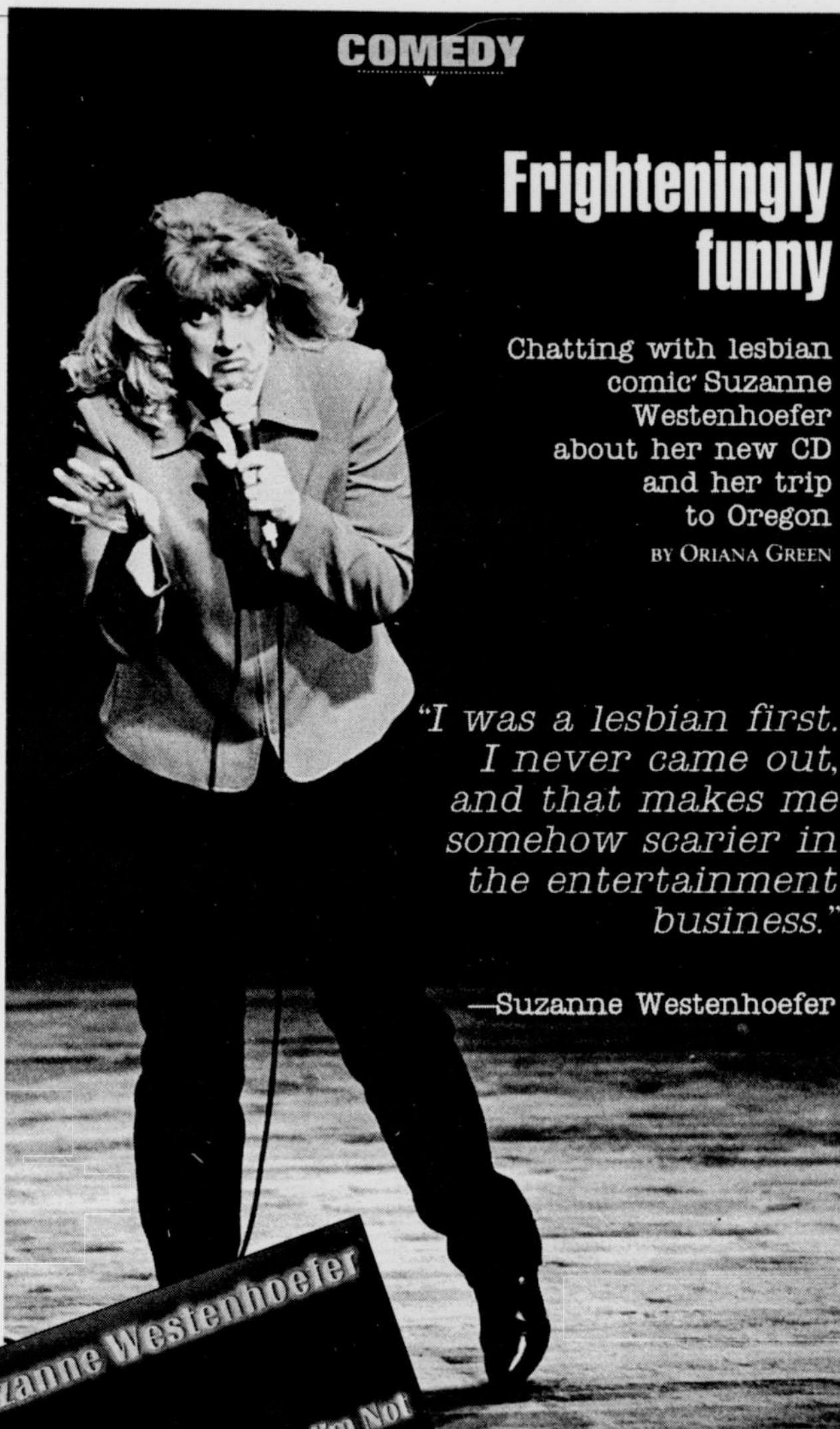


COMEDY

Frighteningly funny

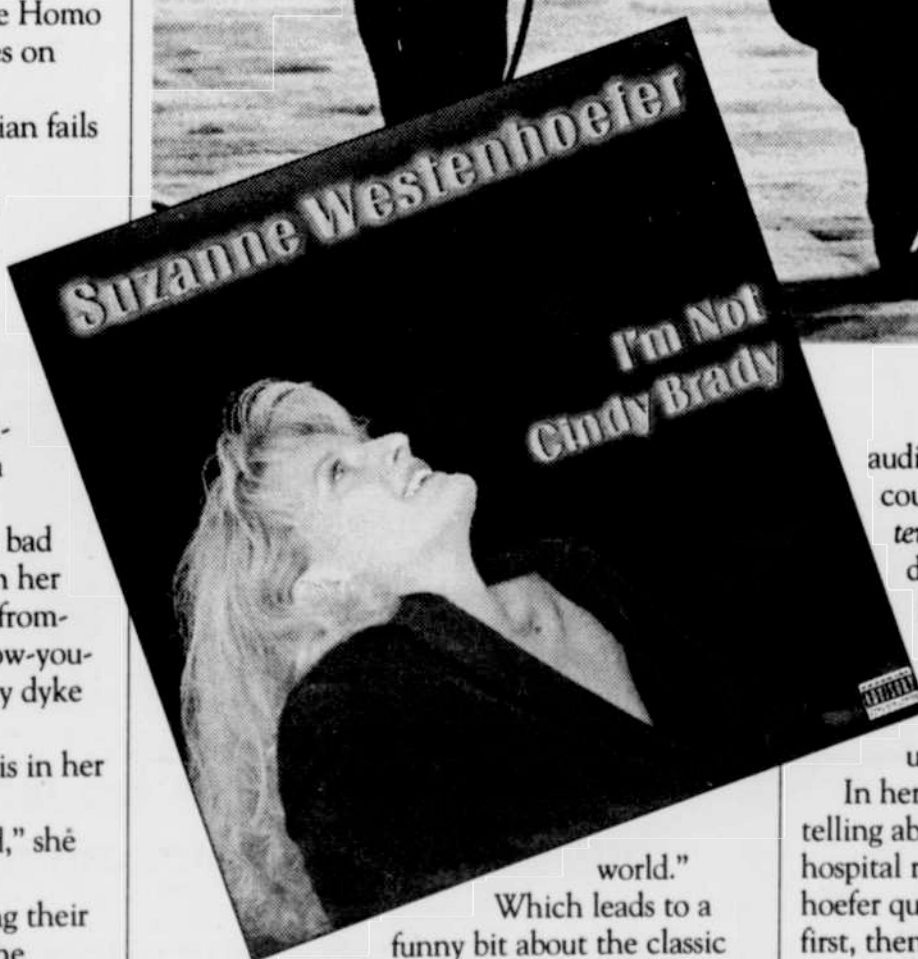
Chatting with lesbian comic Suzanne Westenhofer about her new CD and her trip to Oregon

BY ORIANA GREEN



"I was a lesbian first. I never came out, and that makes me somehow scarier in the entertainment business."

—Suzanne Westenhofer



world." Which leads to a funny bit about the classic conflict over where the animals sleep at night—in bed with them or not. In the inspired finale of the CD, the comic takes us under the blanket with her where she is busy pleasuring her honey when one of the cats turns up there too.

When I suggest that Annie must be a world-class good sport, Westenhofer says that's not it.

"She really feels OK about who she is in the world," the suddenly serious funny girl explains.

And about that surgery—comedic vocabulary comes full circle in the body of Suzanne Westenhofer. Though she may well induce hysterics—fits of uncontrolled laughter—in her

audience, that she can do so while discarding on the subject of her recent hysterectomy is the mark of a skilled comedian. The irony is that both words come from *hysteria*, Greek for womb, and that *hysteria* derives from the ancient notion that women were hysterical—that is, emotionally unhinged—more often than men.

In her act, Westenhofer has a gay old time telling about the woman who arrived in her hospital room to shave her for surgery. Westenhofer quips that she'd kinda like a cocktail first, then asks the aide if this approach has worked with other women. What follows is indeed a hysterical riff on the follies of pubic shaving.

