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THE LAUGHING ACADEMY

The Laughing Academy founder Kim Greene Hiller entertains the audience at a sold-out stand-up comedy show Friday, Jan. 17, at the venue.
DAVID KRAUS/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

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POSTED TO GlenviewLanternDaily.com 2 DAYS AGO

Comedians shine at sold-out show in Glenview

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Freelance Reporter

Chilly temperatures and wind-swept snow didn't stop the show Friday night as a sellout crowd enjoyed a night of stand-up comedy at The Laughing Academy in Glenview.

The talent, however, wasn't so lucky. Inclement weather prevented two of the three scheduled comedians from making it, but organizers dug into their combined rolodexes to find an 11th-hour fill-in before the 8 p.m. curtain rise.

Cancelling was not an option for Kim Greene Hiller, Laughing Academy founder and owner, and Larry Bloom, whose Highland Park-based company Funnier By The Lake produced the show, billed as "Academy After Hours: Stand-Up Comedy." This was the second stand-up showcase TLA has hosted since its theater space opened in August 2019, though Hiller puts on other afterhours showcases geared toward an adult audience, like sketch and improv nights.

"It was the show that almost wasn't," Hiller said. "Every time I've hit a wall in my business though, I've found a door."

The door this time led to Peter-john Byrnes, a veteran comic living in nearby Evanston who both organizers had worked with previously. They reached out and he agreed to brave the sloshy wintry roadways to join the night's lineup, which included headliner Kevin Kellam, a stalwart of the Chicago comedy scene and DJ on alt-rock station WKQX-FM 101.1.

Bloom was slated to be the evening's host, so stepping into a full set was a no-brainer for the comedy pro. And just like that, an entire evening of entertainment was born.

Taking the stage only minutes late, Bloom warmed up the crowd by quipping about divorce, dating, being a Jewish man and the North Shore.

"Who thinks Glenview is the North Shore?" he asked the room, which answered with applause.

"Yes, because you live in Glenview," Bloom continued. "You know who doesn't think Glenview is the North Shore? The people who live in towns with a shore."

Bloom lives in the shometown of Highland Park, where he splits his time working as a comic and marketing professional who also hosts stand-up showcases. Through FBTL, which he founded in 2014, Bloom specializes in producing shows in the suburbs to help bring the top-notch caliber of comedians — normally booked only in cities like Chicago — closer to those that don't want to deal with the longer drive and hassle of parking.

That formula is clearly working well as the show in Glenview sold out quickly.

Bloom ended his 22-minute set by introducing Byrnes as a super-smart, super-funny "go-to guy" who he works often with. "He really is a go-to guy because I texted him and he was here about a half-hour later."

With the confidence of a performer that had been planning his set all week,

Byrnes jumped on stage sporting a Nordic winter sweater, jeans and black horn-rimmed glasses, then went right to the self-deprecating humor.

"That was a very nice introduction by Larry, but he papered over the notion that I'm unsuccessful enough to be home on a Friday night," said Byrnes, a stand-up comic for 35 years. "Also, that he was pretty sure that was the case."

Referencing his choice of owning and wearing "an Islandic sweater," Byrnes, who has been married for 25 years, swiftly painted his domestic picture.

"You can tell that I have given up," he declared, giving a Vanna White sweep across his chest adding, "that means I'm a parent."

Throughout his 25-minute set, Byrnes continued to mine familiar family stressors — spending holidays together, marital dissents, parenting — but his finest run of the night came from a bit about bees and fairly traded honey.

"I don't think fairly traded honey exists" he started. "If you don't believe me, ask the bees. They work hard all year, making honey. Then they come home one night and their house has been robbed. That's not a fair trade at all."

Byrnes' show "American History XXX" — his perspective of America, its historical atrocities, the inevitability of human decline, the end of civilization, and other light-hearted fare — was recorded at Indy Fringe Festival in 2014.

The introduction of headliner Kevin Kellam,



The Laughing Academy founder and owner Kim Greene Hiller surprises her husband with a birthday cake Friday, Jan. 17, during a stand-up showcase at the venue.

who almost didn't make it to the show due to weather, was a familiar one for the host as they've been working together for years and "he always crushes it," Bloom said.

Kellam, who grew up in an Irish Catholic household as the fourth of five kids, burst onto the stage ready to poke fun at himself. After running through a list of siblings and their extreme successes he laments that in his mother's heart, "there are dead pets in my family that outrank me."

Kellam's 35-minute set was part observational and part autobiographical, drawing on his experiences growing up and talking about his family.

"I glued my left eye shut when I was 5," Kellam shouted. "When you do that, nothing is expected from you for the rest of your life."

Kellam meandered back and forth across the stage quipping about how his brothers are more noteworthy. One brother, who is five years older and has a master's degree in



Comedian Kevin Kellam, a DJ at WKQX 101.1, performs his headlining act.

chemical engineering, can "turn a Dr. Pepper into a Mountain Dew for fun," Kellam said, pausing just long enough for the joke to start sink in before adding, "Me? I can't afford a Dr. Pepper."

Another brother is a decorated cop in the city and once "ran into a building and saved a family of seven people," he shouted, his loudest level yet. "He's such a good cop, he's doing a firefighter's job at the same time."

Kellam recognizes he's abundantly loud but makes no apologies.

"I'm from a family with

five kids. If I'm not this loud, I don't eat," hollered Kellam. Later, broaching his intensity again, he said "it's the only volume I know."

Despite his set, Kellam is quite accomplished in his own right. As a comic, he has a strong stage presence and knows how to come at jokes from an unexpected place. In 2019, he made his debut in the Comedians You Should Know showcase, a critically acclaimed comedy show held weekly in Chicago, New York and Los

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Angeles.

Thanks to his disc jockey job, he's had the unique opportunity to open up at private shows for some of the biggest names in al-

ternative music, including Twenty-One Pilots, Foster the People and Panic! At the Disco.

The next "Academy After Hours: Stand-Up Comedy" is scheduled for March 6 at The Laughing Academy, a collaborative creative center and school

that offers improv training, writing, storytelling and other classes and workshops to all ages.

After that, look for the showcase to happen the first Friday of every month. For more information, visit www.thelaughingacademy.com.