

Newsday

WWW.NYNEWSDAY.COM

SUNDAY, JULY 31, 2005 | CITY EDITION

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For 3 minutes, it's showtime



COMMENTARY
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Quick. What's the worst part of being an actor, worse than bad reviews, worse than AFTRA dues, worse even than keeping some stinkin' day job till the big role comes in?

It's those endless resume drops.

Showing up at the offices of busy agents and managers, leaving stacks of head-shots and resumes, hoping that somebody — anybody! — will finally pay attention this time.

Wait, wasn't show business supposed to be glamorous?

"We figured — my brother Phil and I — that there had to be a better way for an actor to get seen," Robert Galinsky was saying at week's end from California. "Turns out we had to invent one."

Two energetic actor-writer-producer-director-what-ever, the Galinsky brothers had moved to New York from the Hartford area to pursue their careers. Of course, both of them had plenty of experience dropping resumes.

But they had a fresh idea: Put on a show featuring 10 actors, each performing a three-minute monologue in front of a live audience and a panel of industry judges, who would pick a winner and offer honest, professional critiques. And invite agents and casting directors to the show, promising them an extraordinarily efficient fresh-talent trawl.

And so the "Manhattan Monologue Slam" was born.

"It's 'American Idol' meets 'Masterpiece Theater,'" Robert Galinsky says. "It seems obvious, looking back."

The Galinskys started quietly in the cramped basement of the Cornelia Street Cafe, quickly trading that for the roomier Bowery Poetry Club, at 308 Bowery. Word began to spread in the acting world. Big crowds turned up. Soon

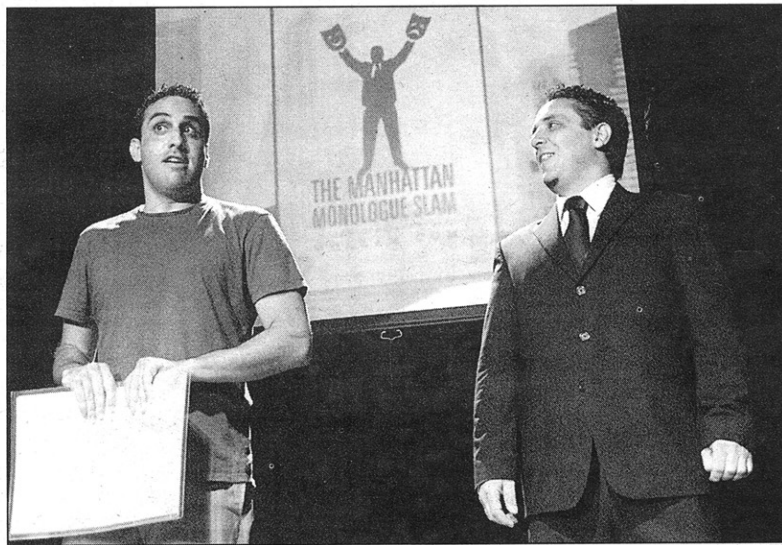


PHOTO BY DONALD BLACK JR.

Brothers Philip, left, and Robert Galinsky created "Monologue Slam" for actors seeking exposure.

enough, the shows became a monthly fixture and then produced a West Coast spin-off. (This Tuesday, and the first Tuesday of every month, in New York. Last Tuesday of every month at Ivar's in Hollywood.) A bicostal champion face-off is coming soon.

But three minutes is still three minutes, and that's not much time on stage.

"It's a real acting challenge," Galinsky said. "There is no slow build here. There is no time for a long story arc. The lights come up and — boom! — you have to show the audience who that character is and what emotional state they're in."

But the rapid-fire pacing is why slams are so valuable.

"In 40 minutes, an agent can see 10 actors transport the audience to 10 different places," Galinsky said. "Matches really are being made."

And after the main event each night, a second round is open to anyone who signs up. But this time, the monologues are even shorter — 30 seconds.

"We have everybody from pol-

ished, professional actors to people who are totally green," Galinsky said. "You can tell right away if somebody's light is on or off. And we cast the first set of the next show from these performances."

The industry judges have included acting coach Terry Schreiber, agent Sean Elliott, director James Foley, screenwriter James Gunn, comedian Andy Dick, actor Jenna Fischer and MADtv star Debra Wilson. Along the way, the brothers picked up a couple of partners, Terry Schnuck and Jeff Chrzczon, and a serious film and television producer who's working to turn "Manhattan Monologue Slam" into a reality-TV show.

"This is an idea that should have come a long time ago," said MADtv's Wilson, who grew up in South Ozone Park and said she was thrilled to be a slam judge.

"There's Def Poetry Jam," she said. "There's venues for stand-up comedians and poetry coffee houses and places

where bands can play music. But you didn't have anything where an actor can say, 'I want to develop my craft organically, somewhere I perform in front of my peers and get a critique that I can trust.' You know this is not a business that is always going to love you back."

Producer Braxton Pope says he's confident there's a TV show living in here.

"Live performances don't always translate well to television," he said. "But there is something really dynamic, something really kinetic about the 'Monologue Slam.'"

He's already mapping out the future the Galinsky brothers launched.

"You do some B-roll — let the audience see who these people are," he said. "How they prepare. What is going on in their lives. Not just put a camera on sticks and film the stage version. Put it all into context. It could be very powerful stuff."

Without a single resume drop.