



FRANK OLIVIER'S

TWISTED CABARET

SEE:

TWISTED MISTER *Comedic genius throws another Frank on the grill*

Oh, my lord! What won't he do? He's a magician, he's a mime, he's three girls at a time. He's

Frank Olivier, and he's bringing his **Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium**

Vaudeville Show to Las Vegas. The slightly schizophrenic, multiple person-

ality-laden Olivier gives the audience a hilarious look at the inner workings

of his mind in this one-man show. An amazing array of unusual and

decidedly odd characters with diverse skill sets—including knife-

throwing, fire-eating, magic, ballet and cross-dressing—comes

to life onstage. ¶ If you know comedy, you'll likely recognize Olivier

from appearances on *The Tonight Show*. He started in the comedy

business early, attending Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey

Clown College after he graduated from high school. Later,

he sharpened his sense of timing with headlining stints

in comedy clubs across the country and touring

with the Broadway hit *Sugar Babies*. ¶ So step

out with Swami Frankananda, Professor Von

Franz, Frankonovitchski, The Frankettes

and Francel Franceau and let Olivier con-

vert you to the twisted side of comedy,

one mime at a time. —NINA KING

SAHARA 10 P.M. APRIL 28-MAY

7, 8&9-10:30P.M. 702-833-0070





Frankapalooza

Julia Morgan gets twisted
By Sam Hurwitt and Stefanie Kalem

If life is a cabaret, old chum, then Frank Olivier is here to see that life remains a little weird. Emceed by the Mephistophelean Mr. Paul Nathan (who's done the same for the Exotic Erotic Ball and his own Dark Kabaret), Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show features a dazzling array of acts, all with an increasingly familiar face: Olivier as hapless magician the Great Frankini, tormented Central European knife thrower Frankonovitchski, joined-at-the-hip dancing trio the Frankettes, the fleshy puppeteering of Tongue Trick Theatre, a unicycle ballet act, extreme yoga practitioner Swami Frankananda with a nose for whatever's available, balletic acrobats the Frank Bros., and Cafe du Flambe, dinner theater even more flaming than that Noël Coward play your Uncle Phil was in. Even the garrulous midget stagehand Maurice has that nagging familiarity about him. And as you might imagine, it all goes horribly, terribly awry (with the accent on "wry") in all the right places. But of course it would hardly be

a cabaret without Teutonic tunes, provided by the Twisted Cabaret Band: pianist and composer Nolan Gasser, drummer Tim Vaughan, and all-around winds man Roger Glenn. A long-beloved Berkeley juggler, comedian, and vaudeville Frank-of-all-trades, silver-tongued and sure-handed Olivier is recognizable from street performances in tourist spots like Pier 39, from touring in Sugar Babies with Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller, and from

appearances on The Tonight Show. But he's given ample room to show his stuff (no, I don't mean that stuff, though I wouldn't bet the farm against it -- they don't call him twisted for nothing) in this madcap carnal frankshow, a Frankapalooza if you will. You might say Olivier puts the villain back in vaudevillian -- if, um, you don't spell very well. But if you've ever wanted to see a guy juggle and play a guitar on fire while riding a unicycle, now's your chance to head on down to the Julia Morgan Center for the Arts this weekend. Not to put too fine a point on it, that's the kind of act it's best not to put off seeing too long.

So willkommen and bienvenue 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, or 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets can be procured at 925-798-1300, 2640 College Ave., Berkeley. More info at JuliaMorgan.org or TwistedCabaret.com

Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show plays at the Julia Morgan this weekend.

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

VEGAS'S LATEST NEWS

MIKE WEATHERFORD: Take break from Amazing Johnathan to see 'Twisted Cabaret'

Let's see. A guy is juggling three balls while wearing silly headgear, from which dangles three bells. In time with music, he makes a ball strike a bell to punctuate the music with a ding!

But then he misses. The ball hits his forehead, and blood begins to ooze. Oh, there goes that ol' Amazing Johnathan, you say.

Not quite. "Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret" offers similarly demented humor -- without the nonstop swearing -- in the Amazing J's showroom while Johnathan takes a working vacation in Australia. The two-week gig ends Sunday.

Olivier and Johnathan both hail from Northern California and have known each other since the early 1980s. They often performed on the same bill in Bay Area comedy clubs.

"The first comedy club I ever worked was filling in for him when he missed the second show at (San Francisco's) Holy City Zoo. And now the first casino I've ever worked is filling in for him," Olivier says.

