

Austin Chronicle
[Confessions of A Mind On Overdrive](#)
Troy Dillinger Has So Much To Give

Josh Rosenblatt
Fri., Feb. 24, 2012



photo by JOHN ANDERSON Chronicle Staff

You can call Troy Dillinger a lot of things – boisterous, headstrong, generous, selfish, talented, bawdy, c

Dillinger, the creator and host of The Austin Variety Show, loves to talk about himself – unapologetically

Dillinger adores Austin. Like Woody Allen's Isaac Davis in Manhattan, he romanticizes the city he lives in. Which is a good thing. Because Dillinger is busy trying to sell national TV producers, agents, studios, and

To help his cause, Dillinger has put together three minutes of show highlights called a "sizzle reel." Last
"And we close by saying Austin is great."

The Austin Variety Show is Dillinger's scatological love letter to the city he says saved him – from failure

When he was a young man in the Eighties, Dillinger played in local punk bands, several of which, he says
"I thought I deserved to be the biggest rock star in the world. I felt entitled," says Dillinger. "Plus, I was c

Dillinger bottomed out in 2002, when a tour-van accident left him physically and emotionally battered. Hi

In 2004, however, a chance recording session with a friend led to the Troy Dillinger Dirty & Hairy Film Fe

The next years saw Dillinger evolve into something of an Austin impresario. He started Austin Swim, wh

Still, Dillinger says, something was missing. It had taken him five years to climb out of the emotional low

In 2008, Dillinger's relationship with the executives at Adult Swim was souring, and he decided to shut A

"One day, I got this grand vision, and the whole thing came together. It was like I'd been charged with a

Even though Save Austin Music didn't accomplish everything Dillinger had hoped it would, "I felt like I got

Things were looking up. As Save Austin Music was reaching its end, a promoter approached Dillinger about

The Austin Variety Show is really two shows. There are the live performances, held at a large studio space

To be a modern version of Barris has always been in Dillinger's line of sight, even if he didn't know it. His

"I'm this idealistic, creative, sensitive kid, and in the midst of all that, The Gong Show debuts, and it filled

The other half of the Variety Show is composed of scripted "behind-the-scenes" sequences inspired by s

Last month, to celebrate the show's new national campaign, Dillinger and his crew put on a performance

Even a great egoist like "Troy Dillinger" can recognize the truth when he hears it.

Still, there's a difference between tamping down your in ego in the name of doing right by the people you

"We don't know how my story's going to end," Dillinger says. "Maybe it will end tragic, but no matter; I ha

This Saturday, The Austin Variety Show is putting on a performance to coincide with Troy Dillinger's birth

"I wanted the cake to say, 'Don't you know who the fuck I am? I'm Troy Dillinger,'" Dillinger laughs. "But

Austin Statesman
[Austin Variety Show Moves Into Highland Mall](#)

Dale Roe, *On TV*
Saturday, July 2, 2011





Troy Dillinger hosts the first live performance of the Austin Variety Show at Highland Mall. Above: Dillinger, the host of the show, holds a clapperboard during the performance.



Guest Knife featuring Rick and the Knives' Rick Knives and Snakepit Comics' Ben Snakepit performs on stage during the Austin Variety Show.

[More Photos - Click Here](#) >>

Photos: Erich Schlegel
FOR AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Troy Dillinger looks a little sleepy. Giving me the 10-cent tour of the new television production/live theater space that he has just moved into Highland Mall, the contagiously positive host of "The Austin Variety Show" on KBVO is a bundle of energy, but you get the impression that his heavy eyelids could slam shut at any moment.

Maybe that's because he's so busy.

"My problem is I don't let go," Dillinger says. "I take on a new skill set, but I won't let go of the others. I'm the producer. I host. I edit." He admits to being a bit of a control freak.

A Canton, Ohio, native who moved to Austin at the age of 8 in 1975, Dillinger looks a lot like Joel Hodgson (remember Joel, the sleepy stand-up comic who created and helmed "Mystery Science Theater 3000"?) but doughier. Not much doughier, though — he's dropped about 20 pounds courtesy of show sponsor Fit and Fearless.

