Mighty Monkeying Around

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Okay, so Saturday Night Live isn't giving you the comedy fix that it used to. Stand-up is pretty boring. And Roseanne is just beginning to grate on your nerves. Comedy ain't what it used to be. Sounds like a job for Precision Man and Trigger Boy, two of the mainstays of the Mighty Monkey Power Hour.

A pack of rogue comedians and lofty theater types with an interest in the lowbrow, the eight-member cast of Mighty Monkey Power Hour debuted in November at the Maintenance Shop in the Memorial Union.

Sampling the traditional SNL format—quick skits that at times teeter on the edge of comedic insanity—the Power Hour is quickly gobbling up a cult following of comedy-starved Iowa State students.

Pioneered by Matt McLarty, a political science major and director of performance in the Student Union Board, the Mighty Monkey Power Hour was hatched out of love of laughter. Under the influence of theatre department professor Patrick Gouran, McLarty combined his lust for comedy and his adoration of the word monkey—"it's a funny word, monkey. Just think about it."—into Iowa State's only sketch comedy troupe.

To remain true to his idealizing of the zany, though, McLarty offered a different origin. "The show is directed by Sir Smokie del Frakenstein, a mythological 70s icon who disappeared in 1980 and reappeared to direct the Power Hour. We all follow him closely and worship him as an actor."

Whether the cast of the Power Hour can be called a cult or not, McLarty couldn't solidify the Power Hour alone. He called in Nate Mooney and Daniel Fairall, both veterans of Iowa State theatre.

Once the two had hopped on McLarty's rollercoaster of comedy, the three did anything but take themselves seriously. And now, with an expanded cast, the Mighty Monkey Power Hour is fully armed for a comedic onslaught. All they need is a few ideas.

To conjure up the ten or so skits for each show, the members of the Power Hour throw out ideas from all angles. "We go into a sensory deprivation chamber for two hours and come out with all these ideas," McLarty said.

Once the ideas are on the table, the cast uses a bit of American know-how to weed out the ones that aren't up to Mighty Monkey standards. Products of Mighty Monkey's formidable brain power have included the "Gostmen," which are foulmouthed creations of a Nazi experiment in World War II, the "Mimes of Doom," now deceased but revived in "the Next Generation," and the rather depressed messenger of love, "Heartboy." Jim Walden, Martin Jischke and the Government of the Student Body have also become Monkey fodder.

"We'll usually do whatever comes to mind, but I'm the most content when I get to put on my Elvis costume," McLarty said.

More importantly, the actors just have fun with the skits. If something works on stage, it works. If it doesn't, then it doesn't. This attitude is one of the few things taken seriously by McLarty and the rest of the crew. After all, nobody is perfect.

No sketch comedy show would be complete without special musical guests. The groups who get a chance to play seem to appreciate the extra exposure. One local band, Lemming, even went so far as to write a theme song for the show.

Of course, all the nice guy stuff is really only a diversion. Mighty Monkey wants to take over the world, and the group is fighting the battle on many fronts. The cast is scheduled for a television spot on channel 9, Iowa State's student-run cable station. It is beginning a Mighty Monkey Morning Show on KUSR, the student-run radio station. And it is organizing "Monkeystock," a small concert on the Terrace during Veishea featuring local bands that have played on the Power Hour. And that's just in Ames. With performances at universities around Iowa, the Power Hour is hitting the road to spread monkey propaganda.

- Jeff Inman and Monique Nicodeme