Andrew Clark: We have a great speaker today. He did his first workshop today with the second-years, and it was terrific. He's somebody who's been involved in comedy and show business his whole life, as you'll hear. Vice president with APA, which is the Agency for the Performing Arts. Someone who started their comedy wing many years ago. APA's clients include Louis CK, Bill Burr, Amy Schumer, the list is long and very impressive. I'm delighted to welcome to Humber, let's give him a great Humber warm welcome, Danny Robinson. Thank you. *(applause)*

Danny Robinson: The mic's just my height.

AC: Yeah.

DR: Perfect.

AC: This is our sort of Dick Cavett…

DR: (laughs) Exactly.

AC: So Danny, thanks for being here, obviously.

DR: My pleasure.

AC: You flew in yesterday from Los Angeles.

DR: And boy, are my arms tired. (*laughter*)

AC: There you go.

DR: The classics never die.

AC: My first question is quite predictable, which is how you got started in comedy, and of course your background actually goes way back. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into it?

DR: My mom and dad were a song and dance team. So I was raised literally on the road with them, playing nightclubs and colleges all over the United States and Canada. So (that was) my first real introduction to comedy as a child, because they would open, and many of the acts they worked with were the classic comedians of the day—Johnny Carson, Alan King, people like that, Danny Thomas, what have you, Frank Fontaine, Red Skelton. So I fell in love with live performance in general. I was a huge music fan, and still am. But I got to know, and got to experience, the great comedians of the day, and obviously this is way before…if you didn't see them on *The Merv Griffin Show* or *The Tonight Show* or *The Ed Sullivan Show*, they didn't exist, basically. And so when I started working in a mailroom when I was sixteen in New York, every time something would come up when I got further in after I finished college, any time they needed a comedian for something, I knew the people. And also Bud Friedman, the man who started the Improvs, was a very close family friend, so as a teenager I was hanging out at the Improv. So I got to see literally every comedian who's come around probably in the last forty-five years.

So when I started my career I was a rock and roll agent because there was no such thing as a comedy division. There were comedians, but they were just clients in the variety/live-performance department. And as comedy grew, and cable came in, HBO doing their first specials, and Showtime getting into it, there were more and

more comedians. When I first started, the odds are I knew the name of probably every comedian, and I probably knew two-thirds of them personally. Today, there's like a billion, which is great; it's a huge industry now. But as I kept going, and doing music and comedy and variety television, I eventually saw that this was becoming an actual business of its own, and I started our division for comedy.

We were the first major agency to have a division solely for comedy. The lucky thing for me was, as I said, I knew these people, I had seen their work, and I'd gotten to experience the classic performers. So I got to see the development of comedy throughout the years, from the early days of The Groundlings and Second City to the comedians that would do *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *The Merv Griffin Show*, *The Mike Douglas Show*, *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, back in the time where if you did *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* and you did well, overnight you were a known commodity, I mean literally overnight. To watch it grow from that small acorn, for lack of a better term, into what it is now, an industry that encompasses everything in our business, and is so pervasive in society… When you think that the monologues and Jon Stewart are where most people get their news from, it's staggering, but it's true. Newspapers are almost a relic. You've got CNN, MSNBC 24/7, you can get anything on your phone or your laptop, but most people would watch the monologues of *The Tonight Show* or *Conan* or David Letterman, but mostly Jon Stewart, and that's where they got their news. So comedy has really developed into possibly the foundation of our society now.

AC: Now you were at The Improv in New York when it started. How has standup sort of transitioned from those guys, and the kind of standup people were doing then, maybe into the seventies, we could even look further forward, but there was a massive, or it seemed like it anyway, looking back, a shift that happened between the early Improv and then through into Los Angeles and that period.

DR: Absolutely. In the olden days—the *olden* days—we rode on horses, it was unbelievable. It was very much the monologist, storytellers, "Two Jews walk into a bar," that kind of stuff. And then, when the Improv opened and Catch a Rising Star and those kinds of places, there was a larger group of people coming in and being socially conscious. Because in the early days, you were playing nightclubs. You were playing to an older crowd. You were playing predominantly to a very conservative crowd. So you couldn't curse. Nobody wanted to hear anything about abortion, they didn't want to hear about the war. They wanted to hear, "My wife's so fat."

But all of a sudden, you had these rooms where young people could come and share their thoughts, their funny thoughts, but also have a conscience about the country and the world, and colleges… it's bizarre how it switched. Back in those days, doing a college gig was great, because in colleges… a lot of the colleges were still tough on language, but you could talk about social issues, and the audiences were obviously all young and very involved in the same things you were involved in, and that was the great gig to get. People loved doing colleges. It's funny to see now, fast-forward all these years, and in the age of political correctness, which I can't stand, now college gigs are possibly the worst. I've had artists say to me, "Don't book

me in colleges." And I'm like, "Why?" And they go, "Because the administrations are like, 'You can't say this, you can't say that, you can't bring up this subject.'" And even the students, many of the students, because political correctness has become such a thing, in an age where you can find a microphone or a camera anywhere, people find a reason to bitch and moan about something somebody said. Many, many years ago, there was no internet, there was no *Entertainment Tonight*. So if you didn't like somebody, you just didn't go back and see them. Now, you can stand up and say, "I'm offended," and walk out and go online and say, "This guy's an asshole." So it's, sadly, almost taken this market, not totally away, we still play to a lot of colleges, but it's a different feel. Now, the clubs and the small coffee houses and the concert hall, where people are coming specifically to see them, are where you can share your thoughts freely and not have to worry about someone bitching and moaning at you, because they paid a ticket to see *you*.

AC: Who were some of the people you were watching and hanging around with at The Improv in the seventies?

