

Meet the Baron of Bubble, a professional bubble maker who creates car-sized floating art

All the world's a stage for the Baron of Bubble, who creates car-sized floating art.

By Richard Chin Star Tribune

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Larry Ripp is one entertainer whose act is literally good, clean fun.

The St. Paul man makes money blowing soap bubbles.

Over the past 10 years, Ripp, who calls himself Sir Sydney Soapington aka [the Baron of Bubble](#), has been booked as an entertainer for hundreds of festivals, fairs, parades, block parties, weddings, graduations and birthdays.

His novelty act consists of blowing enormous bubbles — sometimes as large as a car — while reciting a Seuss-like, bubble-themed rhyming patter.

Call it his bubble rap.



Like many entertainers, most of Ripp's gigs this year have been canceled because of COVID-19.

But you can still catch him bubble busking outdoors at local parks. After all, if anyone wants to wash their hands, he has gallons of soapy water handy.

"I'm the Baron of Bubble and I come from a land, where the bubbles are many, they float from my hand," Ripp said as he sent a 4-foot-long bubble soaring aloft recently at Minnehaha Park in Minneapolis.

Watching him in action is a bit like seeing a soapy Pied Piper at work.

LEILA NAVIDI, STAR TRIBUNE

Larry Ripp stumbled into his career as "the Baron of Bubble" 10 years ago when he purchased a bubble-making kit for his grandson.

More

Within a minute or two, kids will start gathering, running around to try to catch bubbles or make their own with the assortment of bubble wands that Ripp has on hand.

Dogs will try to bite the bubbles floating by. Adults will take out their cellphones to take a picture. Even jaded teenagers will yelp with delight when a bubble the size of a washing machine threatens to burst in their face.

The ghostly iridescent shapes created by Ripp that float slowly overhead are reminiscent of undersea creatures drifting in a current.

“It’s just magical in this time when it seems like everything is so serious and heavy,” said Christine McKigney, a Minneapolis mom who started laughing when Ripp got her and her daughter to make bubbles. “It’s joyful. You feel like a kid again.”

Man of many trades

Bubble making has been a second career for Ripp, 67. He’s retired from a maintenance job at the University of Minnesota, but he’s also had a lot of experience as a performer.

He used to work in radio as an announcer in Wisconsin. He’s written thousands of radio jingles and commercials.

He’s also been an actor, director and playwright for productions staged at the Minnesota Fringe Festival and Bryant Lake Bowl Cabaret Theater.

He has one movie credit, playing a security guard in [“The Alpha Incident,”](#) a 1978 sci-fi horror movie filmed in Wisconsin involving a microbe from Mars.

“If you fall asleep, your brain begins to expand until it explodes out of your head,” Ripp said of the movie’s plot.

Ripp said he stumbled onto bubble making when he was attending a play festival about 10 years ago in Wisconsin and he was looking for a toy for his grandson.

He came across a bubble making kit called the Bubble Thing that is designed to make giant bubbles.

When he tried it out in the parking lot at the motel where he was staying, people started gathering around to take pictures.

A showbiz light bulb went off in Ripp’s head and the Baron of Bubble was born.

A fleeting art form

There are other soap bubble entertainers in the country. Some even perform in stage acts in Las Vegas or New York.

Rick Gravrok, a former preschool teacher from St. Louis Park, said he’s been blowing bubbles, telling corny dad jokes and selling wands and bubble solution for about three years at outdoor gatherings in the Twin Cities.

But Ripp said when he started his bubble blowing act 10 years ago, “I was in the vanguard. I was in the cutting edge.”

“He has a love for bubbles,” said Stephen “Mr. Fun” Poreda, founder of a Twin Cities entertainment booking agency where you can hire everyone from Santa Claus to stilt walkers. “That’s his focus. It’s a beautiful thing.”

Normally, Ripp said he gets about 90 to 100 gigs a year. He’s performed at events ranging from the Art Shanty Projects to the Church of St. Albert the Great’s ice cream social.

He goes through hundreds of gallons of soapy water a year. For do-it-yourselfers, he hands out cards with the formula he uses for his bubble mix.

The recipe includes warm water, dish soap, glycerin, baking powder and a pinch of J-Lube, a lubricant made for veterinary obstetrics that has also found uses as an ingredient for slime, movie special effects or frat house lube wrestling, according to [the manufacturer’s website](#).

Ripp said despite the pandemic, he’s starting to get jobs again. He recently did a birthday party.

“I’ve been getting some inquiries,” he said. You can reach him at thebubblebaron@yahoo.com.

Even when he doesn’t have a job, Ripp often will blow bubbles, said Vickijoan Keck, an actress and storyteller who is Ripp’s partner and performs with him as “The First Lady of Foam.”

“He calls it fleeting art that floats,” Keck said. “It always bring joy to people.”

“I have an affinity for bubbles,” Ripp said. “I just like looking at it. I never get tired of it.”