On the road for 100 club dates a year, Westenhofer hasn't had too many problems as an out comic, though she does refer to a recent trio of stops in Boise, Idaho; Wichita, Kans.; and Fayetteville, Ark., as "the militia tour."

On her CD she trumps Pat Robertson's claim that all the recent natural disasters in Florida are a result of Gay Days at Disney World. OK, fine, she says, "Don't fuck with us—we'll ruin Kansas! We have the power!" Her material is constantly evolving.

"I do an entirely new show every 12 to 16 months," she says, explaining that her shows in

Oregon will include pieces from her new CD and other fresh material.

Westenhofer has a strong connection to Portland, since her agent, local lesbian Tam Martin, is based here. Following her heart and a woman, Martin moved her Beachfront Productions up here from Long Beach, Calif., eight years ago.

Always out since she began performing in 1990, Westenhofer doesn't think of herself as a comic who's gay, but as a lesbian comic.

"I chose to make that part of what I'm doing," she says, adding that she does think it has slowed down her acting career.

Part of that she attributes to narrow thinking in Hollywood: "We already have a blonde lesbian comic"—pause, aside: "Bitch thinks she invented it."

Westenhofer is taking acting classes and working on writing and developing her own sitcom. Does she want to play Suzanne, gay girl comic?

"No, I'll be Suzanne, the femmy dyke bartender, which is what I used to do at Hoolihan's in Secaucus, New Jersey," she explains, figuring that setup will offer more comic possibilities.

She does go out on lots of auditions, just like every other wannabe actress in Hollywood, but she finds so many lesbian roles are stereotyped. Her real fantasy? "I want Letterman's job," she says without hesitation.