Olivier's show is a bit of an acquired taste. The "Tongue Trick Theater" with camera close-ups might be the litmus test for your silliness quotient. But no one will deny Olivier's work ethic after he or

she has seen him walk on stilts in drag, play air guitar while riding a unicycle or juggle upside down while balanced upon a recruit from the audience.

It's not technically a one-man show; there's a stage foil in Paul Nathan, who plays a hunchbacked assistant and warms up the crowd with pre-show antics. But the central joke is that each act in a low-rent vaudeville show turns out to be Olivier in another guise.

"It was too short notice to do this actually, but we did it anyway," Olivier says of the decision he made two months ago to sublet the room from Johnathan. "I don't think anyone was expecting, with a minimal ad budget and so forth, to come in and take this town by storm."

But if small crowds leave happy, Olivier figures it will give him credibility toward a longer run here. He thinks "Twisted Cabaret" could even play in the afternoons. "We'd need to change it around a little bit, but kids love this show," he says. "Some parents are a little uncomfortable with the knife-throwing and the inflatable girl."

Olivier plans to videotape his 10 p.m. shows today and Friday. To make sure he has good houses for those shows, he's offering a limited number of free tickets on a first-come, first-served basis to those who mention the taping at the Sahara box office. ...

S A N F R A N C I S C O

The Examiner.

FRANK OLIVIER'S TWISTED CABARET & PANDEMONIUM VAUDEVILLE SHOW

Mason Street Theatre

Juggling. Magic. Knife-throwing. Fire eating. Old-school vaudeville stunts? The stuff of carnivals?

Not in the hands of Frank Olivier, the insanely funny and outrageously multi-talented comedian whose "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" is enjoying an open-ended run in The City.

Aided by master of ceremonies "Unkle Paul" Nathan and Nolan Gasser's Twisted Cabaret Band, Olivier turns traditional vaudeville on its ear with a dizzying assortment of comic characters, from the despondent knife-thrower Frankonovitchski to the hilarious yoga master Frankananda.

Olivier not only manipulates juggling pins, unicycles, knives and fire, but numerous parts of his body as well. Think of that kid on the playground who used to turn his eyelids inside out — to the tenth power.



The bells are ringing: Frank Olivier's juggling (which has audio as well as visual appeal) gets a little bloody in his "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show."

Through the magic of puppetry, he also becomes the 3-foot tall "Maurice," who lives in a trash can, and a trio of dancing girls called The Frankettes.

The key to the show's success is a twisted sense of danger that permeates the evening. Unlike slick performers who intend to wow the audience with perfection, Olivier keeps the crowd on edge with a sense that his dangerous stunts might not work.

Audiences are less likely to wonder, "How did he do that?" than exclaim, "I can't believe he did that!" (Adam Sandel)

"Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" continues in an open-ended run at Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco. Tickets cost \$38 to \$42. Call (415) 982-5463 or visit www.twistedcabaret.com.

San Francisco Chronicle

Olivier brings a new twist to vaudeville

By Robert Hurwitt
CHRONICLE THEATER CRITIC

Franks Olivier is a nut — probably not personally but certainly professionally. He's an overgrown kid playing with fire and very sharp objects, an inept klutz teetering through leaps and pirouettes on a unicycle, and an eager innocent dabbling in gross-out humor with irresistibly boyish charm.

He's also very good at what he does. "Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show," now at the Mason Street Theatre, is selling tickets only through March 10 but will probably fulfill its expectations of extending into an open-ended run. It isn't the most polished or impressive resurrection of an old vaudeville variety show, but it's a strong showcase for Olivier's talents. Which makes it a very funny and



JOHN O'HARA / The Chronicle

Frank Olivier does a juggling and bell-ringing routine in his show at the Mason Street Theatre.

often astonishing tour de force of juggling, fire-eating, tongue contortions and madcap comedy.

Some of the material will be familiar if you've caught any of his previous solos, TV appearances ("The Tonight Show"), his show-stopping featured act in the Mickey Rooney-Ann Miller national tour of "Sugar Babies" or just seen him honing his skills on the streets, where he started in

Berkeley at the age of 11 back in the 1970s. Some of the material is definitely new. Some of it is almost instantly forgettable. Much of it is simply a delight.

"Twisted" isn't a solo show. As written (including the lyrics) and co-directed (with David Dower) by Olivier, it's a succession of vaudeville turns with patter and occasional magic tricks by a master of ceremonies, the dryly hu-



FRANK OLIVIER'S TWISTED CABARET & PANDEMONIUM

VAUDEVILLE SHOW: Variety show. Created and performed by Frank Olivier. Directed by Olivier and David Dower. (Through March 10. At the Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco. Two hours. Tickets \$38-\$42. Call (415) 982-5463 or visit www.twistedcabaret.com).

morous Paul Nathan. It also features a sharp trio playing the beguiling Weimar cabaret-influenced original tunes of Nolan Gasser, with Gasser on piano, Tim Vaughan on drums and the honey-sweet reeds of Roger Glenn.