Dillinger, a longtime entrepreneur and musician, dreamed up "Austin Swim," the mid-2000s local viewing parties for Cartoon Network's Sunday night "Adult Swim" block of programming. After initially creating the event as an opportunity for his band to play weekly, Dillinger added local comics, musicians and other performers — and a swimming pool — and turned the whole shebang into a two-hour, pre-show party.

The event bounced around various venues until, Dillinger diplomatically says, relationships with the network became strained. Though he had to drop the viewing party portion of the event, Dillinger parlayed his relationships with sponsors and acts into the "Austin Variety Show."

"When the deal with 'Adult Swim' went south, I thought, 'Let's do the other two hours. And it's so much fun, let's put it on camera,?'" he recalls.

The show was eventually taped in a studio on South Congress Avenue, although Dillinger and company shot some events at the Highball on South Lamar Boulevard. The South Congress tapings regularly were filled to capacity, so the host went hunting for a larger space he could afford on the operation's shoestring budget.

Poking around Facebook, he ran across an ad that read, "Highland Mall — we're not closed."

"I thought, 'Oh, my God,?'" he recalls. "I've got the icky salesman gene, so my first thought was, 'Well, they've got space and we've got a relationship with a lot of local businesses,' so the wheels started turning."

Dillinger contacted the venue's management with the idea of turning it into the country's first "local business mall." He's not old, but he is old enough to remember when local businesses were strangled by the convenience of enclosed shopping malls (Highland was Austin's first). Now local businesses face a new challenge from the Internet.

"Retail is on the ropes," Dillinger says. "A lot of medium-sized and locally owned businesses are really taking it in the shorts in terms of traffic. Let's fill the mall with local businesses." He thinks foot traffic in the mall will increase with Austin Community College's purchase of the mall's former Macy's and Dillard's stores.

Highland management showed interest in Dillinger's ideas, and "The Austin Variety Show" moved in on May 1 with a one-year lease.

"It was a little unusual to discuss leasing store space for the production and filming of a television show," says Darlene Collins, Highland Mall's specialty leasing manager. "(But) we strive to bring excitement, entertainment, festivity and a bit of the unexpected to our customers."

She calls Dillinger a "seasoned professional" who is "a pleasure to work with," and says there were no concerns about the show's content, which can be raunchy (Dillinger calls it a

combination of high production and low-brow humor — "I love the idea of taking 25, maybe 30 people from Austin and paying their bills making a show about fart jokes," he says). Since tapings don't begin until after the mall closes, there's no chance of a family, for instance, accidentally stumbling across burlesque performers in the new studio's storefront windows.

The mall, with its share of empty storefronts, has seen better days, but it appears to be surprisingly well-suited to the show's needs. The show occupies a trio of former chain stores. The middle, theater space — complete with a suite of dressing rooms and a prop workshop — used to be a Casual Corner. The room to the left of the stage serves as a lobby where audience members, who pay \$15 for a ticket (\$13.50 in advance), enjoy pre-show beer and barbecue near booths set up by the show's sponsors. The third storefront houses Dillinger's offices and post-production equipment.

Crowd whoops it up

The enthusiastic audience of thirtysomethings and up at the June 25 inaugural taping in the new facility seemed uniquely Austin — there were plenty of ink-blotted arms and lower backs, some body jewelry and touches of gray painting the ponytails and sideburns on display. The crowd whooped it up for Dillinger — dressed in swim trunks and a snorkel (a tie-in to summer or perhaps "Austin Swim"?) — who presented an off-color, self-deprecating introduction to the proceedings. They were attentive for the intelligent and crafted humor of Funniest Person in Austin winner Andy Ritchie. And they rocked out to the dancing of the Austin City Showgirls and the music of Ghost Knife, who I can almost guarantee produced the loudest sounds ever to be heard inside the mall.

The crowd even enjoyed the humorous commercials, projected on a large screen in between acts. Dillinger splits the commercial time with KBVO, according to station General Manager Eric Lassberg. "They go out and sell their cut of the (advertising) inventory, and that's how they finance their deal," he says. KBVO sells the rest.