DR: Back then, there were the early days of Larry David, Jay Leno, Richard Lewis, Chris Albrecht, who was the head of HBO for many years, and now runs Starz in the States, he was the bartender, and he had been a performer before that. So I got to see the development of a lot of those guys, like early Paul Reiser, and then the next generation of that, like the Denis Learys and the Steven Wrights. In those early days it was Richard Lewis, Jerry Seinfeld, all those guys were plying their trade there. And then, when Bud opened in L.A., a lot of these guys obviously wanted to get into

television stuff, so the migration from New York, me included, moved to Los Angeles. So all of a sudden, a lot of the guys I'd seen in New York were now hanging out in L.A., and working the Improv and the Comedy Store, and this is when the Laugh Factory was just a blip on the map. And then it just, like I said, it just grew and grew and grew exponentially, because it you could get it easier. When *Evening at the Improv* started, it was a whole revolution, because all of a sudden the cameras took you into a comedy club. So if you're sitting in Des Moines or Colorado Springs or Toronto, you could see what a comedy club looks like, you could get the feel of it, you could see all these really cool comedians, and you got to see celebrities hosting the show and, in essence, endorsing the comedians. So people who might have never thought about doing any performance thing, or being anything in show business, had access to seeing great young performers and going, "Damn, I'm gonna try that." So that's when comedy clubs started popping up all over the country.

The funny thing is, the way a lot of them started, the boom really kind of hit right after disco. So a lot of the discos, when disco wasn't cool anymore, they found that they could bring in a couple comedians and pay them squat. All they had to do was give them a stool and a microphone and a couple of free drinks, and they could fill the room. As opposed to having to bring in a band and a sound system and a road manager and fifteen people and all the mishegoss that goes on with that, comedians were really easy, and they were funny. And many of the clubs around the country literally, for the first ten years or so, you'd go in, and the disco ball was still in the ceiling, because Sunday nights would have disco dancing or something. So those kinds of clubs switched from music to comedy, and now there were places all across

the country where all these men and women could go and ply their trade and be in front of different audiences and really learn their craft.

AC: Yeah, there was a big boom in the eighties, and it burst. It's fair to say we're kind of in a boom now, would you say?

DR: Well, as anything goes, it rises and falls. I was telling this story last night.I went to Emerson in Boston, and Emerson, oddly enough, over the past thirty or forty years or so, has become like a comedy college in the States. Steven Wright, Denis Leary, Bill Burr, there are a billion people that have come out of it, tons of writers and stuff. So it's always been a great school for communication and art, but comedy has all of a sudden become its thing. So ten years ago, we started a scholarship for people who want to study strictly about comedy, and they did a benefit concert to start funding it, and it was Bill and Denis and Steven and Eddie Brill and all these people, all these people came back and did it. Even Bill Dana, who I'm sure none of you know, but if you've ever heard of the guy years and years ago (who'd say) "My name Jose Jimenez," he was like a huge comedian back in the days of Ed Sullivan and that kind of stuff. He was an Emerson grad, so he was at that show. And at the end of the show, they'd put chairs around the stage and everyone could ask questions.

They asked Denis Leary, "When did you want to become a comedian?" And he said, "When I came to Emerson"—and this was like 1974, when he came to school there—he said, "When I came here, I came here to be an actor, that's what I'd always loved to do, I wanted to be an actor. But I was always funny, and I liked funny people." And he says, "And the boom was starting, so there were all these comedians

I loved and watched, so maybe this could be a creative outlet for me." And that's how he got into comedy. And he happened to be in class, his classmate was Steven Wright, so he got to see Steven Wright all the time, and that's one of his heroes too. The boom hit, and there was a time where there were at least two, and sometimes four, comedy clubs in every major city. It was ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I mean, it was good for business, but it was kind of crazy. And then, as everything does, when it leveled out, it leveled out at an extremely high level, but it still leveled out. So two of the clubs would close, and now you'd have at least one, maybe two in every city, which is more like it. And again, when the boom started back up, like you said, with the next wave, there weren't any more clubs opening up, because of comedy being as big as it's become, and because you could see it 24/7, you don't have to wait for *Evening at the Improv*, you don't have to wait for *The Tonight Show*, you don't even have to wait for an HBO or Showtime special. You pick up your phone, you can see anyone you want. On Youtube, you can see anything you want. That's how a lot of these people get discovered by people of your age, because they find it on those outlets.

So now, instead of a second or third club or fourth club opening, all of a sudden comedy was a theater show. So now, we work with the same halls, the same promoters, everything that the big rock and roll acts do. We're probably at least fifty percent of their business. Because as performers get popular on all these different ways they can be seen, people will now pay to see them in a hall where they don't have to sit and drink. They want to just come and see the art.

AC: Can you explain briefly what it is your job entails? Because everyone has an idea, they watch *Entourage* and think it's…

DR: It's not *Entourage*, let me make that perfectly clear. *Entourage* glorified all of the worst parts of our business. It was a funny show, don't get me wrong, it had great characters. But if you think show business is that, you're mistaken. It's broken down into a few different things. You always hear that there are managers and agents and publicists and all of that. The biggest question people get asked is, "What's the difference between a manager and an agent?" And I always say, "Five percent."

Everything in our business ultimately runs through an agency. An agency is basically the clearinghouse for every deal that goes down. Our function is to find employment, negotiate the deal, and be the protector for the artist, whether they're a writer, actor, director, comedian, musician, whatever it might be. And then managers are an extension of us. They are the people that, especially when a career gets big, they're the ones that sort of coordinate all of the arms of a career. So they'll be the ones that coordinate with us and the publicist and the lawyer and whatever. But ultimately, even for a manager, it always comes back to an agent. The agent is the person that everything goes through. We find the jobs for them, we negotiate the deals, we follow through and make sure the money's in. We're the protector of the artist, basically.

AC: Is part of the job finding that new talent?

DR: Absolutely, yeah.

AC: Have there ever been moments where you've discovered someone and…

DR: Oh yeah, that happens…well, not a lot, I shouldn't say that, otherwise there'd be twenty-five million superstars. But a large part of what an agent and manager do is find new talent, and you find new talent in many different ways. The comedy club owner, who is usually the first line of the business that a standup will encounter, because they're the ones who have the stage and they'll pay them, they get to see everybody coming up. And many times we'll get calls from club owners saying, "I just had this kid come through, you gotta watch him, he's really good," or "She's really good." You'll also have your clients and friends saying, "I just worked with this gal, and she was hilarious, you gotta see her, I gave her your name," whatever. So artists will tell you about it, managers will tell you about it, lawyers will tell you about it, club owners will tell you about it. And that's a large part of how you find them.