The heart of "Twisted," though, is the solo vaudeville turns by artists with variations of the name Frank, all

played by Olivier in a mind-boggling assortment of debonair and ridiculous costumes. As himself, he's the same wondrously funny, dexterous juggler as ever, tossing (and dropping) clubs and balls with a klutzy aplomb that makes old routines seem remarkably fresh. (Even most of the "mistakes" are familiar, though the bit he calls "The Lewinsky" — a risqué dollop of topical humor — is

new.)

As the Great Frankini, he's a deft magician. As Frankonovitchski, he's the kind of knife-thrower who makes you glad he's working with a dummy. As Frankananda, he does queasy-making nostril tricks, and as Lingua Franca, he's a tongue contortionist extraordinaire. As the Frankettes, Olivier transforms himself into a comic trio of chorus girls with some comic leg-puppetry. And he's also Maurice, the 3-foot-tall theater janitor engaged in a kind of search for signs of intelligent love in the universe.

Some of the routines are less finished than others. A Frank Bros. acrobatic dance number is an anticlimactic audience-participation bit. A lecture-demonstration on the famed flatulence art-

istry of the once-celebrated Le Petomane is funnier in concept than in execution. The low-ceilinged Mason Street stage doesn't really allow Olivier full scope for his unicycle-ballet skills.

But Olivier has always been the kind of artist who makes failure intrinsic to his act. Even the unfulfilled skits become almost as much part of the joy of "Twisted" as the dropped clubs and unicycle spills that add a shiver to his handling of a sharp blade or casual consumption of flaming blobs on a very long skewer. And Olivier isn't just an adept and original juggler, fire-eater and all-around vaudevillian. He's also one very funny guy.

E-mail Robert Hurwitt at rhurwitt@sfgchronicle.com.

FREE

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY

GUARDIAN

AGE

theater

By Brad Rosenstein

Mixed madness

Jugglers don't come much better or stranger than Frank Olivier. This Berkeley boy, who was featured in the Broadway hit *Sugar Babies*, is a one-man reincarnation of vaudeville with a decided edge. *Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show* features the performer as more than a dozen showbiz characters. Like vaudeville itself, the evening is a very mixed bag, including

a pointedly inept magician and an emotionally distraught knife thrower. There are some fun (and relatively kind) audience participation routines but also some dicey scatological bits, including a lecture-demonstration of the skills of legendary French farter le Petomane that sent a family with young children screaming for the exit.

There are hits and misses, and things take a dip whenever amiable but bland MC Paul Nathan takes over. When Olivier is juggling, however, no one can touch him, not just for his mind-bending skill but also for his perfectly honed awkward-guy appeal, which gets an audience roaring. A fire-eating restaurant sketch he does with Nathan is physical comedy perfection, and his finale, riding a unicycle while juggling and playing a literally blazing guitar, is downright awesome. The show definitely needs work before it's ready for prime time, but as a showcase for Olivier's peculiar talents, it's a delightfully wild ride. ❖

'Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show' runs open-ended. Thurs., 8 p.m.; Fri., 8:30 p.m.; Sat., 5:30 and 9 p.m.; Sun., 3:30 p.m., Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason, S.F. \$30-\$42. (415) 982-5463.

ONLINE: sfgate.com/datebook

Critics' Picks

THEATER: Frank Olivier is a nut,



an overgrown kid playing with fire and sharp objects, an inept klutz teetering through leaps and pirouettes on a unicycle and an exceptionally good and

funny juggler. "Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" isn't the most polished of shows, but it's a hilarious and often astonishing tour de force of juggling, fire-eating, tongue contortions, gross-out humor and madcap comedy.

Through March 10. Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco. Tickets: \$38-\$42. (415) 982-5463, www.twistedcabaret.org.

