

YP Watch: Christine Alexander



LIVE! From Sarasota! It's...
...*Sunday afternoon?*

Odd as it sounds, Sunday afternoon is, indeed, one of the hottest (and most affordable) comedy tickets in town — or rather out on the edge of town. Off north 301 in an industrial park where the road winds around and around past faceless facilities, you finally find the eye-catching sign that marks The Backlot Theater (www.backlotarts.org).

It is here that members of the Sarasota Actors Workshop, a troupe of 31 talented performers of all ages and descriptions, under the guidance of three directors, spend some of their Sundays performing 10 short, self-contained plays each 10 minutes long.* Between sketches the lights go down for about the length of your average television commercial; when they come back up on the barren limbo set, the few sparse props and pieces of furniture that have been placed under cover of darkness offer little to tip the audience off as to what to expect next. Could it be funny? Tragic? Racy? Tear-jerking? Offensive? Intentionally obtuse? Upsetting? Amusingly obvious? Resolved by an unexpected twist?

Yes.

In the center of all this activity is Florida's answer to Tina Fey: 34 year old Christine Alexander. As associate producer — a position she delects by describing it as being “in charge of anything that the producer doesn't want to do,” she has updated the website (www.sarasotatheater.com), designed and printed the programs, and just generally helped get the word out. Her enthusiasm for anything that helps the arts, whether she's directly involved or not, says a lot about the kind of person she is and her regard for her fellow performers, about whom she enthuses, “All of them are frickin' awesome!”

A woman of boundless energy, she's pretty “frickin' awesome” herself: Actress, comic, associate producer, sometimes translator for deaf audience members, co-founder of the musical improv group “Becky's Rejects,” writer (with friend Rick Hughes, executive producer of the Sarasota Actors Workshop) of the wildly popular, free, bi-weekly e-newsletter *Anything Arts* (which is emailed to roughly 2,500 readers each edition and available by subscription only — so sign up today for yours at www.anythingarts.com), and one of the 12 monologists in “*gg monologues*” (which you can check out at www.ggmonologues.com) which is going on the road following the SRO

charity performance at McCurdy's Comedy Club.

She's one of those rare, natural, multi-faceted talents for whom no degree was necessary.

Born in Glens Falls, NY, Alexander is the daughter of a cop & a nurse. They lived in Pennsylvania for three years and moved to Sarasota when she was only four. Though no longer married, Alexander's parents still live here in town and are “extremely supportive” of her efforts, which have been an obvious part of her since an early age.

“I've been acting since high school, but didn't really get into it until I took an improv class at Florida Studio Theatre in 2001,” Alexander explains. “They had just begun their improv classes, and Rebecca Langsford started us out in front of free audiences; we would progress from there.”

Langsford, whom Alexander refers to as a “friend and sounding board,” is still involved in the FST group and is the namesake for Alexander's musical improv group, “Becky's Rejects.” The troupe formed, explains Alexander, “Because we wanted to play more than one night a week.”

She makes clear that Becky's Rejects (www.anythingarts.com/beckysrejects) are not in competition with FST, that they are all strong FST supporters and promoters, and still love performing there, doing three to five minute sketches that fill up the entire 45 minute second act. This is where she also does sign language translation for the deaf. She interprets through sign language what is being said on the stage using the American Sign Language she knows and the rest she, well, *improvises*.

In addition to their regular gig at the Backlot (on the last Wednesday of each month), Becky's Rejects tour and take individual gigs on a “for hire” basis. Here Alexander defers to her friends as performers, choosing instead to direct, as she has what she bluntly describes as “a terrible singing voice.”

A big thrill came for Alexander when she tried out for a small part in an Exit Laughing mystery theatre production and was instead called back by director Michael Fink to audition for the lead, which was a dual role. She got the gig and did a great job of it.

One of the most happily married women on earth, she just can't say enough about how great her long-suffering, ever-patient, graphic-designer husband/best friend — the male Chris Alexander — is, and how crazy she is about him. They met at her straight job at Booth Studios, dated

other people, became close friends, and, at a time when both were broken

up from their latest, noticed each other in a new light. Between her full time job at the studio (about 50 hours a week) and the fact that she's “usually *somewhere* (for the acting and comedy work) from 6 to 10 p.m. every night,” it's easy to see why she is so appreciative of her husband's encouragement and support.

“He and my dad come to every one of my opening and closing nights,” she says proudly.

She's also an effusive friend, saying, “It's great to work around happy laughing people” and referring to her Becky's Rejects pals as “the kids.”

Her instant, succinct evaluation of each: “Tim Beasley, my best friend and associate producer, we started the improv troupe together and are the founding members. He's absolutely hysterical. Sarasota loves him; Jamie Day is new to me, gorgeous with a beautiful singing voice. Kevin Allen is probably the funniest person I've ever played with, extremely witty. Zach Chase is hysterically cerebral. Chris Friday is our director and he has, in my opinion, one of the best singing voices in Sarasota. He is ‘Mr. Improv,’ a sponge for information and he shows it off. He's just very talented. And without our piano player, Russell Heath, it wouldn't be a musical, he's very talented!”

Feeling that her raving about her great husband coupled with her description of her B.R. pals as “the kids” has opened the door, I ask if she and her husband have any plans to have a family. She's quick to say this is not in their plans and that her four month old niece, Mattison, daughter of sister Karen (Duncan), provides her baby fix.

So where does she see herself in 10 years?

“In 10 years I'd like to be promoting and acting. I love to see people succeed in whatever it is they need to do, and I know so many people in town that if I know what your objective is, I can set you up with the right people, figure out which one you can fit with the best. Yeah, I love promoting and acting and if I can make a living like this, that would be fine.”

* Tickets are \$15 Showtime is 8 pm Friday, Saturday and Sunday and a 2 pm matinee on Sunday

Charmaine Engelsman-Robins