

Tracey Ashley hits the big time

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.



Tracey Ashley came to Minneapolis as an account executive for a local television station – she left as rising star in stand up comedy.

Ashley, who moved to the Twin Cities area in the late 1990s, was working as a sales representative for WCCO-TV when she decided to enter a competition at a local comedy club. But Ashley didn't win – she was the first runner up.

"I came in second. First runner up is just a nice way of saying you didn't win," joked Ashley, who considers her style of comedy storytelling comedy. "Back then someone said to me, 'you don't want to win, it's an omen. Whoever wins ends up never doing comedy.'"

The omen must have been true. According to Ashley, the guy who beat her is no longer in comedy. But Ashley continued on and hasn't looked back.

The stand-up comedian, who makes her home in a small town in Indiana, gained national attention when she appeared on the reality comedy competition, "Last Comic Standing" in 2007. Ashley finished as a semi-finalist.

"Once I did that show, things really picked up for me," said Ashley, who has appeared on TV Land and Nick Jr., and is heavily sought after on college campuses. *Campus Activities Magazine* recently nominated her as Best Female Performer.

"I love doing colleges because I get to do an hour of material," said Ashley, who said her ability to perform without cursing excessively has endeared her with campus show bookers. "When you do colleges they want you to be clean; kind of PG-13. That helped me to work in so many different venues."

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Ashley's ability to perform clean comedy certainly helped her in landing her most recent television gig – "Wanda Sykes Presents HERLARIOUS."

The one-hour comedy special – featuring stand-up and skits – premieres Saturday, July 13 at 9 p.m. CST on OWN. Ashley will be featured on the second episode, airing Saturday, July 20.

"What's so cool is we taped it at Harpo Studios and they turned where Oprah (Winfrey) did her shows for all those years into a comedy club," said Ashley.

Ashley has her first CD coming out in early August. The CD, titled "Tracey Ashley – Two First Names," was taped right here in Minneapolis at the Acme Comedy Club.

"I wanted to do it (record the live CD) where I started," said Ashley. "I have so much love for Minneapolis."

Fans looking to connect with Ashley can do so by visiting her website, www.traceyashley.com or by following her on Twitter @Tashley305.