Comedy: Name of the Game

The Warehouse Comedy Squad is an ensemble of actors and writers who subscribe to the theory that the more you laugh, the more likely people will think you are crazy and leave you alone. The concept of this group began in a drunken stupor on March 26, 1980 and no one has had the sense to stop it. Our aim is simple, really. We want to

entertain, have fun and have something to do nights. Although some of our sketches are written by individual cast members, all sketches are molded by the entire ensemble. So, if you want to pick a fight, it will have to be with the entire ensemble." — Rodney RaAkbar.

The Warehouse Comedy Squad is comprised of a hip, madcap and multi-talented group of brothers and sisters living in Baltimore, Md. who have united their collective talents to make life more laughable and enjoyable for others.

Their witty skits are razor sharp satire and social commentary ridiculing the fashions, folkways and foibles of men and women.

Their unique brand of humor is somewhat reminiscent of the slick parodies seen on "Saturday Night Live" and "Friday," but are more soulful and hipper so as to appeal to the harder-to-reach funny bones of black people.

"Life is hard for black folks,"
says Rodney RaAkbar, manager,
writer and member of the Comedy
Squad. "If you want to make black
folks laugh — to really crack up —
then you have to come straight out
of the wonies of real life."

Religion is a real part of the lives of most black people and has always been a favorite subject of satire for comedians like Richard Pryor. One of the best skits by the Comedy Squad is called "Pastor Bob," a hilarious jab in the ribs of faith healers.

"We are all religious in one way



Joseph [Josini] Smith
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Members of the Warehouse Comedy Squad, caught during a performance: [L to R]: David Downs, Denise Shackleford, Rodney RaAkbar, Tyron Matt Williams, Segovia Sylvia.

or another, but the members of the comedy squad also realize that comedy is a way to unmask the falsehoods of con men who prey upon the black community. Pastor Bob is just such a person," asserts Mr. RaAkbar.

During the "Pastor Bob" skit, the high-heeled shoe-wearing charlatan is faced with the biggest challenge of his career: healing a

huge crippled man who walks into

Pastor Bob assesses the

situation and then dives on the

man's right crutch three times,

grabbing it with both hands and

flopping around the floor like a

fish out of water while shouting

the usual incantations of faith

the other side of the man's body,

Pastor Bob admonishes him to

throw away his right crutch and he does. "Now that I've healed you,

After repeating the process on

his church on crutches.

healers.

throw away your other crutch and walk," shouts Pastor Bob.

The huge man obeys, throws his other crutch away, and falls to the floor with a mighty crash that also brings Pastor Bob and everybody else in the church tumbling down to the ground. "Get that big n—out of here," screams Pastor Bob. "He's tearing up my church!"

black community by represen-

tatives of the law have also

provided the members of the

Comedy Squad with ample

material for satire. During the

"Sgt. Badge and Slap 'm Down"

routine, two overzealous cops get

everything backwards and blow

away the victims of crime instead

heroic, Sgt. Badge and Slap'm

Down shoot the victim of a hold-up

five or six times and give his valuables to the robber who then

Pursuing their efforts to be

ling a Injustices perpetrated upon the

of the criminals.

By Frederick I. Douglass

fades into the dust, plus they save a man from threatened suicide by killing him before he can do it himself.

The sophisticated skits performed by the Warehouse Comedy Squad began as a way to kill time between segments of a couples game a la the "Newlywed Game" that was provided as entertainment for the patrons of The Arena, the club which serves as the group's base of operations.

"Things would drag a bit when we had the men or women secluded backstage, so we started doing takeoffs on commercials. Like in one skit, we see a bank robber blow away some people because the coffee he drinks makes him trigger-happy.

His partner prescribes some decaffeinated coffee for him and during his next holdup he's so cool he won't even shoot the cops.

Anyway, people began digging our commercials and asking for more of that kind of entertainment, so we started

workoug out our skits," declares
Rodney RaAkbar.

As the skits became more complicated other people began joining the comedy ensemble RaAkbar says. "Now we have a group of people who are capable of doing a bit of everything in the Warehouse Comedy Squad.

David Downs is a Capricom, actor and heavily into the martial arts. Dave was discovered wandering around the warehouse when we moved here to open up The Arena.

Actually he had burglarized the place six months before, but he forgot how he entered the building. He was lost. He decided to join the Comedy Squad when he got tired of looking for the front door.

Denise Shackleford is a talented singer, dancer and actress who brings a Scorpio's temperament to the group.

Segovia Sylvia, who portrays Pastor Bob, is a Sagittarius who writes and produces many of the skits, in addition to being a singer and actor. Everybody is an actor in the Comedy Squad, come to think of it.

Tyron "Matt" Williams is a Cancer who writes plays and is a musician. Another Cancer on the group is the big man, Mike Walker who is so dedicated that he travels 45 miles from Washington, D.C. to work with us."

One of the most talented members of the group is Joseph "Josini" Smith who is one of the best ventriloquists I've ever seen and I will give anyone who can catch him moving his lips \$100 in cash.

He does a solo act as a magician performing feats of legerdemain that are bafflingly mystifying. Josini, as Smith prefers to be known, sings, acts and dances, but ventriloquism is his forte.

Rodney RaAkbar realizes that he is managing a colossal diamond of a talent with Josini and is seeking to market him nationwide. Presently, a tour of Nigeria is being charted for Josini in late December and deals are being negotiated for him to do TV shows and commercials. I predict that within a year, the whole nation will see Josini on the tube performing his amazing escape from chains that would make Houdini blanch with envy.

The galvanic force piloting the Warehouse Comedy Squad and the Amazing Josini is Rodney RaAkbar, the renaissance man who brings myriad skills to the comedy troupe.

RaAkbar manages the groups, writes and produces many of the scripts, and is also a talented

fashion designer whose creations have been sought after by many entertainers.

"I got into the world of entertainment through my work as a fashion designer. For a long time I had a monopoly on doing the stage costumes for many of Baltimore's

groups that have gone on to

national stardom including First Class and the Softones.

"Later I got an opportunity to do outfits for the Parliament-Funkadelic and many other national recording artists. I was making some decent bread as a designer, but my head was pulling more in the direction of helping

young people, particularly talented young blacks.

"So, I decided to start working directly with talented youths in the Baltimore-Washington area and to use my contacts to help them get their careers started."

One of RaAkbar's projects

