jokes to a sold-out crowd that was visibly uncomfortable yet overwhelmingly supportive.

Ofiesh, a full-time information technology employee at Harvard University, founded the showcase after a life changing moment in 1999. While he can frequently be seen doing comedy throughout Boston, he has become particularly known in the local stand-up community for his naked routine.

“The crowd responds to the vulnerability,” Ofiesh said. “We create a safe space for the performers and the audience.”

Ofiesh sat down with Northeastern University student Rich Trombetta to talk about what inspired him to begin this unique art form, why the show has been so successful and what it is like to stand naked and tell jokes. What follows is a condensed version of their conversation.

### **Q: What was the inspiration for the showcase?**

A: In 1998 I got really depressed. I saw a therapist and he said I needed to work on intimacy and do things where I might find women that I liked so I went to a retreat at HAI (The Human Awareness Institute) and enrolled at a stand-up comedy class at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education.

### **Q: And that gave you the idea for the showcase?**

A: Not exactly. At the retreat participants could do entertainment and I thought why not go all-in. I decided at the last minute to get naked and get up and do a stand-up routine. It was my first time being naked in public and my first time doing comedy.

**Q: How did it go?**

A: It was a transcendental experience. I blew the roof off the joint. I destroyed those hippies.

**Q: What jokes did you tell?**

A: I instinctively made jokes why we were all there. The whole retreat was a great set-up.

**Q: Can you give me an example?**

A: There was a let's play doctor demo with two facilitators where they toured each other's bodies and genitals. Then we had to pair up and do show and tell. Then they made us say vulva. I opened my mouth and said, 'let's all say uvula.'

**Q: How did you take that experience and turn it into a show?**

A: It took a while. I started doing comedy and I knew I wanted to do a naked show. I asked all around and everyone said no. Even ImprovBoston. I asked again and they ultimately said yes. It wasn't until 2005 that this got started.

**Q: Were there rules you had to follow?**

A: It's actually pretty simple. No tips on stage. No sex acts. We can't touch anyone in the audience. Can't put your fingers in your mouth. Basically we have to make sure we aren't a strip club.

**Q: What are some memorable moments from past shows?**

A: We once had a dominatrix in the show. Her gag was that she was going to floss someone's teeth in the audience. No one would volunteer so I had to volunteer. She had my head in her lap and started flossing away. It was more intimate than I thought it would be. The bit flopped because my teeth were so clean.

**Q: What does your family think of this?**

A: My mom? She said, 'Oh so now you're doing *that*.' They're not surprised. My brother came to a show and I called him a perv, a very supportive perv. I'm an odd bird. I have strange interests.

**Q: Such as?**

A: I got into Bitcoin. I collect board games. I have a ton of those. I do hot yoga. I've been to naked yoga.

**Q: How about your girlfriend?**

A: We met at a Tantra workshop. She thinks the show is awesome. The first six months we were dating she came to every show. She once got up the courage, took her clothes off and came up and told a joke. It was great.

**Q: And co-workers?**

A: I work at Harvard in the information technology group. I just stopped caring about what people think about me. I told some of them. There was one guy who came to a show and recognized me and he went around telling people. Whatever.

**Q: How do you get the other comics to perform with you?**

A: They all come to me. I never tell anyone they should do this. You have to want to do this. It's really kind of [expletive] up and scary as [expletive]. But if you can do this you can do anything. You get up there and nothing bad happens.

**Q: Are they nervous?**

A: Look. Whenever there's a thing you have fear around there is safe ground on the other side of that. That's where the fun is. It's worth taking a look at that.

**Q: Where do you go from here?**

A: I'm not trying to really do anything or send some type of big message. Too many comics are focused on the next thing instead of where they are. You have to be mindful. Hey, as long as no one else is doing this I have the number-one naked comedy show.

**Q: Any other words of wisdom?**

A: Want to join us tonight?

*The Naked Comedy Showcase takes place the first Thursday of each month at ImprovBoston in Cambridge.*