

## Wil Sylvince: New York's Funniest Comic

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What set New York's Funniest Stand-Up contest winner [Wil Sylvince](#) apart from the rest of the field during Monday night's finals at Caroline's was the Haitian material.

The material was funny—particularly the bit about Haitians making lousy pimps because of their elfish, pipping speech and squeaky falsetto voices.

But what made the material fly was the way it connected with the kind of cultural catharsis we Americans crave in our comedy. Since the earliest days of the republic, the comic stage has been the crucible in which we've tested "other" ethnic and racial identities before making them our own.

Maybe as a Haitian-American, Sylvince had an unfair advantage over the other four contestants who each donned more familiar personae. But he worked it too, with the kind of tragicomic, confessional material that gives the best stand-up its depth: In one memorable routine, Sylvince goofed on his father giving him a broom for Christmas, pretending it was a toy and teaching young Wil how to "play" with it.

For bearing his pain and helping us laugh both with and at his Haitian-ness, Sylvince won \$2500 and the chance to perform on the bill at the New York Comedy Festival's closing event on Sunday night at Lincoln Center with Artie Lange headlining.

Even with the explosion of media outlets for stand-up, pure comedy is a tough business. Most comics are road warriors, living out of suitcases, changing into old clothes in the back room at Zany's, and grossing, maybe \$60K on a good year. And yet an event like New York's Funniest Stand Up drew more than 200 contestants to its open call last month. (The event was a first, but one that club owner Caroline Hirsch hoped would become an annual event.)

The finals, hosted by *Curb Your Enthusiasm's* famously foul-mouthed Susie Essman, played to a full room and all the contestants went over well (only Joey Gay's abrasive, Brooklyn lout routine missed more than it hit). Julian McCollough's twentysomething slacker single had a good line about Match.com: "I don't have 25 dimensions to my personality." Marc Theobald gave the evening's most polished, theatrical performance, but one that drew perhaps too recognizably from Richard Pryor in terms of facial mugging and mike technique.

But in the end the clear winner was Sylvince who was already slated to open for Damon Wayans at the Comedy Festival's Friday night event.