But there's also just the legwork of going out. The first twenty, twenty-five years of my career, I basically lived at The Improv and The Comedy Store. They could've put out a cot in there for me. On Tuesday nights I was there at two-thirty in the morning. So I got to know all of the performers, and I got to experience all of the performers. And every once in a while, you'll see that person and you'll go, "There's something special." Adam Sandler had just moved out from New York, and he'd had one little tiny thing on an MTV show. And a good buddy of mine said, "You've gotta see this guy. He's really sharp, he's really raw, but I think you'll get him." And then oddly enough, I got a call from Harry Connick Jr., who knew him from New York, and

he said, “Can you get me into the Improv on Tuesday? I want to go see my friend Adam.” And I went, “Hey, I’m going down to see him too, I’ll meet you there.” So I met him down there. And when I saw Adam on stage, he had no act. It was average at best. But he was hilarious. That’s something you can’t buy or learn. He had that charisma; he had that connection with the audience. So it’s things like that. First time I saw Steven Wright, it was the same kind of thing. You just go, “No one’s ever thought thoughts like this. No one’s ever looked at the world the way Steven looks at the world.” Even today.

And even things like, in the magic world, Harry Anderson, when I first saw Harry, he was hilarious. He was also a phenomenal magician. But he had that likability; he had that X factor that connected with an audience. In his early days he was a con man. He would go into the audience and he’d embarrass you and con you, and he would do these geek tricks where he’d take a needle and put it through his arm and there’d be blood, crazy crap like that. And literally, after the show, I would hear women say, “I would love my daughter to meet him.” It’s like, “He just put a needle through his arm, are you fuckin’ kidding me?” That’s the thing that we all go to look for, is that X factor that you can’t teach. Now, you can’t teach funny, but you can teach funny people how to make it work. You can give them the structure. Those that learn how to work and learn the structure can go on and be very successful as performers. Many of them who are great comedians with great material, but don’t have that something that connects with an audience or has that personality that works in front of the camera, they go behind the camera and become multi-millionaires by being show runners and such.

Larry David's a good example. I used to see Larry in New York and in the early days in L.A. here, and then he was on a show on ABC for a few years that was supposed to compete against *SNL* called *Fridays*. A lot of great people came out of that show. He did well, people liked him, but he didn't pop. But then, he and his best buddy Jerry put together and wrote *Seinfeld*, and behind the cameras he became a genius. And he's one of the few that, after that, went on and created another genius show with him in front of the camera. So he's a real anomaly. Jerry's another one, I saw Jerry in Washington, D.C. It was the first time I ever saw Jerry, and the audience wasn't getting him. It was the funniest thing. They just didn't get it, and I thought he was hilarious. I went backstage afterwards and introduced myself, and I said, "I thought you were great." He goes, "Are you kidding me? Nobody laughed!" And I said, "I don't care. They don't know what they're talking about. You're funny." And we became friends, and I worked with him for years. You do have to go out and do that.

AC: Do you think you still have to go and be in Los Angeles?

DR: No.

AC: I know when it comes to, say, journalism, and you want to work in New York, you can do it from outside, but if you don't *go* to New York, you're not making an effort. Is that true in Los Angeles for comedy?

DR: I think ultimately, you want to end up in Los Angeles or New York, or sometimes Boston, San Francisco, and other big hubs, like Chicago, for Comedy. But if people jump and run to L.A. too soon, you're playing in the big leagues when you

hit L.A., and even at the Laugh Factory and the Improv and the Comedy Store, you're going up onstage, and if you're still learning your trade, the odds are the next guy after you is gonna be Dane Cook or Jerry Seinfeld or whoever, and you're gonna look like an idiot when they go up and just kick your ass. So if you're good, and you're in the outskirts, I tell people all the time, even if you're in L.A. and you're still in the early part of your career, get out of L.A. Go anywhere. Work in the Midwest, work in the south, I don't care where it is. Make your mistakes in the hinterlands. Let the hinterlands discover you, so that when you do come back to L.A., you're ready to play in the big leagues. You don't want to take a guy who's on a JV team and start him on the varsity. He'll be exposed like *that*.

So no, you don't have to come to L.A. and New York. *Eventually* you do, because that's where the hub is, and when you get to that level of talent and professionalism, then yes, the time to come to L.A. would be then. It's funny, it then reverses itself. So after you come there, and you hopefully become a star or do whatever you want, then you can go back to living anywhere. Movie stars and big-time comedians can literally live anywhere if they don't want to live in L.A. or New York. When you have that level of success, people will find you, they don't care where you live, because your agent or manager will be in L.A.

AC: There might be a question in the audience. We'll take a quick break in case there is one. (*pause)* There was a time, it appeared anyway, that there was a belief about Canadians being funny, and I'm thinking after…

DR: They're funny!

AC: They are, but with Jim Carrey, Mike Myers, managers, agents, producers in Los Angeles, if they heard there was a good Canadian who'd just arrived, they kind of made sure they'd take a look at him or her. Is that still the case, you think?

DR: Oh, absolutely. And Second City, of course, has turned out many, many great people, in Toronto, obviously, and then down into Chicago. A lot of great comedy comes out of here, both standup and sketch. I mean, *Second City Television* is still probably the funniest show to ever go on the air. I mean, *SNL*'s great, don't get me wrong, but I think pound for pound, that might have ever been the funniest show ever on television, and it created some of the greatest comedic actors and actresses. And now, since Just for Laughs especially started, now the whole industry goes every summer up to Montreal, and you see, not only American comedians, but also British comedians, Australian comedians, French comedians, and tons of Canadian comedians. Invariably, everybody comes back from that festival having discovered one or two people from Canada.

