



For Phil Baker: Performing is Child's Play!

Interview by Sarah Hanson

We caught up with Phil Baker of Phil Baker Music, a musician who performs for children's parties. Turns out it's more than just clowning around, it's serious business.

How did you get started in the children's entertainment business?

Growing up in Brookings, my life's ambition was to be a jazz guitarist. So I studied jazz guitar at the University of Miami in Florida. When I came back to Brookings, an SDSU preschool teacher invited me to play guitar and sing for her class. Something kind of clicked. From there, I started performing at schools, festivals, libraries, concert halls, and have been doing it ever since.

What is your favorite part of this industry?

I enjoy collaborating with other artists and organizations to create new products. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to write and produce music for the Sanford Harmony Program, at Arizona State University. I worked with the ASU School of Family and Social Dynamics to help write a curriculum that would foster better communication in the classroom.

What's the hardest thing about performing for kids?

Performing is the easy part. The challenge is trying to find enough time to be creative while still paying attention to business details - marketing, communications, paper work, traveling, etc. Although I make my living as a performer, I run a music business.

What advice do you have for those interested in working in children's entertainment?

Find a niche you enjoy. Develop your talent. Learn the business side of things. Create a plan. Ask for help. Constantly reinvent what you're doing. And stick to it. Success doesn't come easily, nor does it come without support from the community. ♦

Funny Business: Joking Around with Dr. Allen Unruh

by Melisa Goss

"According to research, it takes nine laughs a day just to keep your sanity," says Dr. Allen Unruh. "And with the inflation, it's fourteen."

With jokes like these, Unruh has been cracking people up – literally and figuratively – for 40 years. Unruh is part chiropractor, part comedian and this Patch Adams-like combination leaves his patients properly aligned, but holding their sides aching with laughter.

Unruh often takes his humor outside his office walls, which are decked out for the holidays, reflecting Unruh's festive spirit. He performs stand-up comedy at weddings, reunions, conventions, meetings, and churches. All of his comedy is clean in nature. He says the jokes simply roll off his tongue.

"After forty years of collecting and writing them daily, you just know them," he says.

This quick wit didn't always come naturally, though. Unruh claims he went to school to develop his wit, but only attended half the classes.

"A half-wit is still better than a dimwit or a nitwit," he jokes.

In addition to performing stand-up at parties and other events, Unruh has put his comedic skills to use as the author of six books, including *Laughter is the Best Medicine* and *If the Government Doesn't Get Off Our Backs, We're All Going to Need a Chiropractor*. He and his wife Leslee, with whom he has five children and 13 grandchildren, even co-authored a book on the importance of keeping laughter in marriage entitled *Romance 101*. For the Unruhs, romance and laughter go hand-in-hand, providing an endless supply of jokes about how to be romantic.

For this reason, Unruh cites Valentine's Day as one of his favorite holidays, though it's clear from his merrily embellished office that Unruh is a fan of Christmas and Thanksgiving as well. However, as a doctor, he must urge against indulgence.

"Moderation is key to good health," he says. "That's why I've decided to limit the number of diets I'm going on."

And as the holiday season approaches, Dr. Unruh offers one last piece of advice that's sure to leave you in stitches: "In the spirit of Christmas, rather than decking the halls, try calmly discussing the problem you're having with them." ♦