

Life & Times

*We Irish,
we think of you often
We hope you had a good
Christmas and New Year.*

Orlando Sentinel
OrlandoSentinel.com

MONDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2005
SECTION D

*Hope to see you soon
Love Charles + Pamela
Cuskey*

The View From Here | LINDA SHRIEVES



Dr. 4 (Trish Sie) gives a little show and tell with glow-in-the-dark putty during a Snark-a-Snoops performance, a stage show that puts science front and center with fun.

An experiment in fun

At Sak Comedy Lab, a pair of performers combines science with music and dance to inspire — and entertain — youngsters.

The View From Here is a slice of local life by Sentinel reporters. Today, feature writer Linda Shrieves contributes.

Two-year-old Rachel Rinaldi's favorite superheroes cannot be found on television or at the movies.

Instead, Rachel's heroes perform onstage every week at the Sak Comedy Lab. So, rather than sitting in front

of the tube every Saturday morning for a dose of cartoons, Rachel and her mom slide into seats at the Sak theater so the tot can sing and dance with two of Orlando's wackiest scientists, Dr. 4 and Professor Cheddar.

"Dr. 4 and Professor Cheddar rank right up there with Dora the Explorer," says Rachel's mom, Brynne Rinaldi. "She knows all their songs; she knows the dances. I think it's amaz-

ing that my little girl now sings songs about the classification of rocks."

Dr. 4 and Professor Cheddar — whose alter egos are Trish Sie and Christin Knorr — are a volatile compound, an example of what might happen if you mixed The Wiggles with Bill Nye the Science Guy.

Together, Sie, 34, and Knorr, 32, combine science with music and dance and toddlers. The result is the Snark-a-Snoops, a campy stage show with a scientific twist.

"Kids are always trying to figure out how things work," says Sie. "What better way to start them out on a lifetime of asking questions?"

The idea started more than a year ago while Sie was changing her son's diapers. When she and Knorr began

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JULIE FLETCHER/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Miss Shell Shocked (Michelle Cowart) and the Snark-a-Snoops show really draw toddlers into the fun of play and, just as important, the fun of learning. The show takes place 3 times a week at the Sak Comedy Lab.

Science shares the stage with song, dance

SCIENCE FROM D1

singing goofy songs and dancing, he was delighted. So the pair cooked up a stage show for kids, in which Dr. 4 and Professor Cheddar, wearing bright orange and green lab coats and Converse All-Stars, search for the elusive beast, the Snarkabing.

Science seemed like a perfect theme for their stage show because they could explore a huge number of topics — and tap into a child's curiosity about how things work.

"We never have trouble writing songs because there's an endless number of things you can write about in science," says Sie. "And kids from preschoolers to teenagers are intrigued by the kind of experiments we do. It's not always fascinating to memorize stuff in class. But mixing things up and watching them go is fascinating to everybody."

Sie and Knorr may be newcomers to the science world ("neither of us studied science in school, other than the science that everyone else took," says Sie, herself a music composition major at the University of Pennsylvania), but they're hardly greenhorns on the stage. A few years back, they performed rap songs about great books. Before that, the duo regularly performed bizarre dances at an artists' cooperative that Sie founded called Bubba G-noush.

Now Sie, a former ballroom-dance instructor, and Knorr, a former nanny, are channeling that energy into skits about science.

Throughout a lively stage show, the children sing and dance and learn — among other things — that calcium is a mineral, that water freezes at 32 degrees, that molecules dance around when they're heated up.

This naturally leads to the Test Tube Dance Move. Cue up the music, DJ, and Dr. 4 and Professor Cheddar groove and undulate to the music. The tots clamber out of their seats and

gather at the edge of the stage, like tiny groupies at a rock concert.

Today is "Glow in the Dark Snark Day," so the crowd of preschoolers waves glow sticks in the air, while the disc jockey, A.C. Unit (also known as Alan Cowart), dims the lights.

Onstage, Cheddar and 4 turn zinc sulfide powder into a glow-in-the-dark blob. Next, they pull out a two-liter bottle that contains a squid. When they shine a flashlight on Mona the squid, she glows.

"Did you ever see," asks Dr. 4, "a dancing squid who lives in a two-liter bottle?"

"My cousin has one!" shouts a 4-year-old boy in the second row.

"What's its name?" asks 4. "I don't know," answers the youngster.

No matter. The silly scientists continue their song-and-dance number, mixing science and math with fun and frolic. Dr. 4's favorite song celebrates the beauty of the number four — and teaches children that there are four quarters in a dollar, four corners in a square and four strings on a violin.

At one point, 2-year-old Alyssa Truckenmiller, who's here with her play group, wanders onto the stage and hands two glow sticks to the scientists. Ten minutes later, Alyssa climbs back onstage to reclaim them.

These interruptions might befuddle some professionals, but Sie and Knorr are masters at improvising. When they first began, they performed before small groups at Sie's ballroom-dance studio, the Zebra Room. Soon, they moved to the Orlando Science Center, and now they're performing three times a week at the Sak Comedy Lab.

Beginning in January, they'll split their shows between the Sak theater and the Zebra Room.

Back onstage at Sak, Professor Cheddar and Dr. 4 are making glow-in-the-dark, homemade Silly Putty — a finger-

sticking, gooey blend of Elmer's glue and liquid starch, with a little help from Grandma 4, who is better known to her friends as Marjorie Kulash.

They knead it, color it, shine a flashlight on it and — voila! — show it off to the crowd of kids.

Next, as always, it's time to dance. The pseudo-scientists jump up and down and perform a favorite, the Robot Dance.

The crowd of toddlers dances along enthusiastically.

As the show ends, the children crawl back onstage, while their moms chase them.

"It was wonderful," says Melanie Formisano of Lake Mary, who brought her 3-year-old Elizabeth, to catch the show. "Even I learned something."

But now it's time for lunch. Followed by a nap.

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