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[Comedy](#) Thu Jun 16 2011

**[Paul F. Tompkins with Demetri Martin and
friends, tonight at the Chicago Theater](#)**

By Nellie Huggins

I recently had the opportunity to talk with Paul F. Tompkins, who is performing at the Chicago Theater tonight in [Demetri Martin & Special Guests, Who Are Also Comedians and Friends of His](#), about his career, his upcoming album and his feelings about American Idol.



Tell me about the show you're doing with Demetri Martin for Just For Laughs.

I will be doing a proper set of stand-up, and I believe the show is being recorded. It's really just friends doing what friends do when they get together.

I can't wait to see it! I missed you when you were in town last, and it was very upsetting.

Well, I'm glad there's a second chance for you (laughs).

Me, too! Can you talk a little bit about the new cd that you're working on?

Sure. I am recording a new cd in the fall, in Brooklyn, at the Bell House. It's the current live hour that I have been doing for the past year. I would love to have a quick enough turn around to be able to get it out this year.

Speaking of working on new things, you recently did a column for [New York Magazine](#) on [American Idol](#). Can you talk about what that entailed?

A guy named Justin Wolk approached me and asked if I would ever be interested in doing something like that - I was reluctant at first, then I thought 'this will be easy'. I didn't realize at the time how much it would take over my life. It was 6 months of me writing about a show I don't really like and it ended up being a lot of work.

That did seem very involved. What is your writing process like?

I make a lot of notes. My writing these days consists of stand up and sketch. If I'm writing sketch, I outline the sketch, put the meat on the skeleton and make sure it's funny at every beat. Stand-up is different - it's more conversational. I go up with bullet points and talk it out. The pressure of not knowing how it will work is what makes it work.

Are the topics that you discuss on your podcast, [Pod F. Tompkast](#), written out in advance? Or is that all improvised?

Oh, that's all improvised. All I know before hand is the segments that are in the show. The rest of it is just stream of consciousness and off the cuff.

That's impressive. It's obvious that you've been honing your craft for a while. What advice would you give to young comics and writers?

Work to find your voice. It's an ongoing process, and it's a good thing. I understand the impatience of waiting; just be sure you're being true to yourself as often as you can. You are putting forth what is the essence of what you find funny. Check in with yourself. Are you satisfied with how you're conveying (your ideas) to a room full of strangers? You're trying to get something across to people who have never been in your head.

That's great advice. A lot of comics and writers who I know have a lot of respect for you, as someone who is more mature than a lot of performers, and seems to work very hard.

Ideally, yeah, the longer you do it, the more mature you become. I was doing the Sasquach Festival with [Scott Aukerman](#) and we had a really rowdy crowd, people were drunk and yelling and screaming. Years ago, that would have freaked me out, but now I just realize that that's what it's going to be. There is a sense of control that comes with being a professional. It helps to realize that, this is not a referendum on me. It's a thing that takes a while and comes with experience and maturity.

Who were your role models? Who inspired you to get into the business?

When I was a kid it was Steve Martin. I had all of his albums. Him and Bill Cosby. Later on, the people I was working with became my support. You become a part of a community and it's so much about the discovery process.

Who do you enjoy watching on stage now?

[Jen Kirkman](#) is one. I really love watching her perform live. She's so funny and in the moment. Also, [Maria Bamford](#). She does such great social satire and characters; she's incredible and there is nobody else like her. I also really like [Kristen Schaal](#). I'm really fond of her and I really like her silliness.

Paul, thanks so much for taking the time to talk with me. I'm looking forward to seeing you at the Chicago Theater!

Absolutely! It's been a pleasure.

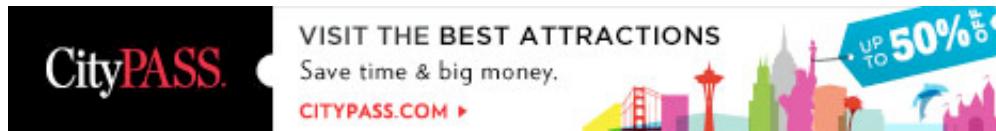
Paul F. Tompkins will be at the Chicago Theater tonight, as a part of the TBS Just For Laughs Festival. Tickets and information can be found [here](#).

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By Megan Marz

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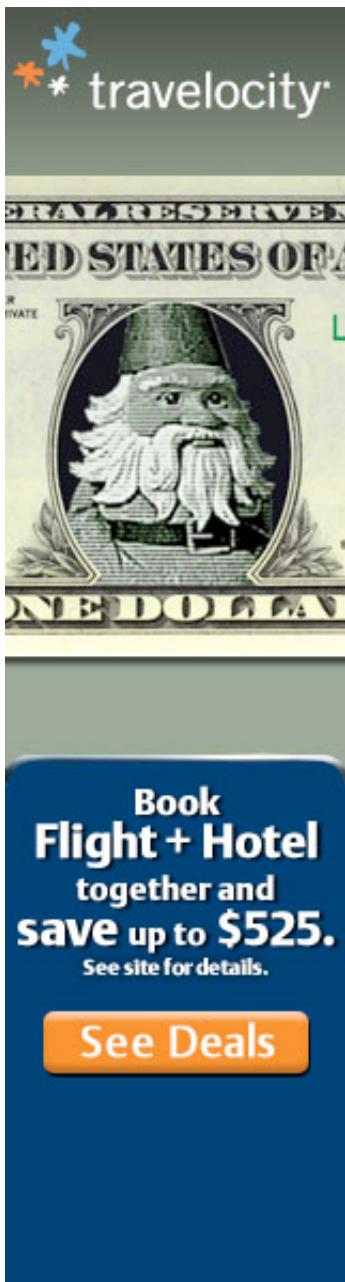
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