AC: How has the web affected touring for stand-ups? Has it changed how people tour?

DR: It's changed it completely. In the beginning, the way you, like I said, you'd do a TV show, *The Tonight Show*, what have you, and then that's how people would know about you. And then, when you'd go out to hit the clubs and what have you, it was radio interviews and it was the newspaper. That's how people found out where you were playing, and how you promoted in the town. The same thing with concerts and all that. Radio still, to this day, actually, is the best tool that people use for promoting

shows. But as the new media came in, cable and all that jazz, and then when the web came in, it changed everything, the way you advertised, everything. Newspapers lost millions of dollars in advertising because nobody had to take out full-page ads for shit, because you'd just put it on the web and everybody had their own website or whatever, and you could put it on your website and everyone would know where you were going. And now, every concert, whether it's comedy or rock and roll, invariably is announced on the web show. They don't even have to take an ad out on television or in the newspapers. They will still take ads out on the radio, because radio drive time, especially, is still a huge way to get to people.

The other thing it did, which really, really helped comedy especially, more than music, is now you can see performers from all over the world anytime you want. So you can flip on Youtube and you can see Lewis Black, you can see Bill Burr, whoever it is, and people in Europe and Asia and India… We just had Bill Burr play Mumbai, which was unheard of five years ago, forget twenty-five years ago. So now, everybody can find people they enjoy. I was having a meeting a year or so ago with a Dutch promoter who works all through the Netherlands and stuff, and we were like, "Do you buy the specials from HBO and Showtime and put them on there?" Which they used to do in the old days a lot of the time. England would buy them and they'd put them on, Australia, what have you. And he went, "No, we literally get everything from Youtube. We just watch Youtube, we see who's getting the hits on Youtube in our country, and we bring those people over." The first time we sent Lewis Black over there, he walked into a hall, and there were like two thousand people, and he was like, "How do you people know me?" (*laughs*) "You're in The Netherlands!"

But everybody around the world can find comedy and connect with any kind of comedy out there. Most of the world speaks English, or in every country around the world there's always a big population of people that speak English. I was telling Andrew that in the early days, if you became a successful comedian in America or Canada, you could only play England and Australia. That's where the other English-speaking countries were-Canada, America, New Zealand. But now it's literally worldwide that you can play. And it's all because of the immediacy of finding the performer on devices that were not invented when I started.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about Louis C.K.'s approach, what he's done with his specials?

DR: Yeah. We started working with Louis when a friend and associate of mine who runs our New York office, a guy named Mike Berkowitz, came up with the model that we used and still use for Louis's touring. Louis loves touring, and getting to his audience, but he didn't want to have his audience, now that he's become this big star, to have to pay a hundred and fifty dollars to get a ticket. So we sat down, and Mike came up with a way to do it where you don't use ticket brokers, you don't use any middleman, in essence. We go to halls where they don't have a sponsor that has to be paid, or any of that kind of stuff, and we have our own ticketing method so that he can still make the same money he would make, he can still make big money, but his tickets can be fifty bucks, forty bucks. It's worked brilliantly, and makes him feel better, it makes his fans feel a lot better, and the halls still get it, they make their

money, we don't say, "You can't make anything," they still make their parking and sodas and popcorn and all that jazz, and X percentage of the ticket.

But that said, it's a pure ticket. There are no fees because there are no ticket brokers, there's no sponsor that has to get a dollar a ticket or whatever. Other people are using that, we do that with some other people as well, especially artists who are big enough to, in essence, fund themselves, and be able to take that risk. We'll go out and basically promote their shows for them, using their money in essence, and they can still make tons of money, probably more money than they would've made in the traditional way, but are able to keep ticket prices down.

AC: For most young comics, what they're hoping for, to a degree, is getting into development, or a development deal. Then quickly, they talk about development hell, but that's another story. Can you walk us through how one gets into development, and then, once you're in development, what to expect and what will actually occur?

DR: Again, when comedy started having the big boom, and networks realized people watch comedians, they started scouring the clubs like we did, and the initial thing they would do is give you a holding deal. They would literally give you ten thousand dollars for a year, to be exclusive to NBC or CBS or whoever it was. Looking back, it was the worst deal you could possibly make. Of course, back then, ten thousand dollars, if you were a guy working for five hundred dollars a week, you were like, "Oh man, this is great." But it took you off the market, and in a holding deal, they don't have to do anything with you. They can just hold you, and if something in their

network works for you that they think you can work in, then they'll put you in it. Otherwise, they just basically keep you away from your competition. So that morphed into a development deal where they would pay you to be exclusive to them, but (also get) you or someone else that they would set you up with or someone you knew or someone else who had a deal at their network or studio, to create a show for you and around you. And that would go through script development and such, and then hopefully to a pilot, and then hopefully if the pilot's good it goes to series.

So now, when you get a holding deal, the money is better, it's a ton better, but there's actually an end game that you can be partially in control of. You have a say in what kind of show is developed, what your voice is going to be in the show, what you're going to be in the show. So it's much, much better, and like I said, the money's obviously better. Especially in the old days, I would always tell artists, "I know the holding deal's tempting, it's a big check right up front, but invariably, everyone I have ever known that took one of those holding deals, a week after he signs the deal with NBC, there's the perfect show for them at CBS or Fox." It just never fails. So when they take themselves off the market, they cut most of their options out, with no tangible way to forward their career. Whereas now, with development deals, at least you're in control somewhat of what the product is that you're trying to get on the air. It's still tough. Ultimately you don't have the final say. But you do have a chance to develop what you want to. When Jerry and Larry developed *Seinfeld*, they were in control of the show, which was originally called *The Seinfeld Chronicles*. But they had control over it. Roseanne, same thing, Tim Allen, you can go down the line.

They were involved, and their shows were based on their comedy, their voice, their point of view.

AC: Yeah, but they seemed to be very popular, or more popular, in the nineties. I won't name the comic, but there was a guy, a Canadian, who did like a half-million one out of Just for Laughs with CBS, and then was offered…

DR: I know him.

