

JENEÉ

FROM PAGE 3

George Carlin, smart comedians unafraid to be social critics. But as much as he loves comedy, he also has a passion for history.

Almost a decade ago, Justin left Kansas City to pursue a doctoral degree in African history at the State University of New York in Stony Brook. Not only was he the new kid, in a new state, on the coast, he eventually went on to become the new teacher and a new comedian. A few years ago, Justin took part in an open mic night and got a lot of laughs. So when the 30-year-old isn't teaching history at the City College of New York, he's on stage.

He doesn't plan to give up one career for the other, yet. The two jobs, he says, aren't so different.

"It's great that I get to do both. I spend a lot of time talking about things that matter, things that are meaningful and working to keep the attention of the crowd," he says. "When comedy comes up with a health plan, maybe my answer will be different."

Still, he's enjoying success in the underground New York comedy circuit. He hosts open-mic nights, earned a spot as one of Elite Daily's "Comics to Watch" and screened his stand-up film, "Justin Williams: Black and Comfortably Middle Class," at the 2013 Friars Club Comedy Film Festival.

But this weekend, Justin is getting back to his Kansas City roots.

"Home is where the heart is: KC, baby," he says. "I come back two or three times a year. I have a lot of big supporters here, and Westport is a great place to do a show."

He says fans can expect him not to shy away from the hard topics — the government shutdown, Trayvon Martin, voting rights — he speaks his mind.

"I talk about the things people don't like to talk about in public, like politics. We have to talk about it," he says. "Politics are crazy because we never talk about it."

Reach Jeneé Osterheldt, call 816-234-4380 or send email to josterheldt@kstar.com. "Like" her page on Facebook and never miss a column. You also can follow her at Twitter.com/jeneeinkc.

This Week in Kansas City



The Michael Yo Hot Mess Comedy Tour

Michael Yo is a mogul in the making. He's positioning himself as a tastemaker through his appearances as a TV commentator on programs including "Chelsea Lately" and as a correspondent for outlets such as "Showbiz Tonight." While Yo's stand-up comedy is amusing, he's at his best when acting as a presenter. His Hot Mess Comedy Tour features two of his colleagues. The signature routine of Los Angeles' "Justine 'the Machine' Marino describes her fixation with Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Orlando Baxter, a former middle school teacher from Massachusetts, relates hilarious tales about working with troubled youths.

8 and 10:30 p.m. Friday, 7 and 10 p.m. Saturday, and 7 p.m. Sunday. KC Improv, 7260 W. 87th St. 816-759-5233. improvkc.com. \$20.

Missouri Comets vs. Syracuse Silver Knights

The winning combination of hosting the MLS All-Star game at Sporting Park in July and Sporting KC's thrilling victory in the MLS Cup earlier this month has inspired a lot of people to refer to the Kansas City area as the soccer capital of the United States. Sports fans can affirm the premise by supporting the Missouri Comets, the indoor soccer team that plays at the Independence Events Center. Sporting KC's 2014 season doesn't begin until March, allowing impatient fans to bide their time by watching the Comets' roster of international athletes take on the Syracuse Silver Knights.

7:35 p.m. Saturday. Independence Events Center. 855-452-4625. cometsindoorsoccer.com. \$15-\$45.

The Louis Neal Big Band

Kansas City has a plethora of big bands that evoke the large ensembles once led by Bennie Moten, Count Basie and Jay McShann. The Louis Neal Big Band is a casual "kicks" group that is regularly featured at the Blue Room. Unlike the traditionalist Vine Street Rumble Jazz Orchestra or the more formal Kansas City Jazz Orchestra, Neal's band possesses a contemporary sensibility that's designed to please fans of both Duke Ellington and Stevie Wonder. Admission to the Blue Room is free on Mondays, but the vibrant atmosphere and the swinging music are priceless.

7 p.m. Monday. The Blue Room at the American Jazz Museum, 1616 E. 18th St. 816-474-8463. americanjazzmuseum.com. Free.

New Year's Tease

Santa has already come and gone, so why not get a little naughty on New Year's Eve? The Lawrence Burlesque Collective is presenting New Year's Eve Tease, a tastefully risqué night of revealing dancing and performances by a hip-hop artist and a rock band. The women of the Lawrence Burlesque Collective are part of a time-honored tradition that spans from Gypsy Rose Lee to the Suicide Girls. They'll offer more than an hour of tantalizing theater. Approach, a hero of the Midwestern hip-hop underground, Kansas City's punk-inspired Hissy Fit and DJDG Boogie will provide the music. There'll be plenty of time to behave nicely before Santa begins making his lists in 2014.

8 p.m. Tuesday. Liberty Hall, 644 Massachusetts St. in Lawrence. 785-749-1972. libertyhall.net. \$13 in advance.

The year's final performance of the Kansas City Repertory Theatre's 'A Christmas Carol'

"God bless us, every one!" Tiny Tim's maxim tugs at the hearts of everyone who has read "A Christmas Carol" or who has seen any of the thousands of adaptations of Charles Dickens' classic work on stage or screen. The Kansas City Repertory Theatre's elaborate production, a staple of Kansas City theater, is the region's theatrical benchmark. Even the Rep's hilarious contemporary works such as "A Christmas Story" and "The Santaland Diaries" have failed to supplant its stirring rendition of the story about the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge.

1 and 5 p.m. Thursday. Spencer Theater, 4949 Cherry St. 816-235-2700. kcrep.org. \$29-\$69.

| Bill Brownlee, Special to The Star