

CRITIC'S CHOICE

"Comedy by Michael"

By Rachel Swan

Being uncool and out of place is actually a good thing for comedian **Kevin Avery**, whose bits are mostly about revisiting and purging insecurities. Avery says he cut his teeth in middle school, while attending a Jack & Jill youth group weekend retreat. "I grew up with my white friends at Catholic school, then I was in the Jack & Jill youth group with my black friends," he explains. "It was basically like, 'Live in the suburbs? Can't find any black people? Join Jack & Jill!' I was hanging with white people, and not up on the music black people were listening to. I was a mess." On this particular trip, Avery says, his brethren singled out the two nerdiest kids in the group - Avery was one of them. It started with a lot of he-said, she-said: "They pitted us against each other," he recalls. "It was like a cockfight - kill or be killed. Finally I called him a marsh Muppet. I don't know what it means, but I said it with authority. For a bunch of twelve-year-old black kids, I ruled the night."

If Avery learned anything from that small junior high triumph, it was probably the following: 1) It's possible to gain social status by ripping on the underdog, and fronting as if your shit is just *soooo* much tighter. 2) When coolness fails you, comedy might be the next best defense. He found these lessons enabling and liberating, and harnessed them whenever he found himself in a subordinate position. Take, for instance, the time Avery snagged a two-week temp job at the Sephora cosmetics company. "I was a merchandising assistant," he explains. "I was writing purchase orders and sending out daily reports. It freaked me out, but I went every day. It was weird to be in an office that was just filled with gorgeous, well-manicured women. I dress like I dress, but I don't have business casual wear, so when I do, I look like when Jack Black or Chris Farley tries to dress up and go in the workplace." On a recent episode of his weekly Live 105 morning show, Avery compared his experience to that of the Anne Hathaway character on *The Devil Wears Prada*, who comes to work in the haute monde New York fashion world looking all dumpy and has to put up with a million people telling her she's fat.

Avery performs Saturday at **Comedy by Michael**, a monthly showcase hosted by stalwart Bay Area comic and Chabot college instructor Michael Booker. Held at San Leandro's Englander Pub, this event also features the Los Angeles-based comic **Thai Rivera**, plus raffles and giveaways with such prizes as T-shirts, hats, A's tickets, and gift certificates. The show kicks off at 8 p.m. and costs \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door. Info: ComedybyMichael.com -- By Rachel Swan

Price: \$10-\$25

Time & Date: Fourth Saturday of every month, 8 p.m.

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