

The Laugh Floor Comedy Club: A Sneak Peek

by Dave Marx, PassPorter Guidebook Co-Author

Walt Disney World's newest attraction, The Laugh Floor Comedy Club at Magic Kingdom, is scheduled to open in early 2007. That doesn't stop folks from hoping to get a sneak peek at the attraction now (see our Updates). On our recently concluded visit to Walt Disney World for MouseFest, we learned that the show is in active rehearsal, and is occasionally opening for public "tests." Since MouseFest had wrapped up on Monday evening, we had scheduled one "off" day for ourselves on Tuesday before heading home, and because we wanted to spend that day in Magic Kingdom, we decided to swing through Tomorrowland to see if we might get a lucky look at Imagineering's latest.

Just how lucky were we? Soon after we arrived outside the theater (new signs for the attraction proclaim that it's coming soon) the doors opened and a throng of guests issued forth including, as it turned out, several old friends from the RADP online community. They gave us a brief, enthusiastic review of the new attraction, and someone managed to learn that another public test would take place in about 45 minutes! We took care of our rumbling tummies and returned about 35 minutes later, prepared to camp out on the doorstep. After about 15 minutes without a hint of activity, Jennifer headed off with Alexander and his Grandma Carolyn to try to get him a haircut at the Harmony Barber Shop on Main Street. I stayed behind, and about ten minutes later was rewarded for my sloth when the doors opened and Cast Members emerged to invite nearby guests to try out the attraction. A minute later my cell phone rang - Jennifer wanted an update. I told her I had just gone inside, and she must have had some help from Tinker Bell, because within a few minutes we were reunited in the pre-show area.

The Laugh Floor Comedy Club is based on Disney-Pixar's Monsters, Inc. Located in the same space occupied by Timekeeper in the Tomorrowland Metropolis Science Center, hosts Mike Wazowski and the always-sour Roz are on hand to generate the laughs that now power the city of Monstropolis. Mike introduces three would-be comedians (four, if you count heads, three if you count bodies), who take their turn trying to tickle our funny bones and fill the canister full of laugh energy. The attraction is the latest evolution of the concept found in Turtle Talk with Crush at Epcot's The Seas with Nemo and Friends (and at Disney California Adventure's Disney Animation attraction).

The new show's pre-show area has been redecorated, but still resembles

the pre-show area for Timekeeper. On the walls, in place of the technical diagrams of Nine-Eye and the time machine are technical diagrams that explain the laugh energy-capture process. A bulletin board on the left-hand wall includes reviews of past comedy acts (definitely take the time to read this). Video screens play animated messages that set the stage for the attraction, including an invitation to guests to "text" jokes to Mike and Roz via cell phone (text to 42319, start your text with MIKE or ROZ and include your name and hometown; normal text messaging charges apply). Your joke may not be included in the show you view (or at all). The guest-supplied jokes we heard came from people in places like Glendale (California), suggesting that Imagineers were submitting some or most of the "texted" jokes.

The theater doors opened, and we entered a totally-revamped theater. At the front of the theater is a large, central screen flanked by two smaller screens. In place of the level, seat-less CircleVision theater setup from Timekeeper, we found a traditional theater with a sloping floor and row upon row of bench-style seats facing the stage. The grating voice of Roz "encourages" guests to move all the way down to the end of the row. This is one case where nobody would dare disobey! The seats are less than comfy, made of plastic with no body-accommodating curves, just flat slab seat bottoms and seat backs with barely-rounded curves at the corners. The seat bottoms are also a bit higher than normal for no apparent reason, so your legs are more likely to dangle than stretch out. Perhaps it's just that monsters need slightly different seating than the humans that will be present for most shows?

Like Turtle Talk with Crush and the early prototype "Talk to Stitch" at Disneyland's Innoventions, the attraction is a combination of live performance and real-time, computer-generated animation. Live performers back stage provide the voices (two actors provide all six voices, according to our sources), and the on-screen movements of the computer-generated characters are influenced by the live performer's own actions, especially their lip movements (getting a computer-generated character to move its lips convincingly while an actor ad-libs dialog is no mean feat). As with Crush, a cast member circulates about the audience with a microphone and the characters on screen interview the guests. Another twist is added to this show, as there are now video cameras trained on the audience so we can see the guests being interviewed or otherwise incorporated into the act.

The show moves along briskly, with Mike Wazowski introducing comedy acts, Roz dropping them down a trap door if/when they bomb, and the acts themselves doing their best to get laughs. This is live comedy folks, and Disney has drawn upon its extensive experience with live,

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improvisational comedy to make things work. Cast members have been recruited from Pleasure Island's Adventurers Club and Comedy Warehouse, and no doubt from among the many "Streetmosphere" performers in the parks. Based on our preview, though, the cast has been given an especially tough job. The entire show runs about ten minutes, which is precious little time for any comedian to warm-up and amuse an audience. Clearly, Disney's show producers and writers recognize this. Following the show, an Imagineer came out and asked several questions regarding the various comedy acts - which did we like best, which needed the most work, etc. There was also a small army of Imagineers at the back of the theater throughout the show, taking notes.

All in all, I'm cautiously optimistic about this show. Yes, as with any live comedy show, there will be times when none of the jokes connect, and other times when folks will be rolling in the aisles. Speaking as a long-time fan of the Adventurers Club, where they've been putting on essentially the same show with only gradual evolutionary changes for many years, I'm sure Disney's cast members can pull it off. Repeat visitors will learn the show nearly by heart, and will savor the subtle and not-so-subtle changes that come with each new, live performance. I'm looking forward to seeing this again, the next time we're down at Walt Disney World!

About The Author: Dave Marx is the co-author of many PassPorter travel guides, including the bestselling, award-winning "PassPorter Walt Disney World."

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