AC: Yeah, he was offered *SNL*.

DR: I *knew* him, I should say. Yeah, he's the one who kind of killed it for the big bucks.

AC: Yeah, yeah.

DR: I don't want to say his name, but sadly, he's passed. But he was very funny. It was funny—his material was actually crap, but *he* was funny. Physically he was funny, he was a good-looking kid. At that time, every network wanted to make a development deal, because they were hoping they'd get the next Tim Allen, Roseanne Barr, Jerry Seinfeld, what have you. So there'd be competition, and if you did well, especially at Just for Laughs in Montreal, every network was there. And back in those days, not only were the network talent people there, they brought a business affairs person, and they would actually make deals in the hotel room, with the business affairs person and the agent. We'd sit in the room and make the deals with them. And this kid got hot off the festival, and literally every network was going

for him. His manager, who was a very dear friend of mine, Dave Becky, everyone was throwing money at him, and he ended up getting a deal at, I think it was CBS…

AC: I think it was, yeah.

DR: CBS or Fox, yeah, I can't remember, for literally half a million dollars. Now this is a kid that, for all they knew, he didn't have more than fifteen minutes of material. Literally, he was a young kid, he was a good-looking kid, but they gave him half a million dollars because everyone else was chasing him. And they tried to develop a show for him, and they found out he couldn't carry a show. And then they developed a sketch show kind of around him, but he was just one of the cast, and that, sadly, ultimately didn't last either. And after that, all of a sudden, all of the networks were just throwing good money after bad. We gotta be a little more careful with what we do, giving people huge checks who haven't proven that they can carry a show. Because when you make a deal with someone, and you give them X amount of dollars to develop a show and be exclusive to you, then you've also gotta pay staff, you gotta pay producers, you have to pay sets, directors, lights, camera, action, the whole nine yards. So ultimately by the time you develop that show and they get it on its feet and film it as a pilot, they're millions of dollars into it. And if the person they made the deal with is at such a level of their career where they haven't really been fully cooked, for lack of a better term, they can't carry a show.

Carrying a show is a really hard job. There's a little, I hate to keep using X factor, but there is that something special where some people's personalities can carry a show and others can't. And a lot of the deals they made were for people who

were extremely funny, but couldn't carry a show. You don't have to be a great actor. Jerry Seinfeld's not a great actor, but he has magnetism and a charisma that works, and jumps across the footlights and into the camera. But interesting enough, a lot of people who got those initial deals, became writer/producers for other people. D.J. Nash is a guy where we did a deal for him many, many years ago for a show. Very clever pilot, and he was the lead, but he wasn't a lead in a pilot. But he thought funny, and he wrote extremely funny, and now he's gone on and created two or three series, and is a very, very sought-after, highly paid writer/producer. And there's a bunch of those that have happened through the years.

AC: Uh, there's a question?

Audience member: Uh, yeah. Cool, cool. Yeah, you say, "carry a show." You probably answered the question, but what do you mean, "carry a show"? Isn't that partly the writers…?

DR: No. I mean, everything starts with the written word, obviously, but you can be the world's greatest writer, you can have a staff of the funniest writers in the world, but if the person you have saying it isn't charismatic enough or isn't a good enough actor or what have you, it's gonna fail. It doesn't matter how funny the words are. It's hard to describe what that is because there is no…well, as we were talking about, in show business there's kind of a blueprint, but not really, because it's a business that is made up of very special people on all sides. Directors, writers, performers, you name it. It's very special people, and it's timing, and it's what's happening in the world, and it's the charisma of whatever person it might be, that makes them

successful or not. If there was a blueprint, like to become an accountant, you go to school, you take this course and this course and you become an accountant, and then a senior accountant, and then you become a vice president. You can follow that if you're good at numbers and all that. There is no blueprint for show business, because there are things you should learn and do, and there are ways you can better yourself that you need to do. But ultimately, it's that something that you have that somebody else doesn't have.

Think of your favorite shows that you've watched. Every show, every comedy especially, but even dramas, there's always one or two things or people that you can't do without. Everything else is hysterical, but if you lose *that*, if you lose that guy, if you lose that girl, it falls apart. Much like sports. If you have a great basketball team but you have a shitty point guard, you're not gonna be able to get the ball to the guys who can score. I remember *M*A*S*H*—huge, one of the biggest comedies ever on television, and they went through a lot of different cast members. They changed the commandant, this one came in, that one came in, but if you didn't have Alan Alda, if you didn't have Hawkeye, it fell apart. If Alan Alda had left, the show would've died. You can say that about almost every show, especially ones that are created for personalities, a la Tim, Roseanne, Jerry, what have you. Roseanne had two different daughters that came in and out of the show. Nobody gave a crap. (*Laughter*)

This is way before you guys, but there was a show called *Bewitched*, which was huge, you can still see it in reruns and stuff, about a witch who married a

mortal. And about three or four years into the series, the guy who played the husband, Darren, wanted to leave. So they just hired another actor, and literally, in the fourth season, there was another Darren. And nobody cared. It's like, "Hey, he looks a little different, maybe he lost weight." But as long as you have Elizabeth Montgomery, and she was the witch, that was all that mattered. Nobody cared that there were two Darrens. And in Roseanne, actually, the girl left, and they came back a few years later. But again, you had Roseanne and John Goodman, and *that* was the show. A lot of great people were around it, but that was the show.

All of the Bob Newhart shows, Bob Newhart may be the smartest guy to ever go into half-hour comedy, because not only is he one of the great comedians ever, but he was also smart where he created these shows where he was the lynchpin, he was the center. He wasn't always the funniest, he certainly wasn't the best actor, but he was the foundation of the show, and he always surrounded himself with really good, funny people. And Jerry took that model when he did his show. All of the people he hired who were regulars were amazing comedic actors. He was probably the worst actor in the entire cast, but it didn't matter. He was the foundation. Without him, there's no show. In *Bewitched*, there was Elizabeth Montgomery. Without her, no show. Bob Newhart, he did three series. It's hard enough getting one series that's successful, but he did three series that were successful with the same basic concept. He just changed his name, changed the characters, changed the location, but he was that lynchpin. That's what I mean when I say "carry a show." There's that person where you turn the TV on and you say, "Yeah, the writing's funny, and this girl's cute and funny, and this guy's wacky and funny, but I relate to

this guy or girl." And the reason *Roseanne* became such a big hit, besides the fact that Roseanne is an extremely funny woman, is that she spoke for a generation and for a part of the population, the everyday average housewife, who wasn't pretty, who wasn't thin, but she was them, and she was hysterical as them, so everybody related to her, and that's why I say "carrying a show."

