

WHAT IF CONFERENCE

The 4th annual WHAT IF Conference
Where nonprofit & business leaders, along with corporate & community funders connect for a day of inspiration and discovery

THEME:
INCLUSION & EQUITY



KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
Pamela Ross, Vice President of
Opportunity, Inclusion & Equity at the
Central Indiana Community Foundation

Presented by
**THE IMPACT
FOUNDRY**

THE
WHAT IF CONFERENCE
February 4, 2020
All Day
McClellan Conference Center

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2/2 OSCAR SHORTS 2020
3:00 PM ANIMATED
5:30 PM LIVE ACTION | 8:00 PM DOCUMENTARY

2/3 OSCAR SHORTS 2020
2:00 PM DOCUMENTARY
6:00 PM ANIMATED | 8:30 PM LIVE ACTION

2/4 OSCAR SHORTS 2020
2:00 PM DOCUMENTARY
6:00 PM LIVE ACTION | 9:00 PM ANIMATED

2/7 • 7:30 PM ALIEN

2/14 • 10:30 PM POETIC JUSTICE

2/15 • 10:30 PM THE LOST BOYS

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A&C



The real Johnny Carson was at STAB!
Comedy Theatre all along.

ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH HANSEL

BY MAXFIELD MORRIS

Desk job

Johnny Carson lives again

It was a cold November night, in a room where fragrant oil marinated the bones of a hardwood floor. A group of seven people united to practice a truly bizarre ritual, one that at that moment was certainly the only one of its kind on Earth.

They were re-enacting, in its entirety, a 1977 episode of *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, preparing to perform before a live audience a few days later at STAB! Comedy Theater.

The once-every-two-months show comes from the mind of Stephen Ferris—and the combination of outdated jokes with the odd smattering of celebrities and regular people can be hilarious.

Somehow Ferris got the idea to start faithfully recreating episodes of the show. “It just popped into my head,” Ferris said in his living room, with the cast of the November show.

Ferris reached out to the folks who run the Johnny Carson archives with the idea. They were fine with it, so the show had permission to use transcripts of *The Tonight Show*. Next, Ferris had to choose from about 20 years of episodes; the database didn’t have very many episodes from before 1972.

“I made a rule. I knew people were going to be saying, ‘You’ve gotta do this episode, gotta do that episode that has Robin Williams,’ or some other well-known guest,” Ferris said, “but I wanted to just do random ones, or off nights. ... So I made a rule that every episode we do has to be from the same date as the performance.”

That left about 10 or 11 episodes to choose from—most nights, episodes from a show that Ferris had never seen before.

“I was kinda sheltered as a child, and wasn’t really allowed to watch TV or anything, so I’d never even seen a full episode of it, probably before I started doing this,” Ferris said. “I knew who he was and everything, I just, y’know, had never watched it.”

Well, Johnny Carson was the king of late-night television. Even today, he’s esteemed and ubiquitous with the genre. But it’s still strange that he would have a revival in the Sacramento comedy scene, and that there would even be a space for an act like that anywhere.

But that question wasn’t on the mind of Court Hansen, a local comedian who played Mark Hamill in the November show. “When I first heard about the show, I was like, ‘That makes sense. That’s a show,’” Hansen said. “It was like it already existed.”

But it didn’t. It had to be envisioned and brought into reality—and that took a vision.

“My original idea for doing it involved having someone who was completely unlike Johnny Carson, and miscasting the whole thing,” Ferris said. “So I actually got Ruby Setnik, who’s a local stand-up comic, to play Johnny Carson, and it was pretty wild.”

That vision shifted slightly. Dylan Fox plays Carson these days. His takes on Carson’s monologues are pure comedy, and do a great job at playing up what are essentially

defunct jokes from decades ago.

“The ones that just don’t land whatsoever, I take a lot of joy in that,” Fox said. “The hard part is having that confidence in the delivery. Because [Carson] knows he’s going to kill.”

The jokes can still kill, but often for different reasons than originally intended. And in the 90-minute episodes

(complete with the vintage commercials that initially ran), there’s some delightfully weird comedy, and an experience you can’t get anywhere else.

“I think it’s more hardcore to do the whole thing. And it’s kinda anti-giving the people what they want,” Ferris said. “People idolize Johnny Carson so much. I wanted to pick those episodes to show that it’s just kind of a regular show, and it got weird sometimes.”

“When I first heard about the show, I was like, ‘That makes sense. That’s a show.’”

Court Hansen
comedian

Catch “The Tonight Play,” 9 p.m., Friday, Jan. 31, at STAB! Comedy Theater, 1710 Broadway. Tickets are \$7. For more info, visit stabcomedytheater.com.