

Written by Mark Shaffer

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Dusty Slay's Homegrown Stand Up Returns To The Spaghetti Club

By Mark Shaffer

"We get a lot of tourists in the restaurant . . . and they ask weird questions sometimes like, 'What's something non-touristy we can do?' I don't know. You could get in your car and go home... or buy a house and start paying some taxes around here."

– Dusty Slay, "I've Waited Tables"

Stand-up comics have a saying when they've had a particularly good night on stage: "I killed." Dusty Slay might have his own unique spin on this. The Alabama native and former Charleston resident is scheduled to take the mic Monday November 17th at the Spaghetti Club in Habersham for a return solo show.

Growing up in rural Alabama he split time between parents, bouncing back and forth between a trailer park and a farm. "I was born for stand-up or meth addiction," he says. A move to Charleston in 2003 set him on the road to the former. He took some improvisation classes and started working open mic nights around town "just to meet people." In the meantime he did what most performers do to survive, worked the food & beverage industry – and stockpiled material. Then around 2008 the comedy scene started to heat up and Slay lived up to his name winning back-to-back best comic awards in 2011 and 2012. Speaking by phone from his new digs in Nashville, Slay's affable, laid back and sharp – a lot like his comedy.

MAKIN' THAT FUDGE

Mark Shaffer: I think of Charleston as being pretty sophisticated. Are Charleston audiences tougher?

Dusty Slay: I think you might be right. That's where I started, so I learned what works. But I have seen comics come to Charleston and not do as well as they would in other places. Traveling around the country I've kind of found the opposite effect, too. I like to think about a joke. But in some of these blue-collar towns where people have been working all day, they don't want to think about a joke. They're just like, "Make me laugh!"

MS: I watched your bit about waiting tables at Hyman's Seafood - very funny. I actually got lost in Hyman's once.

DS: (Laughs) Oh yeah. That happens.

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MS: A lot of what you do in that routine is based on observation and commenting on the obvious.

DS: I think that's the key to what I do for sure and especially with the waiting tables thing. You take what people really say to you and add what you want to say –

MS: What's happening in your head...

DS: Right. And I use that. I think a lot of those jokes would resonate with anyone, but the food & bev people get a few specifically.

"Sometimes people are in a big hurry. They would come in [the restaurant] and go, 'Could we be in and out of here in 30 minutes?' And I'm, like, 'Hell, you can leave right now.'"

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ – *Dusty Slay, "I've Waited Tables"*

MS: Is the Service Industry kind of like comedy boot camp?

DS: The last two years I waited tables, I quit my full time job and went back to Hyman's and tried to use it. I carried a notebook with me and every table was a potential new joke, 'cause you get some horrible tables. It's just pay attention and write it down.

MS: Do they have your picture on the wall at Hyman's yet?

DS: They don't. You know I told Eli, who's one of the owners, that I wanted to get my picture up there and I think he will. I took him a copy my CD when it came out. He's a really nice guy and has come to a couple of my shows, but I'd never specifically mention Hyman's if I knew he was in the audience. Anyway, I gave him the disc and told him what I'd done and he liked it.

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So that was kind of a relief.

MS: Let's talk about your first comedy album, "Makin' That Fudge." Interesting title.

DS: I was in the bank one day on my way to Hyman's and I heard a lady say to a teller, "Lately I've been makin' that fudge." I interpreted that as some kind of slang for making money. Turns out she was just working at a fudge shop.

Anyway, I got a joke out of it and I did it for a long time and then didn't do it for a while. So one night I'm opening for this band and one of the guys says he's heard about this joke and asks if I'd do it. It gets a huge reaction and I thought, you know, if I ever do a comedy album I'm going to call it "Makin' That Fudge."

MS: What's the joke?

DS: I just set up what she said in the bank and then say that I interpreted it as new slang for making money. I'm "makin' that bread" or "makin' that cheese" or "makin' that fudge." Of course in a doctor's office I would've thought something completely different.

"What are you in here for today ma'am?"

"Well lately, I've been makin' that fudge."

"The doctor will be right with you. Try not to make any in the lobby."

MS: (Laughing) Yeah, that's where my mind went. What's the first comedy album you bought?

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DS: I was raised in Alabama, so the first comedy album I bought was probably Jeff Foxworthy's "You Might Be a Redneck." I know it got played out, but when that record came out it blew my mind because it was everything I'd grown up around.

MS: You describe your comedy as "Smooth southern style that will make you feel so comfortable you have to laugh. Its like cornbread telling jokes." (Laughter) Creating a comfort zone isn't something I normally associate with stand-up.

DS: Right. I just worked with a guy from New Jersey and he was so funny, but he was the complete opposite of me. He made fun of everybody. People were afraid to move. (Laughter) I like the idea that people can come to my show and just laugh. I really try hard to write jokes that aren't offensive. I don't get overly meticulous about offending people. I come up with that kind of stuff. But then I ask, "Is that mean?" I come up with mean jokes and "unclean" jokes. But I try and find a way to clean 'em up and if I can't, I give it to one of my friends who might do it.

I don't want to be [pigeon holed] as a "clean comic," either. I saw a "clean comic" the other day who did churches and that's way too clean for me. (Laughter)

No edge. But I had a girl tell me the other day that she'd heard I was a clean comic and didn't even notice. I like that.

MS: When everybody's laughing, what's the difference?

DS: Exactly.

MS: A cop, a priest and a comic walk into a bar. What does the comic see that the others don't?

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DS: Oh, man. The priest would spot what's wrong morally, the cop would see what's wrong legally and the comic's probably watching the service looking for what's funny. Like my friend who's a bartender, he once had a customer who said, "Don't put any of those scallions on my burger. I don't like seafood." (Laughter)

THE LOWDOWN

Dusty Slay returns to the Lowcountry with two gigs in mid November. Dusty headlines a night of comedy, Sunday the 16th at The Pour House in Charleston. Check out the bill and buy tickets at www.charlestonpourhouse.com. Monday the 17th catch his solo act in the intimate setting of the Spaghetti Club in Habersham. Call (843) 466-3663 for info and tickets.

Check out Dusty Slay on Youtube and visit DustySlay.com to purchase his new album, "Makin' That Fudge."