

## The Hits Just Keep Coming

**PLEA:** The Chicago Bar Association's 87th Annual Christmas Spirits Show



Reviewed by Adam J. Sheppard

Let it never be said that crooked politicians, a divided U.S. Senate, and scandal-mired athletes are good for nothing: They provide plenty of comedic fodder for the Bar Show. The Chicago Bar Association's Annual Christmas Spirits Show—written and performed by members of the bar—satirizes the year's most memorable news stories through song parodies and short skits. The show is in its 87th year.

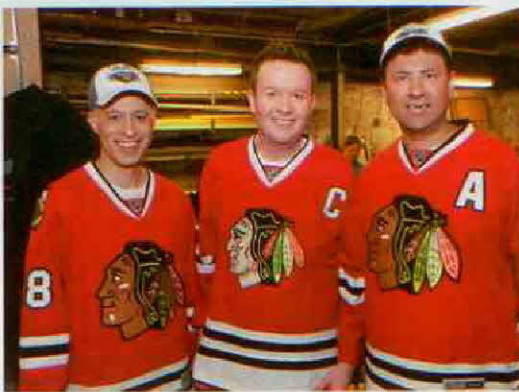
This year's show opened with light-hearted numbers aimed at Chicago's sports teams. A parody of "Chelsea Dagger"—the catchy alternative rock song adopted by the Chicago Blackhawks as their goal/victory song—recalled Duncan Keith's missing teeth, playoff beards, and Patrick Kane's run in with a Buffalo cab driver. The other Chicago sports teams were the subject of "Don't Stop Believing" (a parody of the ubiquitous Journey song):

Cub fans went through hell  
Not much better at The Cell  
It looks like these teams aren't goin'  
anywhere

We didn't get Lebron  
The Bears fold when the pressure's on  
The whole offensive line is in disrepair

In a clever parody of "Nothing," (from *Chorus Line*), a sports fan becomes disenchanting with World Cup soccer due to the sport's low scoring. The show drew on a current pop song—"Rehab" (by Amy Winehouse)—to poke fun at Tiger Woods' admittance into sex rehab.

Illinois politics are always the subject of several Bar Show numbers. This year, Governor Quinn (Ben Weinberg) sang "Won't you go Home Bill Brady" to his gubernatorial opponent. Jeffrey Marks excelled in his performance as Rahm Emanuel in "[Chicago's] Favorite Son" (*Will Rogers Follies*).



Faux-Hawks Larry Aaronson, Skip Harsch and Stan Slovin thrilled both on the ice and on the stage. Photos by Bill Richert.



Bob Canel's Asian Carp went "Beyond the Sea" to the Chicago River.

The choreography for this number successfully imitated that used in the actual *Will Rogers Follies*. Mayor Daley (Cliff Berman) performed cute parodies of "Thanks for the Memory" (as performed by Bob Hope and Shirley Ross in the film *The Big Broadcast of 1938*) and "My Kind of Town" (as performed by Frank Sinatra). A triumvirate of Elvis parodies spoofed the Rod Blagojevich trial: The defense sang "Don't be Cruel," the prosecution performed the "Devil in Disguise," and a torso-gyrating Rod Blagojevich sang "Suspicious (and judicious) Minds." This series of numbers was a highlight of the show.

As for national politics, this year's show was notably bipartisan. Democratic leaders, who have proven to be elusive targets for political comedy in the past, were cleverly mocked in this year's show. An embattled President Obama (Galín Caldwell) literally sang the blues ("Blues in the Night"). A parody of "There, I've Said it Again"—performed by Julian Frazin—humorously exaggerated Joe Biden's propensity for verbal gaffes. In "Hello, Goodbye" (Beatles),



Oprah Winfrey (June Brown) explained why she might have a difficult time leaving the spotlight.

newly elected Republican congressmen bid farewell to their outgoing Democratic counterparts.

Republican leaders were not totally immune from the show's satirical efforts. A parody of the 1967 hit, "I Say a Little Prayer," satirized Sarah Palin's knack for interweaving politics and religion. Sonja Johnson, who has played Palin in the past, comically captures the "Momma Grizzly's" essence. In a number that would have made John Boehner's face turn red(der), the incoming Speaker of the House rehearses the uninhibited comments that he will make to the Republican caucus when he takes office in January. The number was

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a parody of the 1950's tune, "You Don't Know Me" (performed in the show by Rick Nagle). The acapella quartet (Corey Berman, Sonja Johnson, Jeffery Marks, and Diana Vargo Lewandowski)—a staple of the show—teased the Tea Party in "My Country 'Tis of Tea."

Environmental issues were topical this year. British Petroleum CEO Tony Hayward (Brian Gilomen) and his executive staff testified before congress to the country tune of "The Battle of New Orleans." This song selection was particularly clever because the real song is about an American who joins Andrew Jackson on the gulf coast to fight against British Forces in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. Asian Carp also surfaced in this year's show. Bob Canel, dressed as a giant Asian Carp (one of the show's best costumes) parodied Bobby Darin's "Beyond the Sea."

Other memorable numbers included a parody of "I'm Telling You I'm Not Going Anywhere"—the sentimental love song from *Dreamgirls*. In this version, Oprah (June Brown) professes her unwavering commitment to remaining in the public eye despite her impending retirement. Bedbugs also managed to creep into the show. Larry Anderson and Stan Slovin, dressed as two bedbugs, sang of their infestation of New York in "New York, New York" (*On the Town*). Arizona's controversial immigration law was the subject of a parody of the famous show tune, "Oklahoma."

In non-musical bits, irreverent *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart (Art Garwin) interviewed bouncy/funny cheerleaders (Ruth Kaufman and Nora Doherty) who were dressed like cheerleaders from the hit TV Show, *Glee*. Fred Lane and consummate straight-man, Joe Stone, once again elicited chuckles with their tongue-in-cheek humor routine. This year, Fred played a disheveled Benjamin Franklin who offered his droll insights on the current state of affairs in the country.

As audience members spilled out of the theatre after the show, several could be heard fondly recounting their favorite numbers from the show. The Bar Show thus succeeded in its annual mission of warming its audience's spirits during the cold holiday season. ■

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