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Your weekend guide to East Hawaii

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BARING IT ALL

Comedian Paul Ogata headlines comedy show at Hilo Town Tavern

By **KATIE YOUNG
YAMANAKA**

Special to the Tribune-Herald

Comedian Paul Ogata has no qualms about posing naked and muddy, donning a knitted pink owl hat and cuddling a pig with painted toenails, disproving at least one stereotype that Asians are reserved.

Of course, it is really Ogata's face on singer Miley Cyrus' body, but that's beside the point. The photo is a perfect representation of Ogata as a comic: a local boy who lays bare his ego and his sensibilities on stage, exposing his insecurities, marital foibles and views on world events. He knows that comedy is the cure for what ails you.

Ogata will be in Hilo to headline "A

Bizarre Night of Comedy" at 8 p.m. Saturday (Aug. 29) at the Hilo Town Tavern. For this performance, he is joined by show host and Oahu comedian Jose Dynamite, Oahu comedian Nick Makosky and Hilo comedian Tony Ridenour. He also has a show in Kona at Jackie Rey's Ohana Grill on Friday (Aug. 28).

Almost a decade after leaving his job as a top-rated morning radio personality to pursue his dream of being a full-time stand-up comic, Ogata, 46, can say he has accomplished a lot of what he set out to do.

He won the 32nd Annual San Francisco International Comedy Competition in 2007 — (former winners include Dana Carvey, Sinbad and Doug Stanhope) — and has appeared on the "Late Late Show," Comedy Central's "Live at

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Courtesy photos
Paul Ogata doing a show for Marines on the deck
of an amphibious assault ship off the coast of Libya.



Paul Ogata performs at The Laugh Factory.



Jose Dynamite will be opening for Paul Ogata.

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Gotham, Comics Unleashed" and Showtime's "Pacific Rim Comedy."

Ogata, who currently lives in Murrieta, Calif. with his wife and two dogs, spends most of his time traveling and performing his edgy, often-improvised comedy in various cities across six continents.

"I've performed for royalty. I've performed for the military on an aircraft carrier — once in a chemical/biological weapons facility where I had to do the show with a gasmask and needles of atropine strapped to my leg (the stuff that counteracts nerve agents). But I do think it would be really cool to do a show in Antarctica, maybe in front of the penguins."

He just finished shooting an hourlong special for Comedy Showtime called "The Truth and Other Lies," and travels most of the year. "People everywhere in the world are aching for entertainment," says Ogata. "I do miss Hawaii though. I miss the food, the weather, I miss how you know people everywhere you go. The family spirit [in Hawaii] is really beautiful."

This will be Ogata's second time performing in Hilo, and he says the audience can expect a "free-for-all" event.

"There's a bunch of things I want to tell Hilo people about," he says. "A lot of the shows are a good collaboration. I like to have fun with the audience. Sometimes they want to go in a different direction than I



Courtesy photos

Ogata entertains U.S. troops in a hangar in Afghanistan.



have prepared and we do that." Ogata says that anything can happen during a show, some of which you can't avoid talking about. "If you don't talk about something that happens, it seems fake, like I'm speaking at the audience instead of with them."

For example, "Once a lady laughed so hard that she vomited and

wet her pants," recalls Ogata. "How do you not talk about that? That becomes the show for the next 10 minutes. Of course, she left and didn't come back, but while she was there, she had a great time."

Jose Figueras (aka Jose Dynamite) says, "Paul is brilliant. He is so fast and quick-witted on stage. He has a

ton of experience doing comedy, and I think people will realize he puts on an amazing show."

The quick-witted improvisation is what makes stand-up comedy fun for Ogata.

"That's the challenge, when I can, with the help of the audience, come up with stuff that's golden for that moment," he says. "That's the best day at the office for me."

Ogata's comedy philosophy is that everything we've been taught is "b.s." and he's here to explain the world in a different light. "It's being able to see things in a different way that makes people go 'ah-ha!' and hopefully, 'ha-ha!'"

Ogata says there's nothing that's "off limits" to him. "You can always find a way to make something funny. People might feel like they aren't supposed to laugh at something,

but if I can make them laugh, then it's a victory for everybody."

Figueras will open for Ogata along with Makosky and Ridenour. "We're there as the opening act to quickly make people laugh and give the show a little diversity," says Figueras. "It's a good way to showcase the next generation of comics. Also, a lot of times, you don't know what an audience will really be like. As a headliner, you can watch the opening act and you can gauge how the audience is feeling and what's going on and adjust your set for them."

Figueras, 37, who worked as the opening act and occasional promoter for comedian Augie T. for nearly nine years, says he makes a lot of local jokes, racial humor and observations from the "eyes of a haole who has been living in Hawaii almost 20 years."

It was Augie T. who gave Figueras his stage name, and he isn't sure why, but it's a name that stuck. He also heard his best comedy advice from Augie T., as well. "One night, I completely bombed on stage. I went up to him and said, 'Man, that was a tough crowd,' and he said, 'It's not the audience, it's the material.' If people don't laugh, it's because I didn't do my job."

Figueras, who also works in advertising sales and radio commercial writing for Ohana Broadcast Company in Honolulu, says the shows where he has to work harder to make people laugh are some of the most rewarding, however. "I come off sweating profusely because I had to work so hard, but I got up there and took the show by the reins."

At the show, he says, people can expect an amazing, fun and hilarious night of comedy.

"I'd love to be able to come to the Big Island more often and see more home grown local talent," says Figueras, who produces two weekly comedy shows on Oahu as well. "Doing stand-up isn't easy, but there's a lot of talent out there. It's great to see new comics that come to the scene and have a different perspective."

Doors for "A Bizarre Night of Comedy" in Hilo open at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$15, available at Hilo Town Tavern, Blane's Drive Inn (150 Wiwoole St.), or online at www.brownpapertickets.com.