— Robert Hurvitt

THE NORTH BAY'S BEST EVERY WEEK

BEST BETS

Theater

Berkeley native and former S.F. Street performer Frank Olivier is a lovable lug who can juggle, eat fire, sing rock 'n' roll and ride a unicycle—and he does them all at once in the grand finale of *TWISTED CABARET*. But smart artist Olivier knows these skills aren't enough for a whole evening and so he's added a three-piece band (I love the way they lean in to watch Olivier, as if they can't believe it either). And he has a (slightly) straight second banana called Unkle Paul, to set him up in acts that range from 3 Dancing Girls (Olivier and two remarkable cardboard chicks), to a meal at the Cafe Flambe where everything on the menu is flaming. He brings audience members onstage and makes clowns out of them in several of his more popular segments. He's a yoga master, a lecturer on flatulence (that ends with blazing underpants)—but mainly Olivier creates an onstage character who will kill himself or audience members to entertain. Which makes *Twisted Cabaret*, in spite of its 3rd-grade gross-out material, fun. Through March 10 at Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason, S.F. Info: 415/982-5463.—LB

Marin Independent Journal



Twisting the night away

Frank Olivier's "Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" lets audiences in for an evening of demented fun at the Mason Street Theatre.

Olivier joins emcee Unkle Paul and the Twisted Cabaret Band for a fast-paced performance of 15 acts that run the gamut from magic to fire-eating. Tickets to "Twisted Cabaret" are \$30 through Feb. 14. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Thursday, 8:30 p.m. Friday, 5:30 and 9 p.m. Saturday, and 3:30 p.m. Sunday. Mason Street Theatre is at 340 Mason St., San Francisco. Call 982-5463.

The Oakland Tribune

The Argus, The Review, The Tribune, The Herald, The Times-Star

STAGE

Be grossed out by a true professional

By Chad Jones
STAFF WRITER

FRANK Olivier's "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" is good-time theater, and no one seems to be having a better time than Olivier himself.

The Berkeley vaudevillian is so good natured and giggly throughout his two-hour show that you just have to forgive him for being such a lunatic.

You want to see an audience

THEATER REVIEW

**Frank Olivier's
"Twisted Cabaret
& Pandemonium
Vaudeville Show"**
★★★ Fantastically
freakish

squirm? Go to San Francisco's Mason Street Theatre and watch Olivier, in his guise as yogi Frankananda, inhale a

strand of dental floss through his nose and then cough up one end out of his mouth. He casually tugs on both ends as if to demonstrate the ease with which his cranial cavities accommodate such childish (not to mention hilarious) pranks.

Don't try this at home! Go to the theater and pay Olivier, a truly twisted professional, to do it.

You'll also see him eat fire

Please see **Stage**, LIVING-6



FRANK OLIVIER plays with fire in his "Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" at the Mason Street Theatre in San Francisco.

JOHN J. KIM — Staff

Stage: Show offers series of stunts with twist of comedy

Continued from LIVING-1

and swallow flaming swords, bounce eight-balls off his head until he bleeds (no, it's not real) and juggle so many objects you'll think that gravity has given him a special dispensation.

"Twisted Cabaret," which opened Thursday night, is a series of stunts performed with a twist of comedy or a whiff of the macabre. Olivier is the main attraction, but he's given able assistance by emcee Paul Nathan, an accomplished magician in his own right, and a three-piece band headed by Nolan Gasser, who also wrote the 1930s car-oon-flavored score.

Director David Dower has patched together a show that gives Olivier free rein to unleash his naughty inner 7-year-old.

With an ever-present gleam in his eye, Olivier straps two

IF YOU GO

**Frank Olivier's
"Twisted Cabaret
& Pandemonium
Vaudeville Show"**

■ **Where:** Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco

■ **When:** 8 p.m. Thursdays; 8:30 p.m. Fridays; 5:30 and 9 p.m. Saturdays; 3:30 p.m. Sundays

■ **Tickets:** \$38-\$42

■ **Transit:** Powell Street BART

■ **Call:** (415) 982-5463

dolls onto his shoulders and becomes a trio of dancing girls known as the Frankettes. He hauls a hapless volunteer from

the audience and makes him the amnesiac half of an acrobatic team. And he does tricks with a pink tutu and a unicycle that would leave Baryshnikov agog.

The highlight of the show — if you consider the dental floss trick to be the most enjoyable low point — is Olivier's tribute to Joseph Pujol, the French entertainer known as Le Pétomane.

Pujol practiced what Olivier describes as "willed flatulence," which is to say he was able to take air into the lower part of his body and expel it in musical or otherwise tricky ways.

Olivier has not quite mastered this questionable art, but he does manage, if you listen carefully, to achieve some audible success. The final trick, involving butane and flames, really must be seen to be believed.

The most significant problem of this highly enjoyable evening is the theater itself. There must be a better space for Olivier's merry mayhem than the cramped Mason Street Theatre. The sight lines are terrible, and during the rock 'n' roll finale involving a very tall unicycle, flaming batons and an electric guitar, the low ceiling and small stage dampen the thrill of Olivier's accomplishment.

