



Comedy act doubles up with laughs

By Pete Mortensen The Daily Northwestern
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Ernie G was a degree away from becoming a social worker.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in psychology, Ernie G, born Ernesto Tomas Gritzewsky, was weeks away from entering the social work graduate program at San Jose State University when he attended a seminar that changed his life.

"The leader said, 'If you know in your heart that you are a performer and don't do anything about it, you are robbing the world,'" Ernie G said.

And fortunately for the crowd at Saturday night's 2nd Annual Marcus Marinho Comedy Beatdown, Ernie G said he knew he was a comedian at heart. Ernie G, along with Felipe Esparza and Northwestern alumnus Rick Ramos, entertained an audience of about 350 at Ryan Family Auditorium in the Technological Institute.

The event, sponsored by Alianza, the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Omega Delta Phi, Sigma Lambda Gamma and the Latino Alumni Association, is held in honor of Marinho, who died in a car crash during Winter Break 1997. Alianza President Lilly González said it was historic for all of the campus Latino groups to co-sponsor an event. Proceeds benefit a scholarship in Marinho's name.

Ramos, Speech '96, a friend of Marinho's, kicked off the event, saying diversity has increased at NU since his days as a Wildcat. He also performed at last year's inaugural event.

"When I came here, I was the Mexican," he said. "Seven thousand five hundred people ... Mexican percentage: me."

Marinho is the only reason Ramos comes back, he said in an interview before the show.

"This place is evil," Ramos said, pointing at Tech. "There is this dark grey cloud over it. But I come back for someone I love. I wouldn't for any other reason."

Esparza was called in at the last second to replace Gabel Iglesias, who canceled because of another commitment. He said his mother's reassurances did not help his anxiety.

"She said, 'Don't worry. No one there is gonna laugh at you,'" Esparza said.

Esparza said in an interview prior to his performance that he got into comedy because he ran out of things he was bad at.

"I majored in part-time jobs," he said. "I was starving as a student anyway, so (I figured) I might as well starve as a comedian."

The manic energy of the headlining comedian, Ernie G, the "Latino Sinbad," electrified the audience. The self-described Mexican-American-Puerto Rican-French-Russian-Catholic Jew blended humor with songs and dance moves.

Ernie G mocked stereotypes, public service announcements and religion. He said going back to Catholic Ash Wednesday services after several years away reminded him how many things could get him sent to hell.

"I thought, 'I forgot to genuflect! I'm going to hell,'" he said.

After graduating from college, Ernie G moved into his grandmother's garage. He said he lived rent-free as long as he took out the garbage on Tuesdays.

This living arrangement was less than ideal, as his grandmother would wake him up early in the morning with semi-inspirational mixed metaphors.

"That's the way the cookie bounces, Ernesto," Ernie G said, impersonating his grandmother. "Get in there and eat your menudo because money doesn't grow on fleas."

Audience members said they enjoyed the comics' performances.

"It was hilarious," said McCormick sophomore Angelo Gonzalez. "It's a step for the Latino community to hold a large-scale event here."