Lassberg adds that he's trying to have the station — populated by local sporting events —

driven by locally oriented programming and is open to similar programming pitches from others.

"I think it's bold of Eric Lassberg to go, 'OK, we'll put this on,?'" Dillinger says. "He might be able to make a little more money off of another episode of 'My Name Is Earl' than they make off of us, you know. But he took a chance with us, and I think we're starting to make it worth their while."

It's definitely a labor of love for Dillinger, who refers to himself as a longtime broke musician, and the 10 to 20 collaborators helping him with the show at any given time. "It's two or three full-time jobs," he says. "I don't come from money; I've never had a bad car accident that I collected insurance on. At any given time, I'm maybe 30 days away from homelessness. The bulk of what we do comes from sponsors."

Dillinger hopes to eventually make the venue available to other parties. "We want to help build traffic at the mall," he says.

"And we've got a great bounty here and it would be a shame not to share it." And he is working toward stockpiling enough episodes to sell the show into syndication.

"It would be nice to get rich, you know? If we sell the show, I'll be able to get out of debt and maybe put a down payment on a house. It would be nice to have my living situation be secure. But I really do this because I love it. I love laughing and — even when I was playing music — I love making people laugh. It's good for you."

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'The Austin Variety Show'

Midnight Saturdays

KBVO

Austin Statesman

[Variety show offers sneak peek of its new home tonight](#)

Gary Dinges, AAS Staff

Friday, May 27, 2011



Highland Mall is ready for its close-up.

The "Austin Variety Show," the ailing North Austin shopping center's newest tenant, opens its doors tonight, offering Austinites a special sneak preview of its 10,000-square-foot studio.

"We're hoping the party will create a lot of excitement about what we're doing here," said Troy Dillinger, the show's host and producer. "We're doing something we're not supposed to be doing somewhere where we're not supposed to be doing it."

Carved out of a former clothing store that's capable of accommodating an audience between 200 and 250 people, the studio's new home is on the second floor near the now-shuttered Dillard's on the mall's south side. It can also be accessed from an entrance on Airport Boulevard.

At a time when a number of tenants are exiting the mall, Dillinger says he's eager to help bring shoppers back.

"I love a challenge," he said. "This is not your standard mall. It's kind of like the Wild West."

Mall employees say they're excited about their new neighbor — and some even hope to land a spot on the show.

"I want to be in the entertainment business," said Erik Chase, a manager at the Zales jewelry store who recently started doing standup comedy. "I've got the goods."

Chase, who calls himself the "mayor of the mall," says the "Austin Variety Show" could be the break he needs.

"I know this is my year of the 'yes,'" he said.

The show, which airs at midnight Saturdays on MyNetworkTV affiliate KBVO, will tape its first episode from the new studio on June 18. It should air this fall.

In addition to his TV program, Dillinger says, he is talking to several theater groups interested in using the space. And while the "Austin Variety Show" is geared toward an adult audience, shows for children could soon enter the mix.

In the long term, the host hopes to grow the show significantly, adding 25 to 30 jobs.

"I want to help people I enjoy working with pay their bills," Dillinger said.

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'Austin Variety Show' open house

When: 8 to 11 p.m. tonight

Where: Highland Mall, 6001 Airport Blvd.

Cost: Free

Online: austinvarietyshow.com

Austin Statesman

[Highland Mall's newest tenant: a television show](#)

Gary Dinges, AAS Staff

Monday, April 25, 2011

At a time when a number of retailers have been exiting Highland Mall, producers of a local television show say they're confident a rebound is imminent and will soon move their studios to the ailing shopping center.

The "Austin Variety Show," which airs at midnight Saturdays on local MyNetworkTV affiliate KBVO, has signed a one-year lease and will move on May 1 from South Congress Avenue into a 10,000-square-foot former clothing store near the now-shuttered Dillard's on the mall's south side.

The first episode to broadcast from the new studio is set to air June 18.

