

HURTS SO GOOD

Anti-Valentine's Day show to offer balm for bruised hearts

BY MIKE THOMAS
Staff Reporter

Self-proclaimed "king of small media" Ira Glass is for love and in love. But scheduling love to blossom on a specific day of the year — especially Valentine's Day — is difficult.

"I just think it can be delicate," the host of public radio's "This American Life" and its soon-to-be Showtime spinoff says from New York City, his base of operations since jilting Chicago last spring. "It can be hard to make it happen. Valentine's Day can feel like prom night, but for adults. There are expectations."

Tonight at Chicago's Apollo Theater, along with other spoken-word artists, he'll wax poetic on love — and the lack thereof — as part of "No Love for Love: The Poetry Center of Chicago's Anti-Valentine's Day Show."

Not that Glass, who is married to former Chicago Reader editor Anaheed Alani, is anti-Valentine's Day. On the contrary.

"I do not blow it off," he says. "I'm very careful about it."

So what counts as a romantic gesture in Ira's World?

"I feel like I'm constantly trying to do little things for Anaheed to amuse her and make her laugh," he says, not entirely comfortable with revealing personal particulars. "Even something as dumb as picking up a cupcake for her on the way home from work — that's well within my range."

He buys lots of flowers, too, "but I'll usually say my feelings with a pack of cigarettes," he says. "Oh, you got me some cigarettes! Know your audience."

As for his love history, Glass laments its relative dearth of drama. Fortunately, his onstage colleagues will pick up the slack.

Crashed cars, downward spirals

Chicago actor and writer Diana Slickman, for instance, was once



Megan Stielstra plans to recount her breakup with Indiana Jones. Her fiancé insisted she end it.



Christopher Piatt will focus on his obsession with right-winger Ann Coulter tonight at the Apollo.

proposed to by a guy who also had popped the question to two other women — on the same day.

"He was hedging his bets," says Slickman, a member of the Neo-Futurists theater troupe who lives in Andersonville with her mate of 14 years. "We all said 'no.'"

She also dated a paranoid schizophrenic.

"He was very upfront about it after we first met," she says. "I thought, 'Oh, that's fine. Big deal.' But then we couldn't go anywhere together. We couldn't go anywhere, period. And he would pick fights so we wouldn't go out."

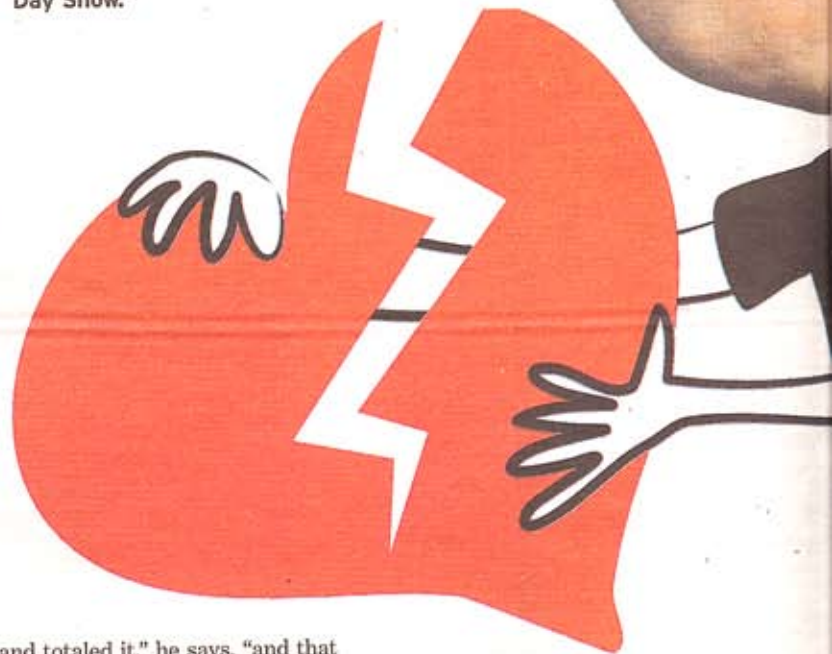
But her segment, she says, is "more about how love in general has let me down over the years in many different ways."

Christopher Piatt, the theater editor for Time Out Chicago, former co-host of the Partly Dave Show at No Exit Cafe in Rogers Park and a former free-lance theater reviewer for the Sun-Times, has endured his share of crashing and burning. In one case, literally.

"An ex of mine borrowed my car

SHATTERED GLASS

Ira Glass, host of public radio's "This American Life," will wax poetic on love tonight at the Apollo Theater as part of "No Love for Love: The Poetry Center of Chicago's Anti-Valentine's Day Show."



and totaled it," he says, "and that was the end of a relationship that probably should have ended sooner." His performance piece focuses on his obsession with leggy right-wing punditrix Ann Coulter and their (fictional) coupling.

It's "sort of about the chilly hate sex we used to have," says Piatt, who had "a long, dry 2006" on the dating circuit. "And it's written in verse form. ABAB."

His impression of Valentine's Day? "It can be a celebration of scorn as well [as love], as I'm sure this event will be."

Scorn, of course, puts the poison in one's pen. Featured performer Joel Chmara, a communications professor at the College of Lake County, knows this well.

"Oddly enough," he says via e-mail, "this is one of the first V-Days in which I'm happily in love." As a result, "It's made my writing soft and pudgy. Most of my stuff these days centers

around Technicolor unicorns and gumdrop rocket ships."

It wasn't always so. Chmara has been unhappily out of love, too — and that's where he'll mine his No Love material. Aside from bits "that will sum up my sordid romantic affairs in 10 minutes," he'll employ "my fine beat machine to bust out a golden jam with the help of the personal ads."

Dumping Indiana Jones

Megan Stielstra, a performer, writer and fiction instructor at Columbia College, recently turned 30 and is trying to cultivate a new outlook on love. Much of her past work, she notes, was "this bitter, grrrr, what's love sort of thing."

Her worst Valentine's Day ever, she says, was spent helping a boyfriend wash his clothes at an Ital-

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ian laundromat — all the while knowing he'd leave her forever the next day.

Eventually, true love came calling and (recent) matrimony ensued — but not before she quashed a torrid affair with the man of her dreams. His name: Indiana Jones.

"The week before we eloped, my now-husband took me to the Music Box to see 'Raiders of the Lost Ark,'" Stielstra says

of a revival that screened there last year. "He said, 'This is your last time to see him as a single woman. You have to end it if we're going to do this thing.'"

Aided by audio clips, she'll tell the interactive tale of their breakup by talking with her erstwhile celluloid stud.

Does she still pine for him in all his bullwhip-snapping glory? Apparently not.

"When your reality is kind of knocking your fantasy out of the water, there's really no need to go back," she says. "And I kind of lucked out with the reality all of a sudden."

If that sentiment seems disconcertingly upbeat for a show called "No Love for Love," Glass offers an explanation.

"Only the most hopeless romantics would ever even feel a need to make a show like [this]. Like, you don't do an anti-Valentine's Day show if you actually don't care about love. You only make an anti-Valentine's Day show if you care very badly about it. And so I believe that you will see a stage full of the most romantic sops ever."

Is he one of them?

"I believe I have the normal amount of romantic stuff in me," he says. "I feel like I'm just exactly average when it comes to that."

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'NO LOVE FOR LOVE: THE ANTI-VALENTINE'S DAY SHOW'

When: 8 tonight

Where: Apollo Theater,
2540 N. Lincoln

Tickets: \$20; \$50 for
VIP seating

Call: (312) 559-1212