AC: How much of that is a comedian understanding what they do to be funny? I remember interviewing Ray Romano, and him talking about how he could write all sorts of really dirty jokes, and would sometimes do it, but give them away to friends who could pull them off. I think he said, "That's just not how I'm funny."

DR: Ray's one of those (comics) who developed a brilliant show around himself, and has now gone on to actually be a really good actor. He's gone on to do other dramatic things, and he's really, really good. But you're right, there are always two sides. My favorite one is Bob Saget. Bob Saget, anybody that knows him (knows) he's the dirtiest guy you'd ever want to meet. He's just twisted in a great way. But when he broke on television, he broke on two of the cleanest, all-American shows you can have, *Full House* and then *America's Funniest Home Videos*. And everybody thought, "Oh, he's the dad, the clean guy," and he's the most filthy person you'd ever want to meet. But then after those shows were done and he was a star, and he could go out on the road, now he goes out and does his act, as dirty and funny as he is, because now he can get away with it. But you're right, Ray, when the show was on, he couldn't do that, and he probably actually breaks morals clauses that he had with some of these shows.

AC: Any…yeah. Right there.

Audience member: Yeah, I'm just wondering, based on what you just said, someone like myself, I want to be an actor as well as a comedian, and right now I'm trying to find a new agent, and I'm conversing with some agents, and they keep saying, "Invite me to some shows," and I have and they haven't come yet, but I'm kind of thinking I don't want them to come see me because I don't want them to see me do this bit or that bit, is this too offensive or whatever. So am I just overthinking this, or should I actually be aware of this?

DR: Yeah, you are. When you're asking managers or agents to come see you, do what you want to be. Any time someone tries to fit their talent into (something that doesn't fit), like a square peg into a (round) hole, but that square peg is really not them, it's ultimately going to be unsuccessful for them. You have to be what you are. You have to think like you think, you have to perform like you perform. The world and the industry will catch up with you, if you're good enough, obviously, eventually. It may happen, and I was saying in the class earlier today, I've known guys and girls that hit it big on a TV show when they were 21 or 18, and had a successful run for five years or whatever and made a lot of money, and then for ten years could barely get a job. So it doesn't matter when you break, it's *that* you break. And when you do break, you want to be true to yourself, because if you're not, it's gonna be exposed, especially in stand-up comedy. And when you're asking agents and managers to come down and see you…

It's funny, I didn't bring this up, so I'm glad you asked this question. I get that all the time. They go, "You know, I ask these people to come down, and they don't come for the first ten times. Who do I have to blow to get an agent for a show?" (*laughter*) And I always remind them, everybody wants to come down and see you. They really do. I want to come down and see everybody. But you have all day, I mean, you're still in college, but when you finish college, you'll have all day to work on your craft. You'll have a side job, whatever, but this is what you'll build your whole day around. And it's at night. But people forget that we've been in the office since 8:30, 9 o'clock, on the phones, doing meetings, doing what have you, and we have wives, girlfriends, husbands, kids, what have you. So life gets in the way sometimes. I'll plan to come see you, and then one of my clients is doing a TV show, so I gotta go to that. So they're not (refraining from) coming to see you because they don't want to see you. (Life) just gets in the way. You just build your whole day up to that, but our day is done, in essence, when you're going up. It isn't, because our job is basically 24/7, so if we miss it the first two or three or ten times, whatever, it's not because we don't want to see you, it's just that we haven't had a chance to do it properly. Everybody will eventually come and see you. And to be honest, a good agent or manager will get there.

As I said, when I started my career, I was out six nights a week for four or five hours a night, and I saw damn near everybody. That's the way I got to know them, that's the way I got to sign many of them, and that's the way I got my reputation where I knew people and managers, I'd hang out with all these guys and women who were managers, and they're still friends of mine to this day. So because I was

vigilant about that, I did get to see and experience almost everybody. I don't do that as much anymore, because I'm an old fart, but I still go out probably two or three times a week, but there are people in our department, younger kids who are the same age now as I was when I started, who are out five nights a week, who are hitting the clubs, all the little venues, all the speakeasies and all that stuff. So someone will see you. Someone will absolutely see you, because there are always people out there looking. That's the lifeblood. It never fails. I will ultimately, every year, get calls from studios and network people I've known for a long time, and their first question is, "Who's new? Who have you seen, who do you like?" Even if it's someone I don't represent. "Is there a funny female out there? Have you seen anybody when you've been out in the clubs," or whatever. It's never gonna end. Everyone's looking for the next thing, because you have to keep feeding the monster, basically.

AC: Great. Is there another… Matt, yep.

Audience member: Thanks. I have, I guess, two questions. One, if I guessed the name, would you tell me it? Was it Rob Schneider?

DR: No.

Audience member: Was it Jim Breuer?

DR: No.

Audience member: Oh, you said they were dead? I missed that.

DR: Some of their careers are dead. (*laughter*)

Audience member: OK, my real question, though…

DR: The odds are you wouldn't know this guy even if we said it.

AC: He was very funny…

Audience member: (*to Andrew*) Could *you* say it?

DR: He was funny. He wasn't a great comedian, but he had a funny personality.

AC: He wanted to be a talk show host.

DR: Eh, I think he just wanted to be a star.

Audience member: And his name was….OK, for my real question. Even a step before my esteemed colleague on my left here, is there a trade publication that I could read.. how do I even know where to go to talk to an agent, you know what I mean? Where are these agents?