"Highland Mall presented an opportunity to us that doesn't exist anywhere in Austin," said Troy Dillinger, the show's host and producer. "With a mall comes a solution to problems that local businesses struggle with all year long. Free parking, reasonable rents, and year-round controlled climate make it possible for businesses from boutiques to food trailers to operate more profitably — without interruption — season to season."

Dillinger says he envisions the mall evolving into a home for "all things Austin." Arts and crafts fairs are planned, as are a number of special events during the holiday season.

"They couldn't have been more receptive," he said. "They really are looking for ways to change up their game."

Highland lost Macy's earlier this year, and a Dillard's clearance center is set to close soon, leaving the mall without an anchor. Austin Community College has purchased the Macy's building, the larger of the two Dillard's stores and the mall's core, and it is planning to move some classes and offices to the shopping center in the coming years.

ACC has said existing tenants will continue to operate until their leases expire.

In addition to the "Austin Variety Show" deal, Mac's Coffee Shop is set to open soon at Highland, according to mall manager Dennis Backstrom, and leasing agents are working to land more tenants. Adelle's Bridal Boutique, a locally owned retailer, also recently opened at the mall.

"We're hanging in there right now," Backstrom said. "I think we're going to see a turnaround."

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Austin On Stage

Austin Variety Show to Be Broadcast Locally by KBVO-TV, Starting January 10th

For the past few months, the vaudeville-styled Austin Variety Show has been performed and videotaped with a live audience for television in a cabaret setting at Dillinger*illa Studios. Featuring live music, comedy, performers, and audience participation games, the production will begin airing on KBVO - My Austin TV, beginning January 12th.

The production is the brainchild of [austin swim]'s Troy Dillinger, an award-winning filmmaker and Austin musician for more than 25 years. The production is co-hosted by Second City alum Tom Booker, founder of The Institution Theater.

Each episode includes live burlesque acts, nationally known comedy acts, local music acts, specialty acts, and game shows where the audience members can win prizes. In addition, topical comedy video segments are played between each act.

The previously taped episodes will air every Sunday night from 11 p.m. to 12 a.m. The one-hour show will be available to subscribers of Time Warner Cable Digital, Direct TV, AT&T, GrandeCom, and Suddenlink.

The channel locations are:

- Time Warner Digital Cable, Ch. 1525;
- Direct TV, Ch. 51;
- AT&T, Ch. 7 (HD 1007);
- GrandeCom, Ch. 18 (HD 318);
- Suddenlink, Ch. 15 (HD 115)

The Austin Variety Show displays national-level Austin talent to audiences both in-and-outside of the Austin area through its television broadcast and through web content and live webcasts. While the show is being broadcast locally, it will also be shopped to cable networks for national broadcast syndication.

Lin Television - Austin, home of KXAN and KNVA-The CW Austin, recently launched KBVO - My Austin TV, in order to provide Austin's digital cable viewers an opportunity to view local programming presented alongside popular national programming. Organizers said the partnership will also give Austin television audiences an opportunity to discover The Austin Variety Show before national cable audiences have the chance later in 2010.

Dillinger*illa Studios are located at 3708 Woodbury Drive, near Congress Avenue and Ben White by Ruta Maya Coffeehouse. Tickets for the monthly show and taping are \$10 for general admission. For more information and tickets, call (512) 773-5697 or visit

www.AustinVarietyShow.com.

Austin360.com

TV Blog - Local Variety

Lin Television's KBVO (My Austin TV) will present a new, locally-produced variety show from the creators of Austin Swim (the live, Adult Swim viewing party formerly held weekly around town).

Dubbed "The Austin Variety Show," the program, taped monthly before a live, South Austin studio audience, features music, comedy, performance artists and live audience games. Local businesses provide audience prizes and giveaways.

"The Austin Variety Show," airing Sundays from 11 p.m.-midnight on Time Warner, Direct TV, U-verse, Grande and Suddenlink, is co-hosted by Austin musician and filmmaker Troy Dillinger and Second City alum Tom Booker. For more information, check out the show's Web site or My Austin TV.

