

CLOSER LOOK

Yuk-Yuks

No, a Yuk-Yuk is not a new type of junk food or an ending to a bad joke, but a new comedy cabaret in Toronto.

Opened last month, Yuk-Yuk's founder and director Mark Breslin explains its creation simply: "A bunch of us got together and decided we needed a home for itinerant comics."

For now, the club operates out of the basement of the Community Hall at 519 Church Street. The quarters are rather cramped, and in the long, thin room the view of the stage isn't always the best, but these set-backs seem to be accepted by the crowd as a matter of course.

It was the atmosphere of the club the creators were concerned with. "What we wanted", says Breslin, "was to run a club that has comic definition from the moment you walk in until the moment you leave." As you enter the club, you are confronted by a pair of eight foot high glistening lips, yukking at you from the stage. Campy rock 'n roll from the 60's spews out of the noisy, low-fi system, followed by a muddled rendition of 'God Save the Queen', which ends suddenly with the sound of a car crash.

Breslin, a dapper MC, greets the audience and introduces the night's line-up. Each Wednesday there is one feature performer, and a host of other comics. Amateurs are not paid for their routines, but if all goes well they could be invited back as feature performers at a later date.

Because of the wide variety of talent, ranging from very funny, to a total bomb, the MC has to be on his toes at all times. "I try to keep the show moving as fast as I can," says Breslin. 'Keeping the show moving'

miserably he is either hooked off the stage or presented with "The Worst Comic of the Night Award," accompanied by a free meal of bagels and iced tea. It's not difficult to determine who needs

line-up included Jay the Juggler, Peter Grosse, a comic-singer, several stand-up comics, and Tony Molesworth, a ventriloquist. Intermission entertainment was provided by Evelyn Datl, who played the mysterious invisible piano.

There are basically two types of comics who appear at Yuk-Yuk's — amateurs who have never performed before and want to get the feel of an audience, and professionals who want to try out new material. Sometimes the amateurs go over better than the professionals.

Breslin, who was Director for the Arts at Harbourfront, and who also directed Ryerson's RIOT '76, says Harbourfront's cancellation of the Bohemian Embassy spurred him to go ahead with Yuk-Yuk's. Although comedy is very healthy in Toronto, he felt that outlets for comedians were lacking. "Toronto acts as a magnet for comedians from all over English Canada," says Breslin.

The club has been packed every Wednesday since it opened. The cover charge, a mere one dollar, is directed towards the cost of running the club and paying the feature performer. The best seats in the house are gone by 8 p.m. although the show doesn't start until 8:30, so it pays to get there early.

Breslin and his partner, Joel Axler, plan to expand the club in the near future. "There seems to be quite a demand for this sort of thing," says Breslin, "and if the people want it, we'll do it. That's Yuk-Yuk's motto."

— Madelaine Drohan



photos: christopher darling

Above: Yuk Yuk's MC, Mark Breslin. Below: Some amateur comedians try their routine out on stage.

involves rescuing comics who begin to flounder on stage. Yuk-Yuk's has solved this problem by creating a special Yuk-Yuk's hook and the "Yuk-Yuk's Worst Comic of the Night Award."

If a comic is doing

rescuing and who doesn't says Breslin. "Once the audience all leave for the washroom at the same time, I know the comic's beat."

The performers are not only stand-up comics. On one particular night, the