Which is ironic, since she can't even get on his show. Even though Westenhofer has had her own HBO special and appeared on plenty of other shows, David Letterman and Jay Leno resist an out gay comic. "We don't use theme comics," Dave's people tell her.

"I was a lesbian first; I never came out, and that makes me somehow scarier in the entertainment business," Westenhofer asserts. "We are way more fascinated with people who might be gay or who have come out."

Another irony is how she looks. She's certainly not an in-your-face, buzz-cut butch in boots. She could, in fact, pass for hetero in any role.

Finally, I get up my nerve to ask this brash babe a pointed question. One day recently, when Westenhofer's new glam photos arrived in the *Just Out* offices, many staffers were convinced she'd gone under the knife in pursuit of a finer face. Blaming it all on the most adamant staff member, News Editor Inga Sorensen, I asked Westenhofer if she'd had some work done. She was so astonished at the question that she called out to Annie to share the question with her.

After a hearty laugh, Westenhofer replied: "First of all, I'm way too young to have plastic surgery. Besides, I'm so not OK about pain."

When I mentioned that Sorensen is herself an attractive femme with long blonde tresses, Westenhofer figured out the truth of the matter: "Tell your news editor she's a jealous fuck! I'm gonna kick her ass when I get out to Portland!"

So, Inga, you might not want to sit in the front row—Suzanne Westenhofer is definitely not Cindy Brady.

■ SUZANNE WESTENHOEFER performs *I'm Not Cindy Brady* at 8 p.m. April 7 at the Aladdin Theater in Portland, then heads to Eugene on April 8 to perform at the Wild Duck. Tickets cost \$18 in advance or \$20 at the door; they're available from *It's My Pleasure* and TicketMaster in Portland, *Mother Kali's* and *Fastixx* in Eugene.

ORIANA GREEN would love to see Westenhofer 20 feet tall on the silver screen and is inspired to write a screenplay for her. She is also the Entertainment Editor of *Just Out* and can be reached at oriana@justout.com.

Anyone who can make her recent hysterectomy funny can probably find humor anywhere. Judging from her new CD, *I'm Not Cindy Brady*, Suzanne Westenhofer finds humor all over the country.

On April 7, she'll bring her show of the same name to the Aladdin Theater in Portland as a fund-raiser for Equity Foundation. Then, on April 8, she heads down to Eugene, which she mentions on her recording as the place where she was once accosted by a posse of lesbians who had heard she'd gone straight.

"I'm like, 'Ooooooh!'" she says with a sneer.

So not true! The only thing bi about her is that she's "mid-bi-coastal," living in Los Angeles most of the year and spending summers and holidays with Annie, her girlfriend of seven years, in—of all places—Columbus, Ohio.

When I imply that this sounds like an off-the-queer-beaten-path place to land, Westenhofer is quick to defend her second home. She points out that there are 2 million people in Columbus and 25 gay bars and restaurants—"yet it's still very homey"—though she's unable to identify how her time in Ohio has affected her act.

One obvious way is that her very down-to-the-earth-of-middle-America partner grounds her and is fodder for her routines. On her new recording, Westenhofer talks about how different she is from Annie: "I'm a little hyper, and my girlfriend has two speeds—on, off. That's it.... She's so slow you can't follow her upstairs, 'cause you'll just fall right back down."

And though she says Annie doesn't like it when she talks about the butch-femme aspects of their life, Westenhofer is sure of her own identity: "I'm so femme, I'm fag—crossed right over!"

As evidence of her partner's many butch traits, Westenhofer trips on Annie's love of Home Depot: "They ought to call it the Homo Depot—any Sunday afternoon it's dykes on ice."

No surprise, the superfemme comedian fails to see the appeal.

"I'm like a 6-year-old in the bank at Home Depot," she jokes.

Then she expands on Annie's handiness: "My girlfriend believes there's no problem on the planet that can't be solved with a little duct tape."

However, Westenhofer has no trouble understanding the appeal of Martha Stewart.

"I think she's freakin' hot—I have a bad case on Martha Stewart," she reveals on her CD. "I think she's a great big tramp-in-from-the-garden-with-her-boots-still-on, throw-you-across-the-bed, make-you-call-her-daddy dyke top."

When asked how much truth there is in her stories, Westenhofer says plenty.

"To my girlfriend, it's all exaggerated," she says. "To me, it's all true."

Does Annie ever get ticked at having their life dished out in comedy clubs across the nation? Every once in a while, Westenhofer says, something potentially embarrassing will happen and Annie will decree absolutely: "Do not use that onstage."

Imp that she is, Westenhofer admits that "half the time I still have to use it, because it's going to be brilliant."

A perfect example of that rebelliousness is the last cut on the CD, which revolves around their menagerie.

"We have animals, of course, because we're lesbians," she explains, though she makes it clear that the two cats and two dogs are really all Annie's.

A careful observer, Westenhofer jokes that "cats are the little bulimics of the animal