



ON TAP **BUSTER**

COMEDIAN RALPHIE MAY

By Alfredo Flores

Back in 1989, **Ralphie May**, then a college student in Arkansas, got the opportunity of a lifetime by winning a contest to open for his childhood idol Sam Kinison at a local comedy club. When May bombed and began cursing at the audience before being booed off stage, that dream turned into a nightmare and a crash course in what it takes to be a stand up comedian. To top it off, Kinison then jokingly told the audience that May would never be in show business again. Ouch.

For most, hearing such a thing would be devastating, especially at the age of 17. But May has tough skin, as does his audience. May holds no punches, has complete disregard for political correctness, and is brutally honest — which caught the attention of Kinison.

"Sam said there's no edge, there's no boundaries in comedy," said May in an interview with *On Tap*. "The only rule is being funny. If it's funny, it's good."

Kinison took May under his wing, advising him to move to Houston and become part of the so-called "Houston Comedy Mafia." Without much of a comedy scene in his native Arkansas, May joined the mafia, and never looked back.

Fast forward almost 20 years, and May is now a long-time stand-up veteran whose wide-eyed, clean shaven, rotund, multi-chinned, baby-faced appearance makes him look far younger than his 36 years. He's one of the country's most popular comedians — consistently selling out venues that seat between 1,500 and 3,000 people — and was recently voted one of *Variety Magazine's* Top 10 Comics to Watch. May, who has a couple Comedy Central specials under his belt, was the first to get a standing ovation on the *Big Black Comedy Show*, and shot to fame as the runner up in 2003's "Last Comic Standing" reality TV show.

May continues to shock his audiences, poking fun of everything and anyone: those who wear

"The only rule is being funny. If it's funny, it's good."

weaves and mullets, obese people, people who talk back to the movie screen, even the, um, height-challenged.

"I'm an equal opportunity offender," said May, who was heckled by some 27 little people in Baltimore a few years ago — a group he joked equaled like 13 real sized people. "It's a comedy club, it's a theater. There's a reason the lights are down low... so everybody can laugh. When the lights are out, you're not rich, poor, black or white. You're just the audience."

May returns to D.C. later on this month for one-night only at Lisner Auditorium. The upcoming presidential election has May excited about a candidate for the very first time.

"This is the first time I felt I could vote for somebody," said May about Barack Obama. "But I gotta be honest with you, I didn't know he was black into mid-January. I thought he was Puerto Rican. And Obama even sounds kinda Spanish to me. Como se llama Obama?"


It's not only politics that has May excited. At one point he weighed over 800 pounds — the result of a car accident at age 16 that sent him into a coma for 10 days. With gastric bypass surgery, he has shed half his weight. He's a father for the first time, daddy to a baby girl named April June May (His friends joke it's a stripper

name, but May defends the choice by saying, "strippers have names of cars they can't afford, like Mercedes and Lexus"); and he's married to comedienne Lahna Turner, who opens for May when they tour together.

But May's decision for the risky gastric bypass wasn't so he would be accepted by society, or get more acting roles, but rather something far more important.

"I wanted to live," he said. "I had a beautiful girlfriend, who's now my wife. I've got a beautiful baby girl. I've got a lot to live for. I can't be messing around."

Another source of his comedy is his family life, and he's quick to defend his act.

"Some people are just so reactionary," he said. "They called me anti-Semitic because I make cracks about Jews. My wife's a Jew, we made a Jew. I think I'm doing the work of Christ here. When's America going to realize, why can't you take a joke?" 

WHO: Comedian **Ralphie May**

WHEN: Friday, Sept. 12

WHERE: Lisner Auditorium
(730 21st St., NW, D.C.)

TIX: \$29

INFO: 202-994-6800; www.lisner.org