

Performing penniless

receSs presents fourth comedy festival

by **JOEL GOLDBERG**

Hatchet Reporter

Comedians and improv groups took the stage Saturday for the fourth annual Slate comedy festival Saturday, after event organizers faced funding issues rivaling the comedy of errors.

The stress of organizing Slate IV, a comedy festival which brings in professional and student groups from outside of D.C. to perform, led Kabeer Parwani, producer of Slate and president of receSs, to bring on senior Jonathan Foox as assistant producer.

"It's highly disorganized," Parwani said, "Comedians are not good at organizing things, especially other comedians into doing things."

ReceSs started Slate 13 years ago, featuring appearances by Amy Poehler's improv group from the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre in New York City, and a sneak preview of the pilot episode of "South Park."

For the next 11 years, the festival lay dormant. Two years ago, receSs alum Darren Miller revived the comedy festival, calling it Slate II and modeling the new festival after the Skidmore College comedy festival, which features four performances over two days.

Ideally, Foox said, Slate would garner similar support. The festival would become a GW institution akin to Fall Fest or Fountain Fling. In future years, he hopes that students don't come to Slate because of who is performing, "they come to Slate because of Slate."

For the fourth Slate festival, Parwani said they encountered a major setback when a scheduling error forced Slate from its traditional venue of the Betts Theatre and into the Jack Morton Auditorium.

"All the times that we discussed canceling it, we always came back to the idea that we have to keep Slate going in some capacity," Foox said.

The Betts Theatre allowed receSs to book past performances for free. The



MICHELLE RATTINGER | PHOTO EDITOR

New York City sketch comedy group, Atomic Age, interprets Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" complete with a cameo by Spiderman.

estimate for Jack Morton Auditorium: \$1,425. When Parwani sought funding for the event, he hit more roadblocks.

"[This year] we were able to give concrete cost demands. We knew exactly

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Assistant Producer

what we were getting into... We only got \$1,000," Parwani said, despite giving what he thought was a very good budget estimate of \$8,000.

As a result, Parwani had to make the show smaller — shirts, performer workshops and the size of the show were cut. Slate held five shows two years ago, four shows last year and only one two-hour performance with an intermission last Friday.

When the lights went down just past 8:30 p.m. Saturday in Jack Morton

Auditorium, the audience filled about two-thirds of the seats. Appearing first, Atomic Age, a professional group from New York City, performed wardrobe changes behind folding tables toward the back of the stage. Later, Friends with Benefits, a professional group from Pittsburgh, delighted the audience with a stumbling, unusual improv act from two of their regular four members.

"It was really enjoyable. I can't believe it was like over two-and-a-half hours, and it went by really fast," said junior Josh Benjamin. "I've seen it every year I've been here. I'd be pretty disappointed if it didn't [happen again]. I look forward to it every year."

By the time receSs took the stage, the crowd had witnessed a rendition of "To Kill a Mockingbird," complete with beaks and feathers, and a birthday party highlighted by Spongebob party hats and a life-or-death game of musical cakes. The audience buzzed between performances. The energy and excitement built toward the grand finale, in which AP Carroll, a former member of receSs, went into a tirade over "Catberry, the Blackberry for Cats."

"What's still important to us, and what I think we can still accomplish, is creating a memorable experience for the comedians who come to perform with us," Foox said. "Something that people will want to happen again." ♦