

Thursday, October 2, 2008

**Neal Rubin**

## Lawyers and journalists will go wild at Detroit Press Club Steakout



The mayor's going to jail, the economy's going to hell, and the Detroit Lions are going nowhere.

Pure comedy gold, baby.

Two traditional evenings of locally produced laughter pop up this month, and there's nothing like foolishness, disaster and incompetence to make a comedy writer sit upright in the middle of the night and reach for a pen.

The annual Detroit Press Club Steakout is Oct. 29 at the opulent MGM Grand Detroit. The yearly public show for A (Habeas) Chorus Line is Saturday at the slightly less opulent Berkley High School.

"I must admit we're a little concerned that we won't have any material for this year's show," says Tim Kiska of WWJ-AM (950), one of the Steakout's co-chairs.

He's kidding.

"The day Sharon McPhail announced she was running for mayor, we almost shut it down," says Justin Klimko, the lyricist for A (Habeas) Chorus Line. "How can you be funnier than that?"

He's kidding, too. Mostly.

Humans have an instinctive knack for turning bad news into good material. ("You should have seen the look on Ook's face when he saw the saber-toothed tiger!") These last few months, instinct has been working overtime. As Mark Lezotte of A (Habeas) Chorus Line put it, "It's hard to do comedy when reality is so ridiculous itself."

### **Lawyers can be funny**

(Habeas) Chorus is a small mob of singing, dancing lawyers who first came together 16 years ago for a bar association dinner. Their name is a play on habeas corpus, the right to challenge the constitutionality of some unlucky mope's detention. If you were a lawyer, you'd think it was hilarious.

While they mostly play private parties, they show their faces to paying customers every October just to

prove to their spouses they haven't spent all those rehearsal nights in a bar.

Klimko, a partner at Butzel Long, says their set list is changing almost daily as one bit of nonsense trumps the last. They've put together an entire medley for the mayoral mess, including "Wasn't There a Party?" to the tune of "Wasn't That a Party," and a version of a Temptations classic they call "Can't Get Text to You":

*I can't turn back the hands of time, although I wish I could.*

*I can't shut the papers down, although I think I should.*

*Oh ... I can't hide what we did in that hotel,*

*'Cause they've got messages from my SkyTel.*

#### **Those rascal writers**

The Press Club Steakout is a descendant of a more off-color version that once featured Mayor Coleman Young dialing in from Hawaii and greeting the guests with a cheery, "Aloha, bleeper-bleepers!"

It's still bawdy here and there, and still off the record, but it's considerably funnier. Among the highlights is the Steakout Lifetime Achievement Award, given to an individual who has shown a lifetime habit of providing fresh meat for hungry journalists.

Defrocked Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick presented last year's award to former WXYZ-TV (Channel 7) anchor Bill Bonds. Kilpatrick is being sentenced the day before the dinner, which makes his presence unlikely, but Bonds will be there to palm off the 2008 award on Geoffrey Fieger.

Co-chair Edward Lapham says it will be "perhaps the largest combination of egos on one stage in the history of mankind."

Lapham, executive editor of Automotive News, went to Detroit Redford High School and Wayne State University and has worked downtown since 1972. The city "can be frustrating and mind-boggling," he says, "but it's our city and we love it. If we can't have a little fun with it, who can?"

Jay Leno, for one, every chance he gets. David Letterman, too. But for two fall nights, it'll just be us laughing at ourselves, keeping all that comedy gold in our very own pawn shop.

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