There are other quibbles as well. A video screen meant to enhance Olivier's astonishing tongue tricks is much too small, and the character of Maurice, a little person puppet Olivier has fashioned out of a garbage can, appears too frequently and without much purpose.

But such quibbles aren't nearly enough to detract from the unhinged effervescence of Olivier's performance. This is a man possessed of enormous tal-

ents and mintscale maturity. He is a pleasure to watch, even when he makes you cover your face in horror or roll your eyes in mock disgust.

This is a man who turns juggling into the best stand-up comedy around. He can turn juggling three clubs into political satire when he performs "The Lewinsky," or he can make the audience gasp in wonder when he has five balls hanging in mid-air.

Whether he's grossing you out or eliciting snorts of laughter, Olivier manages to muster up a sort of "how does he do that?" magic that delights and disarms. Here's hoping that Olivier's "Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville" continues to freak out audiences for a good long time. ■

You can e-mail Chad Jones at cjones@angnews.com or call (925) 416-4653.

San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

Juggler gets raves for dropping the ball

By Rona Marech
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Franks Olivier has been juggling for 30 years, dental floss snorting for 14 years, volitional farting for two years and simultaneously unicycling, guitar playing and juggling torches for most of the decade. The list goes on: tongue acrobatics, swallowing fire, magic tricks, knife-throwing.

His demented resume — impressive to 11-year-olds, seasoned performers and freaky San Francisco hipsters alike — is on display five nights a week in his new show, "Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show."

In his manic ballet, he plays the magician the Great Frankini, the yoga master Frankamanda, the despondent knife-thrower Frankonivitchski and assorted other fire-eaters, dancers, cyclists and oddballs in ridiculous costumes. He openly laughs, sweats, entertains, delights and frightens the audience, an act that the Oakland performer has been honing since he was growing up in Berkeley.

A host of warm reviews have won him an extended run at the Mason Street Theatre.

"He's an overgrown kid playing with fire and very sharp objects, an inept klutz — and an eager innocent dabbling in gross-out humor with irresistibly boyish charm," wrote *The Chronicle's* Robert Hurwitz.

The show's more surprising bits include a flatulence routine — a lecture on famous French farter Le Pétouane, followed by a rousing concert — and the yogi trick, which entails running a piece of dental floss (and later a balloon) through his nose and out his mouth.

"The funniest part," said Olivier, 41, "is that people will pay to watch."

Mom Helen Rubardt, an upstanding, church-going, Berkeley music teacher, said, "I've learned to expect the unexpected from Frank."

Olivier's twisted career began at age 11 when a firefighter visited his class at Berkeley's Emerson School and employed a juggling act to teach students about fire safety. Soon after, Major Chumleigh's Amazing Traveling Circus came to a park in his Berkeley neighborhood, and the youngster was off and running and throwing and catching, spending countless hours practicing with pins and — on the sly from his parents — fire.

When he was barely a teenager, Olivier took his juggling and unicycling act to Sproul Plaza on the University of California at Berkeley campus. On a good day,

Wacky act

"Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" starts at 8:30 tonight, 5:30 and 9 p.m. tomorrow and 3:30 p.m. Sunday. Ends Sunday. Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco. \$30-\$42. (415) 982-5463.

he would earn \$15, prompting him to quit his newspaper-delivery job. He has worked exclusively as a performer ever since.

After a stint at Ringling Bros. Clown College at 18, Olivier returned to San Francisco where he performed on the street and at local comedy clubs. His big break came in the early '80s, when he joined the cast of "Sugar Babies," a hit show starring Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller. Following that three-year tour, he performed around the world and on a slew of television programs. He has mounted five one-man shows.

The success of Olivier's act relies heavily on his maniacal energy, intentional sloppiness and the threat of danger.

"Other jugglers have to know (their routine) really well before they try it on stage," he said. "For me, it makes it funnier, things go better when everything is falling apart."

When he started juggling eight balls, he would sometimes make as many as 10 attempts before the trick worked. The audience would fret and froth and then explode when he finally got it right. "If you stay with the moment and don't move into panic mode, usually what comes out of multiple attempts are moments of comedy, jewels."

In fact, the mayhem — as horrifically perilous as it sometimes appears — is actually tightly controlled. Real accidents are rare, Olivier said, before launching into a story about nearly chopping off his finger with a machete on live television. He was warning up to the trick, joking and slicing a candle and — whack! When the host of the show saw spurting blood, she refused to go forward as his lovely assistant.