---- Dale Roe

SanFrancisco Examiner

Austin Variety Show strikes gold!

Dillinger*illa Studios is the newest addition to a warehouse area turned entertainment district, down one block from Ruta Maya. The night of Austin Variety's third episode, people in the ticket line were wearing silk nighties, slippers, or plaid flannel pajamas while toting cases of beer. The \$10 admission price - \$8 if you wore p.j.s - covered drinks, hot food, and over two hours of entertainment. The drink and food value alone is getting crowds to the door, but the quality of performers being booked keeps the audience glued to their seats.

The themed Pajama Party kicked-off with Ruby Collins' stand-up act, which was full of raunch and dictionary definitions for things like 'gorilla mask'. Hosts and comedic pros, Troy Dillinger and Tom Booker, transitioned between the performers and funny films with self-deprecating humor and a contagious sense of enthusiasm. They pulled the audience into the mix with The

Mating Game, an unscripted blush-enducing version of popular dating shows.

John Pointer did the unthinkable with a guitar: he played it like a talented musician with his own point of view. Even his few cover songs were so far from regurgitated it took a few lines before some people realized they weren't originals. The mix of reverb, body and foot thumping, beat boxing, and incredible playing were enough to make one think there was a full band on stage. Recognizing such extensive talents might come across as douche-y, Pointer slid humor into the show as well and playfully mocked his own band-standing.

The closing act was burlesque by Goldie Candela, but the highlight of the evening was Tom Booker emulation of Goldie. He tore the pajama top and bottom from his body to the sway of sultry music. Just when the audience thought he would go no further, he went full birthday-suit and ran from the stage in hairy-back glory, bringing tears of laughter to many an eye.

The Austin Variety Show is performed live every month, broadcast in live webcast, and taped for later viewing enjoyment. Visit their website for performance dates, webstream link, and ticketing information.

From NowPlayingAustin.com

Keep Austin Artsy Feature: Austin Variety Show

Ed. Note: Our roving reporter, Ross Scarano interviews Austin Variety Shows co- founder, Troy Dillinger, about the latest hot event to hit the Austin Arts scene, The Austin Variety Show. After attending last months Austin Variety Show, eating amazing food, drinking free drinks and getting some special gifts from "Santa Claus," I was hooked. Not to mention the actual show, packed crowd, amazing entertainment, or feel of connectedness among an audience of strangers. If you haven't been, It comes highly recommended. Its silly fun, but hey, we all need

some of that in our lives.— S. Gidseg

AN INTERVIEW WITH Troy Dillinger

From humble beginnings, the Austin Variety Show has become one of those Austin-specific events that keeps our city unique and, of course, weird. Not only weird – televised, too. As of January 10th, the Austin Variety Show is now a publicly aired event thanks to the good people at KBVO-TV. I spoke with the Variety Show's co-creator and MC Troy Dillinger to get the lowdown on AVS.

Ross Scarano: So what is the Austin Variety Show?

Troy Dillinger: It's a live event that's filmed to be a television show. It's old-style, almost vaudeville, where there's music, comedians, audience participation games, burlesque, free food and drinks – it's a whole night for just ten bucks.

RS: How did it start?

TD: I used to do a live fan event for [Cartoon Network's] Adult Swim. We'd get together with a band, and we'd project Adult Swim on a big screen every Sunday night. We had so much fun that we added a comedian, then we gave away prizes from local businesses, then that turned into a game show – next thing you know people were more interested in the two hours of entertainment before Adult Swim than they were in Adult Swim. So that part got kicked to the curb, and we've just been doing the live event, the variety show.

RS: I'm familiar with Adult Swim, and I don't think I'd be wrong in saying that it has a very specific brand of humor – does the Variety Show have a similar sensibility?

TD: If you like Adult Swim, you'll like what we do, but we lean a little more towards dirty jokes and fart jokes than the you're-not-cool-enough-to-get-this type humor that Adult Swim is known for. We want everybody to get the joke.

RS: How did AVS become a television show?

