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SEAN CULLEN: BACK TO HIS COMIC ROOTS

By ROB DIEHL

Veteran Comedian Sean Cullen has been touring and performing since 1988. With a style all his own, Sean combines improvisation with a flare of music that has seen his career touch on everything from stand-up comedy to Broadway musicals. Cullen's career actually began in Hamilton as a member of Corky and the Juice Pigs. This group toured across the globe as regulars at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, The Edinburgh Fringe, and Just For Laughs; they were also featured on MAD TV. In all, they released two wide-selling comedy albums and were a major inspiration for The Barenaked Ladies. It was the The Ladies who originally approached Cullen with a demo tape. Cullen said, "We liked the tape so we asked them to join us on our North American tour." The exposure turned out to be fantastic for The Barenaked Ladies and in 2004 they were quick to return the favour and asked Cullen to join them on a North American Holiday tour. In January 2007, Cullen was again invited to join the band as a performer on their Ship & Dip Caribbean cruise and he continues to return annually.

In 1998, after 11 years in the group, Sean struck out on his own to define his solo style. "I felt I needed change and an opportunity to do what I wanted." Cullen felt restrained as a part of a musical comedy troupe in terms of the different aspects of comedy they could perform. This would be a trend that has since defined Cullen's career. As a solo artist, Cullen toured the club circuit, working on new material and honing his style. Recently, Cullen found himself as a finalist on Season 6 of NBC's "Last Comic Standing." This show puts top comedians head to head to see who the best comic is. Cullen insists, "I originally didn't want to do the show. I thought, who are these people to tell me if I'm funny or not." However, after some convincing from his own management as well as the show producers, Sean auditioned for the show, making the top six.

Despite the competitive nature of the show, Cullen admits that the editing makes it look much worse than it actually was. "Some of the comics became good friends of mine and there was very little animosity between us." Overall, Cullen was happy that he changed his mind and did the show. The exposure that a internationally televised show offers these contestants is immeasurable. Particularly for a Canadian comic, it is essential that he gets exposure in the U.S. market. Cullen feels that, "In order for a Canadian comedian to make it, you have to succeed in the States. Look at guys like Jim Carrey and Mike Myers, they went to the U.S. and were able to solidify their careers." Despite the benefits of being on "Last Comic Standing", Cullen was careful not to fall into the same mentality of some of the other comics who thought the show as going to change their lives. "Only you are going to change your life, not a show," says Cullen. This comedy veteran understands that you can't make your career based on stand up comedy alone; you have to branch out to all forms of performing.

After a ten-year absence from touring as a stand up comedian, Cullen has recently released a brand new DVD titled I Am A Human Man. "I've always enjoyed performing as a comedian and I missed the crowd and performing for an audience." The idea behind the disk is the journey of life and it explores the humorous aspects of growing up and the interesting people that are part of our lives. With ten original music tracks ranging from country to disco to rock, Sean takes the listener on an incredible journey of sound and mind. Working together with writing partner and producer Robbie Roth, who is currently a writer of musical theatre for Broadway and the West End, Sean has been developing these new songs over the last year using his onstage talk show at the Drake Hotel Underground on Queen Street West in Toronto. This talk show, titled The Sean Schau, is a unique mix of comedy, music and multimedia and has provided Sean with the perfect outlet for his restless imagination and the result is the recording I Am A Human Man.

There is no doubting Cullen's comedic genius as proved through his success on NBC's "Last Comic Standing", his three Gemini Awards and his Canadian Comedy Award. In addition to his amazing stand up, Cullen has starred in the smash hit The Producers and has also released a trilogy of books for young adults surrounding the adventures of an orphan named Hamish X. V

[ROB DIEHL]

SEAN CULLEN
 I Am A Human Man Tour
 Thursday, June 4 at 8 p.m.
 The Studio at Hamilton Place
www.seancullen.com