

'Creepy' Comedy Club Lets Stand-Ups Perform for Audience of Dolls

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'Comedy Club' and its Crowd of Dolls [View Full Caption](#)

MIDTOWN — You won't hear heckling from this crowd.

Manhattan's newest comedy club opens in [Midtown](#) next month, catering to first-time stand-ups — and featuring a crowd of 30 baby dolls, sitting at tiny tables and chairs around the stage.

The venue, titled simply "[Comedy Club](#)" and slated to open Oct. 10, is actually an art installation, the latest at the [Chashama](#) art group's storefront on West 37th Street, its organizer said.



Every afternoon and evening for 12 days starting next month, passersby will be encouraged to duck in for a few minutes and tell jokes to the "crowd," which will respond with piped-in laughs, coos or, if the joke flops, wails.

"They're a pretty giving audience," said comedian [Jo Firestone](#), who's organizing the installation and will be working the controls for the babies' responses. "They don't like the inappropriate stuff, though. No rape jokes."

The idea is to provide New Yorkers with an escape by giving them a chance to step into the spotlight for a few minutes amid the workday.

"The whole point is just kind of to have everybody experience this silly, silly environment and take a break from the intensity of New York City and the intensity of being an adult with responsibilities," Firestone explained. "There's a lot of painful and uncomfortable things in the world, and this is really the stupidest thing you can do with your day."

Firestone, 26, is well-versed in what she termed "alternative comedy," especially performances that revolve around audience participation. As head of the production company [Meatball Presents](#), she produces eight shows, including "[Punderdome 3000](#)," an intensely popular monthly pun competition she founded with her father, Fred. She also produces "[Friends of Single People](#)," in which singles' friends take part in onstage dating games. Both are held at [Littlefield](#) in [Boerum Hill](#).

"I try to make shows that make everybody feel goofy," said Firestone, who lives in [Prospect-Lefferts Gardens](#).

She acknowledged, though, that "Comedy Club," with its audience of lifeless dolls, has the

opportunity to become her eeriest work — not to mention the strangest nightclub in New York City.

"It's a little like an early Halloween," she said. "I thought about how to make it not creepy, like with lighting and with the dolls I chose. But then I just kind of gave up. That's what it's going to be — a creepy, stupid experience that people will be a part of."

The dolls could actually help new performers struggling with stage fright or hecklers, said Chashama program director Janusz Jaworski.

"They're a protective barrier between them [the performers] and the people on the street," Jaworski said. "The piece of glass also does wonders. People will come up to the window and get really close to what's going on in the space, whereas if it's out on the street, people will avoid it, not get right close to it."

Visitors will also be invited to take a step inside as spectators, where there will be room for about six live audience members, Firestone said. Those who take the stage can use their own material, or they can borrow from jokes that Firestone will write and leave out on cards.

Some professional comedians have also said they'll drop by, but who and when will remain a surprise.

"Most of the ones I've gone up to have been interested in doing it," Firestone said. "Maybe I just know a lot of weird comedians. It's a weird thing, and I think it's going to be the sort of thing where it sounds weird, but when it's actually being there is going to be way weirder."

The Chashama storefront is located at 266 W. 37th St. For updates and the full "Comedy Club" schedule, visit the [Chashama website](#) or follow Jo Firestone on Twitter, [@jojofirestone](#).