

Suzanne is back in town

Groundbreaking lesbian comic tells all...and then some

BY KATHY BELGE

Suzanne Westenhoefer is a groundbreaker. She is the first comic to do openly lesbian material on Comedy Central, *Evening at the Improv* and *Caroline's Comedy Hour* and to have her own HBO special. Last month she took the out-and-loud act to David Letterman's stage.

Her 2001 show in Portland sold out, and it's no surprise why. She's really funny—probably the funniest comic I've ever seen.

But somehow, our interview turned to some pretty deep, heavy topics.

Kathy Belge: Tell me all about Letterman.

Suzanne Westenhoefer: It was amazing.... It was more work to do that five-minute stint than it is to do four months of shows.

KB: How so?

SW: I do a 90-minute show. And I've probably done seven different ones over the course of about 10 years. I had to go through all that material and try to find sort of a mainstreamy lesbian.... I was allowed to be out. I wasn't going to be on if I wasn't allowed to be out.

KB: So how'd you choose the material?

SW: The hardest part was, how are we going to start? ...Because you can't come out and say, "I'm a lesbian. My dog...." So it was really tricky. Finally, the guy who hires the comics, he and I just came upon it.

If you've ever seen me, you know that a whole lot of what I do is about Annie and I. So why not just go out as if I were a girl in a 10 1/2-year relationship, which I am, and talk like I would at any show? We had a lot of stuff like, is she going to say "dyke"? But in the end, the Letterman people let me do it, and I'm just really excited because, no matter what, we're not going to go back now. That's one little door broken down, and that's all that matters.

KB: You were the first out lesbian act on Letterman?

SW: They never had a gay guy either.

KB: So, were you disappointed that Dave wasn't there and there was a guest host?

SW: For me it was better

because I never had to focus on him. I didn't have to worry, "What was Dave thinking?" Because he's notorious for being standoffish. So maybe for us it worked.

KB: You've said before that your dream job would be to have Letterman's job. So he wasn't there, how tempting was it to....

SW: I did it! I sat in the chair and was like, "Meryl Streep, so, your latest movie...." I would bring Martina on all week.

KB: Has it opened any new doors?

SW: It's kind of hard to gauge that. And, of

course, we went to war right after—24 hours later. It's hard to be all excited.

What's interesting is the first big thing that ever happened to me—I had only been doing standup about five or six months, and I got asked to be on the *Sally Jessy Raphael* show in January of 1991. "Lesbians Who Don't Look Like Lesbians." ...She introduced me as a lesbian standup comedian.... They started contacting her to find me. It was just like off the charts. And, literally, we went to war with Saddam Hussein like 24 hours later. We attacked Iraq. Isn't that bizarre? Two of the big milestones of my career, and a Bush goes into Iraq and attacks. There's something creepy about it.

KB: Last time you were here in Portland was right after 9/11; now we're at war. How does this change your act?

SW: I don't think it does because I'm not political. I myself am political, extremely, and I'm an activist, but my standup is so, you and me, let's talk about my girlfriend.... I don't base my act on MSNBC.

Do Suzanne Westenhoefer's shows cause military conflict? The dyke diva is in Portland on April 25 and Eugene on April 26.



KB: You say you're politically active. With what?

SW: I have always been an activist. I started out starting a gay group on my campus.... God that was hard! ...A small college in northwestern Pennsylvania called Clarion. We got picketed. The Christians went nuts. I got gay-bashed.... It was crazy.

KB: When was that?

SW: 1982. Then AIDS came, and I moved to New York, and I marched with ACT UP. I marched in the first Queer Nation march when they split up from ACT UP. I've always been a very vocal and financial supporter of Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice organizations.

KB: Why Planned Parenthood, as a lesbian?

SW: The biggest reason is that I got pregnant when I was 16, and I aborted a child. I know what it feels like to be poor, pregnant and 16 and scared. Had I known about Planned Parenthood and gotten the pill, it wouldn't have even had to happen.

I also think the abortion issue is a class issue and a race issue because rich white women will always be able to get abortions.... I really like an organization that's so pro-woman, too. I'm a lesbian girl, and I'm not going to get pregnant. I don't even have a uterus anymore, but it's such a female issue—to be able to control whether or not you want to bring children into the world.

KB: OK, let's change the topic here.

SW: This is so funny, isn't it? We're cutting into all these intense, heavy topics. So much for the comedy interview.

KB: Do you still love your job?

SW: I love my job! You have no idea. I have the greatest job in the world.... Look at what I get to do for a living. I go around, I make people laugh, I get paid. Yo!

KB: What do you do for fun when you're not working?

SW: *New York Times* crossword puzzle in ink, including the Sunday, thank you. It's my obsession. I do yoga.... And I annoy my girlfriend...10 1/2 years and I still annoy her. [J]

SUZANNE WESTENHOEFER promises not to annoy you unless you heckle her. She appears 8 p.m. April 25 at Portland's Aladdin Theater, 3017 S.E. Milwaukie Ave. Tickets are \$25 from the box office, *It's My Pleasure* or Ticketmaster. She travels to Eugene for an 8 p.m. show April 26 at the Hult Center, 1 Eugene Center. Tickets are \$25 from the box office or 541-682-5000.

KATHY BELGE is a Portland free-lance writer.



Triangle
Recreation
Camp

www.camptrc.org

NOW OPEN!

40 ACRES
OF MOUNTAIN
CAMPING FOR
GAY AND LESBIAN
MEMBERS ONLY.

Located one hour
north of Seattle on a
National Scenic Byway
in the beautiful
Cascade Mountains.

Limited membership
\$15 per night

Regular membership
\$150 per year
(unlimited camping)



It's My Pleasure
Sexy Gifts - Exciting Ideas
and Unique Apparatus

Corner of Sandy Blvd. & NE 64th
3106 NE 64th Portland, OR 97213
503-280-8080



TransFamilies

For the Family & Friends of Transgender People
Saturday, April 26, 1pm

Meets at First Congregational United Church of Christ
1126 SW Park Ave., Across from the Art Museum, 503-228-7219

HELP US SPREAD THE WORD!

TransFamilies is not affiliated with any other organization

OUT DANCING

Learn
to
Dance

503-236-5129



Cha Cha

Rumba

Country

Swing

Waltz

Foxtrot