

COMEDY / THE SECOND CITY

Current troupe carries on tradition

By JULIE VICK
For the Camera

A performance by The Second City offers more than just a briskly paced, often spontaneous comedy show: It is a showcase of future stars.

Many Second City alums have gone on to fame in television and movies. The roster includes Julia Louis-Dreyfus ("Seinfeld"), Dan Aykroyd, the late John Belushi, Bill Murray, Mike Myers and the late Chris Farley, all "Saturday Night Live" vets.

The Second City's national touring company performs Saturday at the Denver Auditorium to benefit public television station KBDI-TV Channel 12. The concert promises "The Best of Second City," a compilation of sketches, songs and improvisation developed at the company's club in Chicago.

"We have 38 years of documented material to choose from. So we go through the material and see what is outdated and what will still work," current member Greg Mills says.

The performances use few props and costumes, and have managed to satirize everything from political elections to Catholic school.

The comedy troupe got its start in Chicago at a small club that opened on Dec. 16, 1959. The popularity quickly spread, and actors from all over the nation were stopping by The Second City to catch one of the performances.

The players developed new material nightly, building on ideas from audience members to be refined in later shows. With the popularity of the comedy club, a national touring company soon developed, bringing the show to several cities across the nation.

Today there are three touring companies based in Chicago, and a fourth that operates out of Toronto, Canada (where players like Rick Moranis and the late John Candy started). While the touring companies rely on sketches that have proved popular in the past, they also keep some elements of improvisation in every show.

"It's interesting to see how each audience reacts," Mills says. "Some material will be curiously received when you don't expect it, and some people will go bonkers over it."

The touring company com-

IF YOU GO

WHAT: "The Best of The Second City," comedy sketches and improvisation

WHEN: 8 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Denver Auditorium Theatre, 14th and Curtis streets

TICKETS: \$18

CALL: 830-8497

prises six actors, a stage manager and a musical director. Mills says that there is little competition between the comedians on stage because they all have different strengths.

"You've got to be there for everybody, especially when you improvise," he says. "If everyone doesn't work together, the scene falls apart."

While the group feels a strong camaraderie, outside pressures often threaten to intervene. With so many past members going on to comedic fame in television and movies, the comedy troupe bears the burden of living up to greatness.

However, Mills says that he feels little outside pressure to perform.

"All we want to do is good



FIRST FRIENDS: The members of the touring company of Chicago's Second City bring their verbal wit to Denver on Saturday.

comedy," he says. "I don't think you get here without being a perfectionist in your work. I don't think I feel any pressure from the outside; it all comes from within."

Mills has been with Second City for three years. He spent a year and a half playing piano for the touring company before becoming an actor. He was raised in Detroit, but often visited Chicago.

"My dad took me to Second

City shows in high school and I said 'Wow! That's what I want to do.'"

Mills began acting in High School and then started doing stand-up comedy in college. While Mills enjoys working in the touring company, he says he would like to write for television or movies in the future.

"I would like to keep doing stand-up comedy as well," he says. "But as for now, I'm happy."