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Chicago's comedy couples

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Dan Abbate and Kelly Williams (Handout photo)

By Julia Borcherts for RedEye
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Every advice columnist we can think of encourages keeping your professional and love lives separate. But what happens when Cupid strikes onstage? With Valentine's Day around the corner, we checked in with the founders-producers from three venerable sketch and improv comedy houses--who happen to also be couples--to find out what happens when your significant other is also your partner in the business of making the rest of us laugh every night.

Dan Abbate and Kelly Williams

Gorilla Tango Theatre, 1919 N. Milwaukee Ave.; gorillatango.com

Together: Since January 2004, when Kelly auditioned as an ensemble member after Dan first established Gorilla Tango. Married since 2008.

Producing comedy together since: 2004

What's the nicest thing about working together?

DAN: I like that we both always know where we are at personally and professionally. This allows me to talk 24 hours a day (beat a dead horse) about whatever is going on. This fact would probably be the part that is least nice about working together for Kelly.

What's your biggest challenge?

KELLY: We see each other all the friggin' time. That's a challenge for certain. When one of us has something different to do, it's always like "Oooh! Goody! Something different! New gossip! New people!"

What's an unexpected event that's happened as a result of your partnership?

KELLY: Our six-month-old little boy--Winston Danger Abbate. He's darn interesting, although not quite unexpected. And he's definitely a direct result of our partnership--ha!

DAN: We broke up. We refer to our dating relationship as first round and second round. First round only lasted about six week--we both were kind of weird around each other for some reason. Then there was a break of about six weeks, then we got back together--resolved the weirdness--and have been happily together ever since.

Tom and Angie McMahon

Chemically Imbalanced Theater, 1420 W. Irving Park Rd.;

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PHOTO: Tom and Angie McMahon

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Mick Napier and Jennifer Estlin

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cicomed.com

Together: Since March 1999, married since January 2004
Producing comedy together since: Founded CIC in 2000

What's your biggest challenge working together?

ANGIE: Not taking the day to bed with us. It is one of the reasons why I needed an Artistic Director that wasn't him so we wouldn't argue about play selection in bed.

TOM: Finding a boundary between giving critical feedback and being a supportive husband. I've learned the hard way that sometime when she asks, "What'd you think of my show?" it really means, give her a hug and say it was greatÔeven though the light transitions were a bit long and the opening monologue was stilted...but I digress.

What's an unexpected event that's happened as a result of your partnership?

ANGIE: Tom and I met taking classes at Second City. The first day of class, first scene of class, we played a game of "Questions"--you can only ask questions to each other. He asked me three different times in three different ways to have sex with him in that scene. For our graduation show we wrote and performed a scene where he asked me to marry him. Now we founded an 11-year-old theater and have two kids. Art imitates life.

TOM: One of the great things about doing improv is that it teaches you how to think on your feet. This is an especially critical skill when you have kids and you are playing Apples to Apples Jr., and the judge is your wife and she always gives it to the kids 'cause of presentation. But, again, I digress.

Mick Napier and Jennifer Estlin

The Annoyance Theatre, 4830 N. Broadway; theannoyance.com

Together: 16 years

Producing comedy together since: 15 years

What's the nicest thing about working together?

JENNIFER: We laugh a lot.

MICK: Having a non-crazy resource to bounce off ideas and reinforce or dismiss ideas or notions. And seeing each other often.

What's an unexpected event that's happened as a result of your partnership?

JENNIFER: We found we had a mutual interest in mentalism, so we researched and learned about it, and now have a mentalism act that we perform. It's a lot of fun--and a little weird.

MICK: The longevity is the most surprising--that we've been able to spend an extreme amount of time with each other. I'll tell you a secret. In my opinion, when a couple can be silent together, and there's truly no silent tension, it just is, that's the mark of a close and secure relationship. We are often so frantic. We can sit and be peaceful.