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## LAUGH RIOT!

THERAPY'S ADAM SANK AND HIS  
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NEW YORK'S QUEER COMEDY SCENE





# Knock 'em Dead Ringer

Electro-Shock stand-up Adam Sank drives the laughs home.

BY GREGORY T. ANGELO / PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIZ LIGUORI SHOT ON LOCATION AT THERAPY

**Ever heard of a “ringer?”** Out stand-up Adam Sank has—and he doesn’t like them.

If you’re among the uninitiated, Sank explains the terminology: “For a while comedy clubs were more interested in filling seats than anything else,” he says, “and the scene became entrenched in this system of what they call ‘ringer shows’ where it didn’t matter who you were or where you came from—if you could get 40 of your closest friends and relatives to come and see you, you got a slot.”

Then, he explains his displeasure with said system: “Do you know what it’s like to sit through 20 comics who aren’t that good or even ready yet?” Anyone who’s ever fallen for the schpiel of a Times Square street-corner frat boy hawking Kinko’s leaflets and barking the “Free comedy!” tag-line knows all-too-well what Sank is talking about.

“Sooner or later people learn that they’re not seeing good people [when they go to ringer shows],” Sank continues. A relative newbie who chose comedy over a career as a PA with the Fox News Channel (no explanation needed), Sank admits to seeing the value in ringer spots but is likewise quick to point out the consequential backlash their culture created. “I think we’re seeing a shift now where you’re starting to see more shows like mine,” he says.

With six months under his belt as host of therapy’s popular Sunday night Electro-Shock Comedy Hour and fresh off a spot on VH1’s *Best Week Ever*, Sank has reason to brag. His efforts as emcee since September have brought the largely under-the-radar homo stand-up scene to the attention of the gay community at large by taking the mic from its traditional spot on the traditional stages of the city’s traditional comedy clubs and planting it in front of the boys at the sleek 52nd Street lounge. With that move came the opportunity to feature fringe performers such as the outrageous Wendy Ho, character acts such as Robin

Fox’s ode to truly desperate housewifery, Karith Foster’s ethnic stew and in-your-face guys like Brian Barry alongside more traditional performers such as Ophira Eisenberg and Eddie Sarfaty as well as work-horse vets Bob Smith and Danny McWilliams.

It’s a transition that took some getting used-to—both for therapy’s audience and their host.

“It’s a completely different animal when you’re performing for gay people—especially gay men,” Sank elaborates. “They’re the hardest group in the world to entertain, period. Gay men have a more finely developed sense of irony and absurdity than any other people on earth, so it takes a lot to entertain them. Every gay man is a stand-up comedian—and they’re all pretty fucking hilarious! I learned very quickly that my standard material that plays well at a place like Caroline’s—coming out of the closet, breaking up with my boyfriend, my job at Fox News—all of these jokes I could rely on, at therapy they were like, ‘So what?’ It was a tremendous challenge for me and it continues to be a challenge, but I think I’ve learned that what they really wants is spontaneity—they want you to be edgy, they want you to take chances and they want you to interact with them. The queens need to be acknowledged—you can’t just stand up there; you need to write material on the spot based on the experience we’re all having together—that’s what they want to see.” **N**

*Electro-Shock Comedy Hour plays 10pm Sundays at therapy (348 W 52nd St, 212-397-1700). Visit [adamsank.com](http://adamsank.com), [therapy-nyc.com](http://therapy-nyc.com) for more info.*