

# Comedian's show looks at fatherhood - or the lack of it

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Qcitymetro.com

By Glenn Burkins Qcitymetro.com

How does a boy grow into proper manhood when there is no father at home to teach him?

Comedian **Ralph Harris** tackles that social conundrum with equal measures of humor and insight in his latest one-man show, "MANish Boy," which opened Tuesday at Booth Playhouse.

Best known for his standup and television appearances - he was a finalist on the TV series "Last Comic Standing" - **Harris** said the show is in large part autobiographical, at least in its theme.

Raised in Philadelphia and now living in L.A., he said he's spent much of his adult life wrestling with the ill effects of his absentee dad, who left home when **Harris** was 7. At age 9, he said, he decided to become the "the man of the house."

"I was pretty much raised by the village around me," he told Qcitymetro during a phone interview.

And that, in a nutshell, is what "MANish Boy" is all about - **Harris**, on stage alone, recreating some of the unforgettable characters who helped him grow into the man he became.

There is his longsuffering mother who knows what her troubled son is thinking long before he utters a sound.

The angry father who, as **Harris** remembers it, might show up unannounced and could switch without notice from "Happy Dad" to "Devil Dad."

The grandfather who moved in when **Harris'** father checked out.

The drunk/high Uncle Earl who did the best he could ... or maybe not.

The seductress Miss Betty, his mom's best friend, who taught him other aspects of being a man.

True to his roots in standup, **Harris** begins the show with a short monologue. He soon gets a phone call summoning him back to Philly - an old girlfriend, it seems, is demanding a paternity test.

For the next 90 minutes **Harris** time-travels back and forward between the present - the pending DNA test and his conflicted feelings about fatherhood - and reliving the past through the characters he re-creates.

"How am I supposed to be a father when my own dad didn't want to be a father?" he pleads at one point.

Despite the comedy, the show is painfully real - a stinging commentary on the millions of neglected boys who grow up never knowing their dads.

"My pop wasn't Mike Brady," **Harris** said on stage, referencing the "Brady Bunch" character who, for years, was the only model he had for what a father should be - singing as he cooks breakfast and solving all problems in 30 minutes.

**Harris** said performing the show is therapeutic in some ways but also emotionally exhausting. He said he better understands now why his white and Jewish friends all have therapists.

Want to go?

**WHAT: Ralph Harris'**

"MANish Boy."

**WHEN:** 7:30 tonight, 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 3 p.m. Sunday.

**WHERE:** Booth Playhouse, 130 N. Tryon St.

**TICKETS:** \$24.50-\$29.50.

**DETAILS:** 704-372-1000, [www.carolinatix.org](http://www.carolinatix.org).

**Harris**