



Hot Improv The Black Version

Clockwise from left: Cedric Yarbrough, Black, Gary Anthony Williams, Jordan Peele, Daniele Gaither, Keegan-Michael Key and LaMarr

Funniest new theater crew in L.A. scores with absurdly simple premise

NOBODY EVER TALKS about how white improv is, except for the handful of black people in it," says veteran actor Phil LaMarr. So three years ago, Groundlings alumnus Jordan Black gathered a half-dozen African-American actors (including LaMarr) and launched *The Black Version*, an improv show with an absurdly simple premise: doing the "black version" of Hollywood movies. *Psycho* became *Cray-*

Cray. *Weird Science* turned into *Makin' a Ho*. And *The Silence of the Lambs* was reborn as *Why You Eatin' People?* "It's such a thin, essentially racist premise," says LaMarr. "We figured a month in, we'd be out of jokes. But then it took off." The show consistently sells out its Monday night slot at the Groundlings Theatre - L.A.'s most legendary improv venue. It helps that the cast is a comedic A-team, able to vividly render, say, a confrontation between Bill Cosby and his zydeco-loving black nationalist son. "We don't really talk about race in this country," Black says. "And we definitely don't talk about it in L.A. I think this show gives people a chance to exhale a little bit."

GAVIN EDWARDS

Hot Influence Grateful Dead

It used to be Bruce, then it was Paul Simon. Now? All the indie kids love Jerry

'MARK MY WORDS, THE Grateful Dead are gonna make a comeback," John Mayer told RS earlier this year. Dude was right! Suddenly, the Dead are everywhere. Bob Weir popped up onstage with Wilco, My Morning Jacket and the National recently. And a whole Coachella's worth of indie acts - including Vampire Weekend, Kurt Vile and Bon Iver - are contributing to a forthcoming Dead tribute disc produced by the National. (We can only hope that it's better than the grunge-era *Deadedicated*, which featured dubious delights like Jane's Addiction tackling "Ripple.") "Our idea of jamming when we played Bonnaroo was to put, like, eight extra bars in one song," says Vampire Weekend drummer Chris Tomson. "But they weren't afraid to follow their impulse and just trust that the audience that liked them would go with them to where they wanted to go - we can take that from them."

PATRICK DOYLE



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HOT PINT-SIZE SHREDDER AYUMU HIRANO

The first look Americans got at Ayumu Hirano was when the then-12-year-old Japanese snowboarder went so big on the half-pipe at the 2011 U.S. Open Snowboarding Championship in Vermont that people are *still* talking about it. He

won the Open's junior division that year (and again the next) - looking good enough to beat the world's best riders, even though he was about as tall as Shaun White's snowboard. So it wasn't entirely a surprise when, at last winter's X Games,



Hirano nearly beat White, scoring a silver medal - and walking away with pretty much all of the buzz as the youngest medalist in the event's history. Now he's gunning to dethrone the Flying Tomato at the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, this February - even if he won't quite come out and say he wants it. "If I do, that's cool," says Hirano, now 14. "If I don't, that's cool, too."

JOSH DEAN

NOVELS, BUDDY JONATHAN FRANZEN // HOT FORBIDDEN LOVE MEGYN KELLY // HOT REALITY TV 'VEEP'