DR: Well, there isn't any place you could technically go to talk to an agent or a manager. There's obviously *Hollywood Reporter*, *Daily Variety*, *Backstage*, all these kinds of publications. But the only way to get to talk to a manager or agent is through a friend or club owner or lawyer or whatever that will then introduce you, or as I said in the earlier class, do what you do. Keep perfecting your craft. Be true to yourself. They will find you, because they are out there looking. Like I said, I was out in the clubs, I still am. All my competitors and my friends are out there looking; managers are out there looking every night. The young casting associates at all the networks are out there looking to find someone where they can go back to their

boss and go, “Hey, I found this great young girl, she’s great, you gotta see her.” So they will find you. But if you do want to sit and talk to representation just in general, you’ll run into people, friends of friends, that’ll know someone. You won’t necessarily go to their office, but you’ll meet them at a club one night, or some event or something.

I wouldn’t look to go and just meet an agent. Every once in a while, I’ll do this for friends who’ll say, “This person’s in town,” or whatever, “they’re really talented, would you just sit and talk to them?” And I’ll say, “Sure, I’ll do that,” and I enjoy doing that, but ultimately they’ll come in and go, “Hi, I’m a comedian, what can I do?” And I go, “Well, you look funny, but I don’t know if you *are* funny, because I haven’t seen you at work yet.” It’s always best to talk to representation, or even a creative person, a la a writer or director or whatever, after they’ve seen you work, because then they have an idea of what your talent level and experience level is, and what your personality is like. Are you, in their opinion, the kind of person that, like I said, could carry a show, could be that lynchpin in a show, or are you someone who is extremely funny and a great character who would be great to be Kramer in a show?

AC: It’s weird…oh yeah, right here.

Audience member: I just wanted to know: how do agencies find new agents?

DR: People come to them. The road to being an agent is that, in large part, you start in the mailroom. But you can start in the mailroom in a network or studio as well. In a network, you can start in the mailroom and then become the page, and then you work your way up from there. Agencies, it’s the same thing. I would say eight out of

ten people that become agents at our company and most other companies worked their way up through the system—mailroom, assistant, coordinator, then an agent. There's another twenty percent (where) a lawyer gets tired of being a lawyer and wants to be an agent, and they'll switch over. Manager, same thing, they'll switch over to being an agent. Sometimes a road manager who's been on the road for years and knows the business but wants to get off the road, but has the experience that we could use as an agent, will become an agent. But I would say eight out of ten times you start in the beginning, you learn the business from the bottom up. I would say nine out of ten assistants that I ever take, I take out of the mailroom, because I came out of the mailroom, so I like to give back. But also, people coming out of a mailroom are already interested, already have ambitions, and aren't gonna come in at nine and leave at five and say, "Thank you." They're gonna give you that extra time, that extra effort, they're gonna be thinking out of the box, and the like. So if you want to go into that side of the business, that's the route that I would look to (take).

AC: Another question? Yep, right there.

Audience member: I know right now in Toronto, as far as film and television gigs go, that there's a lot more non-union work than there is union. Is it the same in the States right now?

DR: I wouldn't say there's a *ton* more non-union, but there's always non-union work. It used to be, years ago, a lot of the cable networks were all non-union, because in the beginning of cable, they didn't have the budgets to be able to support union wages, but now, I would say 85 to 95 percent of shows are done under the

auspices of some union. In the beginning of your career, people always so, "Oh, don't do a non-union show because then you can't get in the union." That's not true. When you get in the union, they'd rather you not do a non-union show, but at some point, if there's something creative you think is good, and it's non-union, do it. Because trust me, if you want to stay in the union, they want your dues. That's how they stay alive. So they will take your money.

AC: Is there another question? (*pause*) In terms of getting a break, so much used to happen when people would…I hate to use the (phrase) "hang out". I don't know if that still happens as much.

DR: Oh God, yeah.

AC: Because people are at home. When they're performing they go out and do their show, and then they go home and they go online or whatever. Maybe I'm misinterpreting, but it did seem like, previously, a lot of people's breaks came because you had to hang out. You had to go to the clubs six nights a week and hang out.

DR: That's still the case, because yes, you can do things on Youtube, you can make a movie with an iPhone, but yes, the hangout factor is still a huge part of it, for a couple of reasons. Artists want to hang around with artists. That's who their friends are for the most part. So they see each other, they see people who they have the same ideas as them, and they like them, and they'll maybe write together, or they enjoy their work. And also, agents, managers, even lawyers and network people, will be there, and the hangout factor will always be a large part of it, because ultimately

it's a people business. The personalities of the artists are what we're selling, what we're representing. So you need to know the person, you need to know what their aspirations are, you need to know what their likes and dislikes are. So yeah, the hangout factor still exists. Now, you can get your creative talent out in many, many more ways now because of the web, so from Vine on up, you can do something creative. But ultimately, you're gonna have to press flesh at some point.

AC: Great. We have time for a couple more questions, if there are any. (*pause*) Hunter, who'll be on a show tonight.

Audience member: When you were hanging out, as you said there, being vigilant, without putting you in a position to have to slander anybody or anything like that, was there anyone you can remember who maybe seemed like a dark horse coming up in the clubs, who you maybe thought didn't have a shot of piercing or getting a big break, but looking back now you think, "Oh, yeah, he stunk it up in the past"?

