

PEOPLE

Margaret Cho wants us to empower ourselves. At the conclusion of her previous show, *The Notorious C.H.O.*, the comedian said, "To have self-esteem is an act of revolution, and our revolution is long overdue." Now the tough, sarcastic, no-nonsense 34-year-old is returning to Portland on March 13 to lead the insurgency with her new show, *The Revolution Tour*, which thematically picks up where the last one left off.

Revolution is "a bunch of jokes about how we need to become a united front against all the bullshit in the world," Cho explains. "It is me running my mouth about all the political crap that's going on—how the country is ignoring issues of gays, women, health care. Everything we need to deal with that is being ignored or is being put in second place in favor of a war that the government thinks we need."

Them's fightin' words. But, to put it mildly, her humor has always been political. She cites her earliest influence as Richard Pryor, whose work addressed racism with fire-breathing intensity—a theme that Cho, as a Korean American, often turns to.

She's also taken on Pryor's style, which she calls "self-incriminating disclosure...tragedy turned into humor. Storytelling that is not supposed to be funny but is terribly funny because of the way it is told."

By now, Cho's story has been well told. While still a teen-ager, she won a comedy contest in which the prize was to tour as Jerry Seinfeld's opening act. ("The two tools that helped me the most," she says, "were having no fear of rejection and having a totally undeserved confidence.") By her early 20s she was a top draw at comedy clubs and college campuses, where her ethnic heritage and her relationship with very traditional parents were the cornerstone of the act.

In 1994 Cho was signed by ABC to star in *All-American Girl*, a situation comedy in which she would play a version of herself: a young, single Asian American. But the show was a personal disaster from start to early demise, and she descended into a pit of alcoholism and drug abuse.

Her second coming began in 1999 when she turned the humiliating experience into a confessional off-Broadway smash called *I'm the One That I Want*, which went on to become a sold-out tour, a best-selling book and a comedy film that was a hit at festivals.

Recently, the relentlessly single Cho announced she is getting married to a sculptor, painter and performance artist who is active in the Cacophony Society, a loosely structured network of artists who band together to create guerrilla theater and pranks. (A local "lodge" is active in Portland.)

There's no business like Cho business

Just Out chats with everybody's favorite fag hag about her new show and upcoming nuptials

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Never having thought she'd marry, Cho describes herself as "functionally celibate but emotionally promiscuous" and explains reaching 30 was a turning point. "That's like the last frontier. You go through all the explorations, but then you turn 30, and you get to the scariest thing, which is intimacy. It's not about sex anymore but about being dangerously close to someone."

Such private revelations are typical for Cho, whose work, like the best comics, is intensely honest. "It's just me being mean about people," she claims—something that came from "a lifetime of talking shit about other people."

She describes her material as "hindsight that reveals weakness and human faults without judgment." Perhaps it's this lack of judgment that attracts gay and lesbian audiences. As a minority herself, she validates our lives simply by talking about them in perfect, deadpan delivery.

Cho, who reveals some scant bisexual experiences in previous shows, grew up in San Francisco, where she was surrounded by queers. "Even before we understood what gay was," she says, "I always had little boy friends who were not my boyfriends. I used to hang around with tomboy girls—the lacrosse girls, who didn't figure out they were lezzies until much later."

Her parents owned a bookstore on Polk Street in the heart of the Castro district. "There were all these gay men working there, and they saw this thing in me that they wanted to nurture," she says. Gay men taught her "style, life and how to be confident." She says she learned "how to be a woman from these men."

In her acts, she talks about empowered and strong gays (who can forget "Crouching Drag Queen, Hidden Faggot" from *Notorious?*), and she is very sympathetic to the queer movement. "I consider myself part of the core community...we need to have our voices out there because we don't," she asserts. "There still isn't equality in many areas that I want to see it. Like domestic partnership is a lie that corporate America has put over on us. But we are so hungry for any kind of change, we are willing to accept things like that."

Cho recognizes similarities in different minority groups. "To be a minority in America," she continues, "feels like dying a death of a thousand paper cuts.... Each of them individually doesn't bother us, but the cumulative effect is very damaging."

Her solution is "to look deeper and look into what these things mean to us. But you can't just make a speech. It has to be funny," she says, "or else it's boring. I'm looking for people to listen and admit that it's funny."

Revolutions aren't generally in it for laughs, but Cho's *Revolution*, like all of her work, promises to be. **JO**

MARGARET CHO brings *The Revolution Tour to Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall at 7:30 p.m. March 13. Tickets are \$29.50-\$39.50 from Ticketmaster.*

FLOYD SKLAVER is a Portland free-lance writer.

Revolutionary Korean-American, fag-hag, shit-starter, girl-comic, trash-talker Margaret Cho storms into town March 13



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