

Comedy in his blood

Valley-born comedian began showcasing his humor at an early age

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Comedian Darren Carter will perform Saturday at the Empire Theatre in Stockton.

Courtesy photo



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By **Tony Sauro**
Record Staff Writer
May 30, 2013 12:00 AM

Darren Carter's 5-year-old son already is showing signs - symptoms? - of his comedic DNA.

"My son, you know, he's half-Armenian," said Carter, an antic stand-up comedian with Central Valley roots. "He asked me, 'Daddy, when I grow up will I be a full Armenian?'"

"The other day, he looked at my hair and said, 'It's red orange, blonde and bald.'"

Darren Carter

With: Big Al Gonzales, David Lew, Insane Wayne, Vicc Ramirez, Dane Madden

When: 7 and 9:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Empire Theatre, 1825 Pacific Ave., Stockton

Admission: \$15-\$35

Information: (209) 390-7735; Empire Theatre box office

Austin's is none of the above, but he's manifesting the playful childhood tendencies that helped his dad deal with an unconventional upbringing and put together a 23-year career that's encompassed TV, club, film and podcasts - from Marriott's Redwood Amphitheatre in Santa Clara, entertaining Snoop Dogg's family to "That Ginger's Crazy" (2010, Showtime) and appearances on Jay Leno's "Tonight Show."

Carter, born and raised in Fresno, brings some of that down-home, PG-13 humor to Stockton's Empire Theatre for two shows Saturday as part of a six-comic lineup that includes Stockton's

DeWayne "Insane Wayne" Jackson and Vicc Ramirez.

"In first grade, I'd be running around like a robot on high speed with broken batteries," the red-headed Carter said recently from Burbank, where he was taping a Starz network TV special. "It was really cool. A great feeling. Growing up, there were other people constantly telling me I should be a comedian. Be a comedian. Since then, I've found out there are some guys who nobody tells to be a comedian."

Carter has said he was raised in a foster home, that his father (Elvin) was a Hell's Angel and his mother died in prison. He's not following a similar pattern.

"I try to get a nice balance," said Carter, married for 15 years to Genie, who assists him with business stuff. "And I have the same beautiful little boy. He's already calling himself a comedian. Every day, he puts on costumes. Of all people, one is 'Weird Al' Yankovic."

Austin, riffing on dad's stage name is the "little party starter."

Carter said "I don't know" what impact his childhood experiences might have had on him. He still employs the same basics: " 'Cause I don't know any other way. It's, like, I just get out there."

In 2005, he was "just doin' a little Snoop Dogg thing" at Los Angeles' Improv. Soon, he was re-doing it at family gatherings of the Long Beach rapper (Calvin Broadus Jr.)

When he was a teenager, Carter's English teacher at Fresno's Roosevelt High School allowed him to entertain the class. He also prepared himself for multiple options.

"I took speech and acting," he said. "I was on the debate team, so I could kinda talk with some structure. Not just be the class clown. I did sports (cross country, wrestling, swimming, track). So I wasn't just with the brainiacs. There was locker-room humor."

A self-styled "medium-sized star," he remained playful: "On the swim team, I learned how to swim that year. At first. I was halfway kinda walking across the pool. The coach said, 'Hey, what are you doing? Swim.' I wrote a cool rap. It was better than what the cheerleaders did. I went to career day and there were no stand-up comics. Yikes."

While attending Fresno City College, he did some radio work. In 1991, he spent the summer doing stand-up routines in Santa Clara before moving onto San Francisco's club scene.

Carter disclaims any significant influence: "Not really. I don't really get influenced. I don't wanna be imitating people. I like to keep it original."

He finds such novelty during life's routines.

"Normally, it's something that stands out through the day," Carter said. "I jot it down as a note ... and translate it in pieces. I'll noodle around and try it on stage. It's funny. It just comes to life on stage. Maybe I can make it a little bit better. Sometimes, it gets longer. When it comes time to really perform, I trim the fat and get to the meat of it."

After a successful podcast partnership with Dick Spanneberg ("Dick and Darren," now at 170 episodes), Carter's a big social-media advocate: "It's great. 'Let's go behind the curtain a little bit.' Tell people they can keep in touch with me at Twitter, @darrencarter."

Elsewhere, he performed last weekend at Pasadena's Ice House and did a live-to-tape show at Hermosa Beach's Comedy and Magic Club.

"I just wanna do more acting, more specials, more comedy," said Carter. "I almost feel responsible about getting better. When you're in someone's town, they'll ask, 'When's the next time you're coming here?' 'Where can I see you?'"

"You've gotta keep getting stuff out there for them. I absolutely love live entertainment. It's neat to see people having the time of their life."

He's anticipating that Saturday night.

"Stockton's, um, like if Oakland and Reno had a baby," Carters said. "My style is from the Valley. It's perfect. It's relatable, like I'm one of your own."

Contact reporter Tony Sauro at (209) 546-8267 or tsauro@recordnet.com.

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