

# Former local comic gets biggest shot yet on 'Tonight Show'

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Marian Kelly has done her time in comedy clubs and on cable television. Come Thursday, she breaks out on network TV.

Kelly, a stand-up comic who cut her teeth in Kansas City comedy clubs, is scheduled to make her network debut on the "Tonight Show" with Jay Leno at 10:30 p.m. Thursday on WDAF, Channel 4.

"You add up all the people who have ever laid eyes on me in a comedy club and I'm going to top it in one six-minute set," Kelly said from her home in Burbank, Calif.



Marian Kelly

She graduated to touring professional status, and her career gradually blossomed with appearances on "Star Search," MTV, the Arts & Entertainment Channel and the Lifetime Channel.

A native of Seneca, Mo., she moved to Independence in 1987 and spent eight months working open-mike nights at Stanford's Comedy House and the now-defunct Funny Bone.

Last month her agent sent a video of Kelly to "Tonight Show" comic scout and booker Jimmy Brogan, who liked her act. After seeing Kelly perform live at the Improv, he had a few suggestions.

"There was one word that he found questionable," she said. "I'm not going to tell you what it was. It wasn't dirty."

Another Brogan tip was to modify a joke so it didn't sound like it belonged to another comic. He caught Kelly's act again, at Igby's, and gave her the green light to take on "Tonight."

"Every joke has to work," Kelly said. "They make sure that not only are you good, but that

you're prepared to go on national TV and do well. They want you to rock the place."

So is she nervous?  
"I probably will be that night, but I'm not now," she said. "I'm just very focused."

And extremely prepared. For weeks she's been hitting the stages of one or two L.A. clubs a night to polish her act.

"I'm doing the same set over and over again," she said. "So there's no chance I won't know it backward and forward."

Kelly's dream scenario would include a sitcom deal, a la Roseanne, Brett Butler and Ellen DeGeneres. But she doesn't crave life-changing stardom, only a

big-time creative outlet.

"I would like to see the words that I write come out of someone else's mouth," she said. "It's not fame that is sucking me into this. It never was. It was the thrill of getting a laugh with something you decided to say."

Her only regret in pursuing a show-biz career in California is living so far away from family in Missouri.

"I miss them to pieces," Kelly said. "I've got nieces and nephews that have grown three inches since I last laid eyes on them at Christmas. I talked to one on the phone and said, 'You sound taller. Who authorized you to grow while I was gone?'"