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Interview with Kate Clinton

"Outing" and "inning"



BY SANDRA DE HELEN

Kate Clinton is coming to Portland with a brand new show! Her raunchy, though feminist, humor will be a good outing for all of us. Kate discussed "outing" in a telephone interview with Just Out recently.

Kate, what can you tell us about your new material?

I don't know. It's new. What's really on my mind is "outing," do you know about this phenomenon?

We've been exposed to it.

Have you heard of "inning?"

No what's that?

The opposite of "outing." "Inning" is ignoring a performer who is openly lesbian or gay! I have to go around "outing" myself!

What are your thoughts about "outing?"

We have mixed feelings ourselves.

Oh me too. I mean, people who are making profits from the life and blood of gay and lesbian people should be dragged screaming and kicking from the closet, but I think "outing" is driven by a mean spirit. The whole idea violates people's right to privacy, and we as a community are profoundly pro-choice. Outing eliminates that choice. Basically, what we do in our bedrooms — I just hate that phrase — what we do in our kitchens...et cetera.

Where do you think it comes from?

"Outing?" That outrageously funny group ACT UP used humor to push it to the point of exaggeration, which is what humor is, of course. But I think it originally grew out of frustration about AIDS. It speaks to our desperation. The undealt with and denied cultural grief of the AIDS epidemic. We engage in gay bashing while his holiness George Bush gathers statistics. "Outing" is horizontal hostility, frustration turned on ourselves.

And have you noticed the gender bias? Here I go again, but at the root of homophobia is sexism. If you can objectify a woman, you can objectify anyone you want. "Outing" a lesbian is treated as "ho hum" by the media. "Out" a gay male and it's news. And "outing" stops all political analysis. Does anyone stop to question the thing with Malcomb Forbes and all that power?

Where will it all stop?

One thing I've learned after I realized I am a control queen is that I can't predict. Who would have ever thought "outing?" But I'm an optimist.

How so?

There is a good side to "outing." It's "don't 'out' me, I'll 'out' myself." I just read the New York Times and saw five articles about gays and lesbians. Five! We're getting visibility. We're in the culture; there's no going back, thanks to people like Gerald. (I never thought I would say that!) It's 20 years after Stonewall. The older established gay political machine has been through Stonewall, Anita Bryant, has become heads of organizations, seen us through slow painful legislative work. Massachusetts just passed a gay rights ordinance that was 17 years in the works! And ACT UP happened — I'm thrilled to see their anger!

Are there other current events you'd like to speak to? For instance, the Barbara Bush/Wellesley College thing?

I'm an ex-teacher. Spring is always a time of student riots. Both the Wellesley thing and the Mills College decision to go co-ed are being treated the same in the media: hysterical girls! All this backlash. Young women not being given the respect of an opinion. I'm thrilled that there are opinions on campus! You know, Barbara Bush is being very gracious about the whole thing [the young women of Wellesley are protesting the choice of Barbara Bush as the commencement speaker because they feel she was chosen for her role as the president's wife rather than on her own merits, and are requesting a woman of their own choice] ... I've volunteered to be the speaker, but I'm still waiting to hear from them!

Is there anything you can tell us about your new material that we will be seeing on June 8.

The themes are about the same: Catholic Church, feminism. I'm talking about getting older, although we're not supposed to. I'm going back to my deeply feminist roots. All the changes that have taken place in the world, it's still white guys in ties. I do believe we've made forward motion. I'm getting extremely impatient, but am now more accepting. I was very conservative in college, and now I guess I'm getting old enough to be the radical one. Right now I'm on a tear about Madonna and her "Hanky Panky" ... she went on Arsenio Hall and said 'It's about the good kind, the kind women like.' I'm on a tear. Am I talking too much?

It's okay, this is an interview.

Right. Well, just tell everyone I'm happy to be coming back to the Pacific Northwest — I love Portland!

And we love you too, Kate. ▼