

By JAMI KUNZER – jkunzer@shawmedia.com

Tune in to Dave Toomey's 'TV' show

By now, Mike Toomey has proved that you can make a career out of watching television.

That's what he vowed to do years ago when a grade school principal told him that wasn't possible. "Instead of taking it as a warning, I took it as a challenge," he said. "That's the birth of the show."

As Toomey puts it, he grew up "glued to the tube," and his show, "Mike Toomey's TV & Me," is the manifestation of that obsession. The show takes place at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 14 at the Raue Center for the Arts in Crystal Lake.

Toomey, a regular on WGN Morning News, has appeared before at the Raue, including as Bob Saget's opening act last November.

He also has performed at Lucy's Comedy Cafe, the Raue's monthly nightclub environment set on stage and featuring comedic acts.

His presentation features more than 300 slides and sound bytes plus Toomey's impersonations of favorite TV celebrities from the '60s and '70s.

Toomey talked about the upcoming show, as well as his views on today's television offerings.

Describe the show for us.

As I was growing up, TV was the most important thing to me, more important than school or anything else. That became so deeply important to me that I became able to imitate the characters and recite verbatim the shows.

It just kind of became a way of life for me. I became an entertainer before I was a professional comedian.

It's my revisiting of all the shows I grew up with and what I was thinking when I was watching them.

How did you get started in the comedy business?

Ever since I was a kid, I knew I wanted to do something like that. Watching television, any time a comedian was going to be on, I was front and center. I was fascinated by how these guys could pull this off.

I performed at a high school talent show. I was 16 years old, and it went really well. If it didn't go well I probably wouldn't have continued on that path. I started doing open mic nights when I was 18, and I've been doing comedy ever since.

Any favorite impressions you do?

My favorite and the most popular is the "Batman" impression of Adam West. I actually met Adam West and did it for him. He was a good sport, thought it was funny. I got to talk to him afterward and it was cool. He signed a picture for me. It was thrilling.

What other shows and characters are featured in your performance?

I do a segment on all the Saturday morning cartoons that were really popular and some of the after-school cartoons, like "Speed Racer." I talk about "Bewitched" and "Charlie's Angels" and "Wonder Girl" and "Scooby Doo." I mention some of the shows of the '70s, "Barnaby Jones," "Perry Mason," "Mr. Ed."

"Brady Bunch" is a really popular part of the show. There are so many Brady Bunch nuts out there, it's fun to do.

At the beginning, I do Shaggy and Scooby Doo, Ted Knight, William Conrad... My Robert Reed (the "Brady Bunch" father) impersonation, that usually gets a good response.

I do a lot of the cartoon characters, Snagglepuss and Yogi Bear and stuff like that. There are close to 50 (impersonations) I do on the show.

What was your favorite show growing up?

I would go with "Batman" and the "Andy Griffith Show." I got to see every episode a few times. The older I got, the more I appreciated the way the shows were written and the way they were crafted.

Any current shows in the act?

Not really. There are a couple references to things more current, only mentioned in a compare-and-contrast discussion. It's really just me reenacting all the stuff that happened.

Do you watch any shows now that you really like?

I do. It's different because primetime is usually when I'm working or doing something family related.

A lot of what I watch now is sports programming. There are some new shows, guilty pleasures. "Family Guy" I enjoy. I like that show because a lot of the references are the same as the ones I make. Sometimes, I think they wrote it for me.

Do you still watch a lot of television?

Not really as much. The TV's on quite a bit, but I'm not always parked in front of it.

With reality programs and other changes in television viewing, what's your take on TV today vs. TV of years ago?

It's unbelievably different.

When I was younger, there were five channels. You pretty much had to watch what was on. There were five channels, and people said we watch too much TV. Now there are 200 channels, and people say there's nothing on television.

As far as reality television, television was originally invented to escape reality, so we've kind of come full circle. I'm not a big fan of the reality stuff. It's like a car accident. It's not something we should be looking at. When you do look, you find yourself unable to stop.

What do you think draws people in to your performances?

Definitely the nostalgia. One of the best compliments I'm paid when people leave is, "Wow, that really brought me back. Some of that stuff, I'd forgotten about until you brought it up. It was fun remembering it."

There are a lot of fun moments in it, and it has a lot of comedy.

"Mike Toomey's TV & Me"

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Jan. 14

WHERE: Raue Center for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake

INFO: Take a journey back to the '60s and '70s TV land in this multimedia, comedic presentation. Tickets, \$31, \$28 and \$25, available at www.rauecenter.org or call 815-356-9212.

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