The thought of the incident



GINA GATLE / *The Chronicle*

Frank Olivier occasionally drops items while he juggles in "Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret and Pandemonium Vaudeville Show," but that's OK, the humor is part of the show.

still turns Olivier's stomach three years later. "That's the most embarrassing thing I've ever done in my life," he said. He was briefly depressed, but managed to shake the knife-tossing blues when he realized, "Hey, I hit myself with a machete — and I'm OK!"

Paul Nathan, an old friend and the emcee of Olivier's show, says that the nuttiness is as real as the flatulence and the fire. "To spend two hours with Frank onstage is exactly the same as spending two hours offstage," he said.

Olivier's wife, Brenna, recently gave birth to their first child. Perhaps — as the stereotype suggests — fatherhood will tease out the

inveterate performer's more philosophical underside. But those who really know him say he already has a flourishing quiet side.

According to his mom, Olivier can be almost shy. Shy! And he met his wife at a meditation retreat. In fact, he has meditated for almost as long as he has juggled.

"Both require similar focus. Juggling is, in a sense, a meditation," Olivier said. "You have to be right where things are and it keeps you in the moment. It doesn't matter where you want to be. You are where you are."

E-mail comments to
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E Files

The stunt man's here

Frank Olivier does demented vaudeville

BY ADAM SANDEL
Special to The Examiner

JUGGLING. MAGIC. Knife-throwing. Fire eating. The stuff of carnivals, you say? Old-school vaudeville stunts?

Not in the hands of Frank Olivier, the insanely funny and outrageously multi-talented comedian whose "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show" hurtles into the Mason Street Theatre beginning today for a limited run.

Aided by master of ceremonies "Unkle Paul" Nathan and Nolan Gasser's Twisted Cabaret Band, Olivier turns traditional vaudeville on its ear with a dizzying assortment of comic characters, from the despondent knife-thrower Frankonovitchski to the hilarious yoga master Frankananda.

Over the course of the evening, Olivier not only manipulates juggling pins, unicycles, knives and fire, but numerous parts of his body, as well. Think of that kid on the playground who used to turn his eyelids inside out — to the tenth power.

Through the magic of puppetry, he also becomes the 3-foot tall "Maurice," who lives in a trash can, and a trio of dancing girls called The Frankettes.

The key to the show's success is a twisted sense of danger that permeates the evening. Unlike slick performers who intend to wow the au-

Please see **OLIVIER, C6**

Olivier's like the kid who turns his eyelids inside out

Continued from **OLIVIER, C1**

dience with perfection. Olivier keeps the crowd on edge with a sense that his dangerous stunts might not work.

Audiences are less likely to wonder, "How did he do that?" than exclaim, "I can't believe he did that!"

Before a recent rehearsal, Olivier talked about why he decided to go into this particular line of work.

"I started juggling and unicycling at 11," he says. "It was a hobby that got out of hand. I started mime and fire eating quietly at 13. Mime because it is quiet, and I kept the fire eating quiet so my parents wouldn't know."

Olivier is a fourth-generation Bay Area native; he was born in Walnut Creek, grew up in Berkeley and now lives in Oakland. After high school he graduated from Ringling Bros.

Clown College, became a street performer and comedy club regular, then toured with Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller in "Sugar Babies," earning a nomination for the Helen Hayes Award.

He has performed on "The Tonight Show" and at New York's Lincoln Center, has toured Europe, and performed at comedy clubs and theater festivals around the world.

When asked about his dangerous style, Olivier says, "Twenty years ago as a street performer in San Francisco, I tried to do a slicker character saying 'ladies and gentlemen, step right up' and it bombed. I have an awkward edge to what I do and over the years I've really played that up."

"That danger is a big part of it," adds composer Nolan Gasser who created all of the show's music.

"In composing the music I used a Weill-esque sound that

combines comedy with a dangerous edge."

David Dower, who has directed comic works by Sara Felder, Josh Kornbluth and Charlie Varon, is collaborating with Olivier on this production.

"Twisted Cabaret" is not necessarily for the whole family, though. Although 4-year-olds have seen the show and enjoyed it, Olivier generally recommends it for audiences age 12 and over.

"There's no nudity, there's no profanity, but it is edgy, risky comedy and there are some things in the show that you don't want a young child trying to duplicate at home. I tell people to bring children at your own risk."

"But the parents who do bring their kids to see it are the coolest parents in the world," adds Dower.

Of the many stunts that Olivier does in his show, the most challenging is the Rock 'N' Roll Finale, in which he rides an enormous unicycle while juggling and playing electric guitar.

