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BY JENNAH BOOTH

Circus of the absurd

Caleb Duffy's dark, whimsical, clown-fueled comedy

Comedian Caleb Duffy looks like James Franco's double in *Pineapple Express* if he rode a unicycle.

Rolling up on one wheel, arms flailing to keep a wobbling center of balance steady and grinning behind sunglasses, Duffy props his unicycle on a chair outside of Temple Coffee Roasters on a recent spring morning.

"This weather is great," he says. "You can't juggle or unicycle if the weather is bad out."

Weed delivery driver by day and comedian by night, Duffy is first an entertainer at heart and a stoner by proxy. The end of a three-month marriage sparked his comedy, which is fueled by a creative chaos that he channels into a one-man show featuring his alter ego, Wino the Clown.

Often, Duffy's work, which also includes hosting a monthly comedy night, veers into the absurd, but it's about making people happy.

"Like, it's kind of ridiculous to be unicycling, but you see cars stop and smile," Duffy says.

Off stage, Duffy is pleasant and laid-back. On stage, he embodies Wino who, he says, is a true foil of himself—a dark and drunken clown.

"I am pretty happy and I try to be [a] source of light and a source of joy," he says. "[But] Wino the

Clown is pretty much an alcoholic, heartbroken mess."

Duffy didn't always want to be a comedian. As a teen living in Citrus Heights with his parents, he dropped out of high school to pursue mixed martial arts. He went pro at 19 and destroyed his knees, hips, shoulders and jaw in the process.

Duffy endured six surgeries within one year. Procedures that were meant to heal him, however, pushed him to use over-prescribed pain killers and left him unable to walk for almost nine months.

"The opiates make your breathing become very shallow and they make you feel like you're drowning," he says.

Cannabis offered a respite. "Weed has always been like this voice in my head that's like: 'Breathe! Breathe deeply!'"

Duffy says that pot, Kid Cudi and juggling were psychological preservers during his stay at rock bottom. He eventually pulled himself from that mental loop after marrying his ex-girlfriend just three days after reconnecting with her.

Post-nuptials, the couple trimmed weed on a farm in Colfax—a skill passed on to Duffy by his father as a teen.

The marriage ended after just three months, and that's when Duffy's comedy career launched. He found doing stand-up therapeutic.

"I think that's why there's so much self-deprecation in comedy, because if you can shine this light on this dark part of you, and it makes them laugh, it makes that part of you completely OK," he says.

Duffy spent the next few years working open-mics and honing his one-man show. In 2018, he took off his clown nose to tour as an opener for Hobo Johnson and the Lovemakers. The opportunity gave Duffy a whiff of success, playing to his largest crowds and inspiring him to refine his craft.

Now, Duffy hosts the monthly Kava Comedy Kick Back show at the Root of Happiness in Rancho Cordova and Davis, with David Samuel, a local comedian and writer.

Samuel says his friend's skills set him apart from other local comedians: "He just has so many talents it's unbelievable."

Both comedians paint Wino the Clown's show in fragmented scenes of giving birth, Wino berating audience members and comedian Alfonso Portela dressing as a baby.

"It's circus, stand-up comedy and music," Duffy says about the late night, public descent into the wildest parts of his brain. "I put everything I have into them." □

Check out the Kava Comedy Kick Back show at 8 p.m., Friday, April 26 at the Root of Happiness Kava Bar, 1949 Zinfandel Drive in Rancho Cordova.