DR: Oh yeah, everybody has a story about the one that got away. Fortunately, I've been very successful. I have a good eye for talent at an early point, and I love discovering talent. That's always been my favorite part of it. But no one's ever a hundred percent right. So there are always those people who are like, "Hey!" When I first saw Adam, Adam was actually at another agency, and two buddies of mine at that agency were actually at the club the night I was asked to go down and see him, and I just went, "Oh my god, this guy is great." I actually went out and said to my buddies at the other agency, "This kid in there is really funny. You might want to go in and actually watch your client." They were too busy at the bar doing whatever the

hell they were doing, and I eventually signed him and it went on from there. I saw it, but obviously those guys didn't. So there is always someone you watch and you go…to be honest, almost everybody passed on Jay Leno at some point. Nobody ever thought he'd be on television. "Ah, his chin's too big." Yes, he's extremely funny. He's a brilliant stand-up. He's probably one of the five best stand-ups ever to do the job. But everybody was like, "He's not a television face. He's not a guy you can hang a show on. He's not that guy." But he persevered, and he built his audience up through his touring, and then it turned out he was pretty good at hosting a show. But literally everybody at one point when, "Yeah, he's funny, but…"

AC: I'll ask one more question about representation. Assuming that they've got it, how do you know you've got a good or bad one? I'll always remember the anecdote, again it's a Canadian guy I won't mention, he did very well at Just for Laughs, the agent's talking to him after the show, he's saying, "You're fantastic, you need representation, do you have representation?" And the comedian says, "Yeah, I do." And (the agent) asks, "Who is it?" And he goes, "You." (*laughter*) He was one of millions on a roster, right? So how do you know you're in a bad relationship with an agent or a manager? Are there tip-offs?

DR: Well, if he says that…

AC: Well, that's number one, yeah.

DR: "Hi, I'd like to meet you, I pay you." It's somewhat of a visceral thing. You want to be with someone that gets you, for lack of a better term. You want someone who has the integrity to represent you. When you pick a manager and an agent, you are

picking a person that is you, that is representing you. Nine out of ten times, the first line of defense in anybody's career is not going to be talking to you, it's going to be talking to me, and you want to make sure whoever is representing you is projecting what you want to be received. Some people like real hardasses, "I don't give a crap, just get me the most money you can," whatever. That's fine. There are guys and women who will do that. There are other people who want to be creative with you, and get your input on what they should do, and field all offers, what have you. So there are different personalities on my side of the desk that connect with the personalities on the other side of the desk.

Now obviously, people always say, "I want to go with someone who can get the head of the studio on the phone," and there are a lot of those people out there. That is one factor that you should bring in. If you're making the decision between a guy who's working out of his living room, yet is passionate, and another guy who's at our agency who's just as passionate, yeah, you're probably gonna go with us, because we have the resources that the other person doesn't. I wouldn't use that as the only yardstick for your representation. If you just go with, "He or she represents all these guys, and they're powerful, I'm gonna go with them," well, if you do that, you're gonna be the last one on their list. So the odds are, they're gonna be talking about forty people before they ever bring up your name. So many times, being with that guy or girl will be detrimental to you, because there are only so many hours in a day. There are only so many people we can really concentrate on, even though we do work off of lists. After you say, "OK, I've got bing bang boom bom bom," then if you know the buyer well, which ninety-nine percent of us do, the buyer's gonna say,

"Who's *really* the right person for this?" And you're gonna have to be able to go, "OK, this guy, this girl, and this girl." Even though you've got fifteen who are right, they're gonna ask you, "Come on, let's be honest. If you were in my shoes, who would you want me to see?"

So you want to make sure it's a person you can act with, and someone who will have the time to give to you, and who gets your vision of what you want to do in your career, and who, when they talk to you, are honest. I think that's the biggest key. Many, many representation people out there will kiss up to performers like everything they do is great. "You were fabulous tonight. You look great. That's the best dress I've ever seen." Everybody likes being complimented, obviously. Nobody goes into performing to not be told they're good. But you want whoever's working with you to… they don't have to be brutal and say, "Hey, you're fuckin' horrible," but you want them to be honest. Like, "Hey, you were good tonight, but you know what? It was slow in this part," or "maybe you shouldn't wear that shirt." You want someone who's going to give you input, and you (should) trust their input. You don't have to take everything they say. Obviously, ultimately it's your decision, it's your career and your life. But you want to know when you come offstage, or you finish filming something, and you turn to someone and you say, "What do you think, how did it go," you want them to be honest. Yes men are easy to find. Friends are easy to find.

There's the image of the agent with the three-piece suit and the whole nine yards. Well, that's gone away, thank God, because I hate three-piece suits. But you do

have to have some sort of decorum. You are the business side of their show business. You want them to be secure and (to feel that) you're looking out for them, especially when people become stars. When someone becomes a star…getting friends is easier. Don't try to be their friend. Now, through the years, if you do connect with one or two or three of your artists on a real social level, and they actually become friends, great. But you know what? Be their friend, but make sure that the person you want representing them, and for people on my end, if you're looking to go into our end of the business, it's very tempting when you get friendly with the person that then becomes a star. It's very cool. You're hanging out with them, you're going to cool parties, great-looking chicks coming around, or great-looking guys, whatever it might be. And yeah, that's nice, but you know what? Like I said, when they become stars, getting friends is the easy part. Everybody wants to be their friend. You want to be the guy that they know and trust. They don't want you at three in the morning when they've had a lot to drink and they're trying to get in some girl's pants. They don't want you around. They want to know that you're the guy that is looking out for them and maybe will say to them, "Maybe don't stay out that late next time. That wasn't smart." You're the guy representing them.

One of our young agents years ago was complaining, he said, "Oh, you guys want us to wear ties and stuff," he was a rock and roll agent, and he said, "I go backstage at these gigs, and the guys are all in T-shirts and whatever, and they always give me crap about having a tie on, and I feel awkward." And I went, "Don't feel awkward. Yeah, they'll make fun of you. They'll have fun at your expense. But you know what? Throw it back at them. Go, 'Hey, this tie's worth more than your

whole outfit.' But you know what? After the jokes are done, and you go home and they're still hanging around with their hangers-on, that next morning they're gonna wake up and go, 'I'm gonna call that guy or that girl, because they're looking out for me. These guys are looking to get free drinks. This guy's looking out for me.'"

AC: All right. Danny, thank you very, very much.

DR: Oh, my pleasure.

AC: This was terrific.

(*applause)*

AC: Some Humber gifts, as is our wont.

DR: Oh, I love it! I love swag!

AC: Thanks very much.

DR: This is really the reason you go into show business: swag.

AC: Thanks.

DR: Fantastic.

END