The bit is somewhat similar to one he did while taping a television show earlier in his career. Olivier was working on a borrowed unicycle, and ended his act with a spectacular belly flop onto a table in the front row.

"You should warn someone before you do a stunt like that," said the show's producer.

To which Olivier replied, "That wasn't a stunt."

Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show

continues in an open-ended run at Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco. Tickets cost \$38 to \$42. Call (415) 982-5463 or visit www.twistedcabaret.com.

STAGE

Berkeley vaudevillian gets in touch with inner 7-year-old

By Chad Jones
STAFF WRITER

On some level, most performers do what they do to be noticed. Frank Olivier is no exception. He's standing on a small stage eating fire from a bowl using a flaming spoon.

Hard not to notice that.

This is just one of the many demented tricks he performs in "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show," now on stage at the Mason Street Theatre in San Francisco.

Born and raised in Berkeley, 40-year-old Olivier began juggling in the third grade. By the time he was at Berkeley High School, he had formed a clown partnership with a friend and was working with the Berkeley Circus.

"I was a bad clown," Olivier says, sitting in the theater before a preview performance. "I was good for a 13-year-old clown, but I was a bad clown, complete with red nose and wig."

All that changed after he went to Ringling Brothers Clown College and then, almost by accident, got a job with the Broadway show "Sugar Babies" starring Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller.

Ever since then, he has been perfecting his quirky brand of stand-up comedy mixed with circus tricks such as juggling, knife throwing and unicycle riding.

"Twisted Cabaret" is Olivier's sixth show, but he considers this one to be the culmination of 30 years' worth of training.

"This is the show I've been waiting to do my whole life, what I've been training to do," he says.

During the course of two hours, Olivier plays 12 characters, each with his own array of stunts. Although Olivier is the star, the show features a band headed by Nolan Gasser, who also wrote the original score,

and emcee Paul Nathan, whose stage name is Unkle Paul.

One of Olivier's characters does extraordinary tongue tricks, augmented for the audience with a video camera and big-screen TV. Olivier offers a sample by seeming to rotate his tongue 360 degrees.

Another of his creations involves a unicycle ballet, complete with the performer in a unitard and tutu, while yet another has an inept magician accidentally "cutting off" the hand of an audience volunteer.

If all this sounds like good family fun, think again. Olivier does not work the birthday party circuit, and though his humor has sometimes been described as childish, his stunts, with their whiff of the macabre, are directed more toward adults.

At a recent preview performance, Olivier noticed a boy sitting in the front row.

"Don't do this at home,"

Olivier cautioned him. "Go to a neighbor's house."

Director David Dower says Olivier is a lot like a "6-foot-4-inch 7-year-old."

"He's endlessly inventive," Dower says. "He does things with himself and with props that only a child would think of doing, but it works. People are holding their heads in their

hands, they're laughing so hard."

Olivier gets so excited talking about certain parts of the show that he just has to do them. Describing the unicycle ballet, he runs backstage to slip on the unitard and pink tutu.

Garbed like something out of a "Zippy the Pinhead" comic, Olivier describes another component of the show: a tribute to Joseph Pujol, better known as Le Petomane, a French entertainer who performed at places like the Moulin Rouge and wowed the crowned heads of Europe in the late 1800s.

Describing what Pujol did is rather tricky. Let's just say that one of his best tricks involved blowing out a candle from a foot away without using his mouth.

Olivier doesn't do that particular stunt, but he pays homage in his own way. So far, audiences have had a hard time believing he's telling the truth about Le Petomane.

"I have photos and facts, but they don't believe me," he says. "The guy was a national hero in France, but then again, so's Jerry Lewis."

Sitting on the edge of the stage, doing some mind-boggling card tricks, Olivier is joined by Brenna, his wife of 3½ years, who is about a month and a half away from giving birth to their first child.

She's on her way to a childbirth class. The plan was to have her husband at her side, but his evenings are taken up with the new show.

Brenna gives her husband a kiss, works out how he'll get home to Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood and then shuffles off.

Is it possible that fatherhood might change Olivier, make him less fearless when it comes to taking risks for the sake of entertainment?

"My wife is hoping so," Olivier says with a laugh.

IF YOU GO

Frank Olivier's "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show"

■ **Where:** Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., San Francisco

■ **When:** 8 p.m. Thursdays; 8:30 p.m. Fridays; 5:30 and 9 p.m. Saturdays; 3:30 p.m. Sundays

■ **Tickets:** \$38-\$42

■ **Transit:** Powell Street BART

■ **Call:** (415) 982-5463

Contra Costa Times

'Twisted Cabaret' is pure entertainment

By Pat Craig

TIMES STAFF WRITER

Frank Olivier calls his new show "Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show," so right off, he gets points for honesty.