TD: Well, if anybody was still putting stuff like this on the air, I wouldn't need to do it, but nobody is. I grew up watching things like the variety show on TV, and it was such an amazing experience for me as a kid that putting AVS on the air seemed like the next logical step. You know, we had everything already in place but the cameras.

RS: What can people expect from this Saturday's show?

TD: They can expect the most fun that they've had in quite some time. I know that sounds like a

pretty bold statement, but we'll back it up.

"So much fun!"

Review posted by: Artsfan from austin, Dec 22, 2009

I had the most incredible amount of fun at this event. When we arrived the line was already out the door, and the vibe was extremely upbeat. After enjoying an amazing dinner and some Rose's Salsa (one of my favs) I got a glass of wine (all free, mind you) and then settled in to a wonderful night of entertainment. Dirty Sanatas pre show was hysterical, the performers were really entertaining and the audience was more then excited to be there and participate. Highly Recommended. Dinner/Drinks/Entertainment/Supporting local businesses? Yes please!

"Christmas Fun - Austin style"

Review posted by: Jen from Austin TX, Dec 13, 2009

It was a cold, rainy and foggy night so it was super to see Austin folks turning out in full force to support some homegrown fun. The place was packed with enthusiastic fans, many dressed for the season and enjoying themselves. Brian Gutman, the featured comic had some hilarious bits- the one comparing TV to a library was very funny- my husband loved the one about the smart car. The band of the night was Star*Star a Stones tribute - they sounded great and the lead singer Jonny Burke was definitely channeling his inner Jagger!

University of Texas Daily Texan *July 27, 2009*

[Raunchy show attempts to rekindle the flame of Austin's unique culture](#)

Drunk crowd laps up the obscenity laced music, comedy of 'Variety Show'

Jordan Turk - Daily Texan Staff

Just when you thought Austin was slowly bleeding out its old, unique character, a show of epic insanity designed to "bring back a little bit of what Austin used to be" pulls you out from the depths of coffee shop chains. "The Troy Dillinger Variety Show" owned Saturday night at the U.S. Art Authority, located next to Spider House.

The crowd was drunk before 9 p.m. and ready for a night of hilarity.

Hopping onto the stage, Dillinger, the host for the evening, welcomed the crowd with a smile and a lot of f-bombs.

Dillinger gets a little emotional when he starts talking about the purpose and history of the show. It's his wish to return something unique and something completely Austin back to a city that sometimes seems to be on the brink of forgetting its identity, he said.

Starting off the variety show was the cabaret, punk, Texas-swing style band of "Mistress Stephanie and Her Melodic Cat." Though the style combinations might sound off-putting, in reality, the band was an insane amount of fun to watch, especially the interactions of Mistress Stephanie and her boa-wearing, above-the-knee-boots-stomping, fishnets-and-lace-rocking male counterpart, "Kitty."

After a brief interlude of Onion News Network videos, local comedian Bryan Gutmann was next to the stage. Overall, Gutmann was very funny. However, this view was not shared by the raging drunk in the third row, who cajoled and insulted him up until the very end, ruining what would have otherwise been a pleasant set.

The game-show portion of the variety show involved massive amounts of sex, exploring the spectrum of mere innuendo to full-on orgasms.

From boyfriends eating pizza off of their girlfriends' laps to acting out a scene from a low-budget porno, sex was everywhere, and it was hilarious. For the final round, contestants were told to act out their best fake orgasm. Most of the men, when finished, fell to the floor. "I don't know why all the guys keep dying after they orgasm," Dillinger remarked on stage.

The raunchiest part of the show came when The Bat City Bombshells took to the stage. A local burlesque troop, these women knew how to work a crowd. Those who hadn't seen pasties since Lil Kim at the Video Music Awards circa 1999 got an eye-opening surprise while watching the group perform.

The show was a blast, though those offended or not otherwise entertained by a dose of campy

humor ought to stay home.

Where else in Austin can you find singing cats, comedians, game shows, and burlesque all under one roof?

The next "The Troy Dillinger Variety Show" is on Friday, August 21st at the U.S. Art Authority.