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Proops' improv merriment



by **Nikki M. Mascali**
Staff Writer

Greg Proops doesn't just have a funny-sounding last name: He's also really funny, which is a good thing given his career. The notoriously fast-talking and quick-thinking comedian is best known for his work on the British and American versions of the improv TV show "Whose Line Is It Anyway?"

Proops — who still does standup, recently released a comedy CD "Elsewhere" and also stars on the Nickelodeon sitcom "True Jackson, VP" — got into improv while in college. Years later, "Whose Line" came to San Francisco to hold auditions, and the rest is history.

The improv show's live version, "Whose Live Anyway?" — featuring Ryan Stiles, Chip Esten, Jeff Davis and Proops — hits the F.M. Kirby Center in Wilkes-Barre Thursday, Oct. 15. During a recent phone call from Los Angeles, Proops told the Weekender what fans can expect Thursday, why he's the best part of the show and what he'd do with free time — if he had any.

Weekender: What are people in for live? Proops: Laughter and merriment and drinking — then we do the show.

Weekender: So that's just what the cast is in for?

Proops: Well, the cast will certainly be laughing and drinking (laughs). It's improv like on "Whose Line," but it's much more interactive. We bring people out of the audience, so we really depend on the crowd.

We have a bit called "Sound Effects" where we do dangerous activity and two people provide all the sound effects. And we have one called "Moving Bodies" where we can't move and two people from the crowd have to come up and move us. You'd better wear something you like on stage, that's all I have to say (laughs).

Weekender: What makes "Whose Line" so popular?

Proops: Me. I think my personality dominating the show has been the key to its success all these years. Having to drag the others behind me like a refrigerator uphill like a husky has been very difficult for me. When you're as sexually appealing as I am, it's hard not to shine your light over everybody else.

I think it's the fact that it's different than regular sitcoms in that there's spontaneity and danger.

Weekender: A cast member of "Saturday Night Live" recently let an F-bomb fly. Has "Whose Line" had a slipup of that caliber?

Proops: Of course, that's one way to get them to stop tape. If your improv is not doing well and was kind of sucking, I would just swear, and they'd usually stop tape.



Weekender: So even a quick-draw like yourself has moments where your brain just goes blank?

Proops: My humility prevents me from admitting I fail, but yes, there's time when we blank out. That's the fun of seeing us live; you wonder if we're going to make it. This is going to sound crazy, but failing can be very funny, too — heaven knows ("Whose Live" castmate) Colin Mochrie's made a career out of it.

Weekender: What's life like on the road for you, Ryan, Chip and Jeff?

Proops: We detest each other in real life, but when we're together we set aside our animosity to create joy. We're actually really good friends and get along quite well. We drive around in a big bus and play cards quite a lot. We eat lunch together, we eat dinner together, we have drinks before the show, we have drinks after the show. We have a lot of fun.

Weekender: Why improv?

Proops: In college, there was an improv group in my dormitory. They did a sketch where they bring someone out of the audience, and I went and watched them and thought, 'God I can do that.' And the next week I went and did it. I learned from the kids there.

Since we've been on American TV, I've seen improv groups all over. That's really the fun part — (the show's) kind of led improv back to people as a craft. I almost said "art form," but that's stretching it a little, isn't it? Any craft where you don't have to learn lines and you can drink, I don't think that can be an art form ...

Weekender: Tell me about "True Jackson, VP."

Proops: I play the boss of True Jackson, who's played by Keke Palmer. I'm president, CEO and chief designer of a high-fashion company in New York. It's an adventure each week how True will get through being a high school student and the vice president of a major fashion company.

It's really fantastic for me because a couple (costars) are under 18, so we have to stop at a certain time and can't work them to death, so we wrap early, which is awesome!

Weekender: What do you do with all that free time?

Proops: I don't have any free time, but thank you for asking! I'm a big baseball fan, and I like to read history books. I'm kind of boring in that regard, unless you're fascinated by history, in which case I'm rivetingly interesting.

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"Whose Live Anyway" w/ Ryan Stiles, Greg Proops, Chip Esten and Jeff Davis, Thursday, Oct. 15, 7:30 p.m., F.M. Kirby Center (71 Public Square, Wilkes-Barre). Tickets: \$25-\$45, at Kirby box office, ticketmaster.com, Gallery of Sound or 570.826.1100. Info: whoseliveanyway.com, kirby.org

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Greg Proops

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