This is not your wistful reminiscence of the old Orpheum circuit and the Singing Sisters of Spain.

Olivier presents his one-man vaudeville show with a more contemporary sensibility, blending a number of time-honored talents — flame and flatulence, for example — into something, if not entirely new, at least very different from what you've seen before.

A lifelong street performer who began honing his talents on the sidewalks of Berkeley when he was 12, Olivier presents this show as a culmination of a career's work in the offbeat entertainment field. Had this been another era, Olivier and his unicycle, or juggling clubs, or fire-eating, or knife-throwing, might have each been enough to keep him busily and constantly employed. But while this is the age of specialization in other areas, in entertainment, you need to be flex-

THEATER REVIEW

■ **WHAT:** "Twisted Cabaret," by Frank Olivier

■ **WHERE:** Mason Street Theatre, 340 Mason St., S.F.

■ **WHEN:** Wednesdays-Sundays, open-ended

■ **HOW MUCH:** \$38-\$42

■ **CALL:** 415-982-5463

ible to avoid boring an already overentertained populace.

So Olivier, like a slightly bent variety arts chef, cooks up a blend of entertainments that really do include flatulence and fire, both together and separately, into a wildly funny show. The gimmick here is that all the acts are performed by Olivier, who gives each of the different entertainers a name that includes Frank.

Wisely, though, he doesn't just trot out and pretend he's John Byner doing an entire "Ed Sullivan Show" all by himself. Nope, he's got a three-piece band, and a wickedly clever emcee, "Uncle" Paul (Paul Nathan), who give the

show a polished look.

Bandleader Nolan Gasser composed most of the music used in the show, and Uncle Paul is just about as twisted as Olivier, himself, offering a comedic counterpoint and some great material to give Olivier a chance to change costumes between performances.

Where Olivier is innocently malevolent, Uncle Paul is like the kid down the block who won popularity with his seemingly endless access to adult novelties. He seasons the act and helps it move quickly and seemingly effortlessly.

With Olivier, you get the impression that he truly doesn't know where his next act will take him, but seems to believe he'll be lucky if it doesn't end in serious injury.

Like most good street performers, he's always on the very edge of disaster, constantly giving the impression that the next juggling club will brain him, the fire won't go out when he sticks the flaming sword in his mouth and the beautiful dove really has

been reduced to a mound of feathers by an inept magician.

He offers some devilishly inventive versions of old show-business warhorses.

His knife-thrower has an Eastern European accent, of course, but he has also separated from his wife and target and takes his angst out on the new target; he is a yoga master who takes the old show-business wish "Break a leg" far too seriously; he performs his acrobatic dance standards with a hapless audience member he has pulled from his seat and thrust on-stage; and his big finish includes guitar playing and juggling aboard a unicycle that reaches nearly to the ceiling.

It's one of those shows that works so perfectly wonderfully, you're surprised nobody had come up with it before. But fortunately, Olivier is the one who did — because he does it all so tremendously well.

Pat Craig is the Times theater critic. He can be reached at 925-945-4736 or at pcraig@cctimes.com.

THE CRITICS RAVE FOR:
FRANK OLIVIER'S
TWISTED CABARET

"ONE VERY FUNNY GUY!

Madcap comedy... A very funny, often astonishing tour de force."

- SF CHRONICLE

"INSANELY FUNNY!

Olivier turns traditional vaudeville on its ear with a dizzying assortment of comic characters"

- SF EXAMINER

"He's an energetic, multi-talented, masterful comedy performer who can do it all... The funniest show I've ever seen. It's a hoot, a riot, a scream, it's slapstick, it's unbelievable!

IT'S COMEDY AT ITS ABSOLUTE BEST!" - KGO RADIO

"Olivier is a one-man reincarnation of vaudeville with a decided edge.

IT'S A DELIGHTFULLY WILD RIDE!"

- SF BAY GUARDIAN

"LAUGH OUT LOUD!

If demented vaudeville is a religion, this man must be a high priest!"

- SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS

"Frank Olivier's Twisted Cabaret & Pandemonium Vaudeville Show is GOOD-TIME THEATER... Olivier is a man possessed of enormous talent. He is a pleasure to watch!"

- OAKLAND TRIBUNE

"Olivier, like a slightly bent variety arts chef, cooks up a blend of entertainments into **A WILDLY FUNNY SHOW!** It's one of those shows that works so perfectly wonderfully, you're surprised nobody had come up with it before!"

- CONTRA COSTA TIMES