

# \$20K 'cherry on top' for comedy champ

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Shirley Gnome had no expectations her chequing account would swell by \$20,000 when she began plucking away at her acoustic guitar seven weeks ago for a local comedy contest.

So the comic songstress, who serenaded audiences with galling tales of intimate experiences, was in utter disbelief when the drawn-out tally of ballots at the Rio Theatre finally determined at 1:15 a.m. that she was Patrick Maliha's The People's Champion of Comedy.

"I was just doing it for exposure. I just wanted people to know who I was," Gnome told 24 hours after winning \$20,000 in prize money for her win. "This is really just a giant, unbelievably large cherry on top."

Now the 28-year-old plans on using that cash to finish an album, fund a tour and invest in a new platinum-blond wig to wear on stage beneath her cowgirl hat.

"Because after all these weeks of competition, my hair - not looking so good."

Gnome only began doing comedy last fall and is adamant she still feels like an amateur despite garnering the most votes from audiences during last week's final six shows. But contest organizer Maliha said veteran stand-up comics embraced her like one of their own, noting everyone congratulated the blossoming comedian immediately after she won.

"In the end, Shirley had the perfect combination of likeability, humour, audience appeal, showmanship - she just did really well."

In addition to the cash prize, Gnome also secured the enormous trophy.

"That trophy is so hilarious. It looks like something you would find in your grandma's basement."

Speaking of which, Gnome did not tone down her raunchy act one bit when her grandmother came out to watch her croon. "My family is unconditionally loving. There's lots of things I can do in this world and they'll still stand behind me."

