

PEOPLE

Stand up for America

Margaret Cho's new act evolves with every political twist and turn

BY FLOYD SKLAVER

Criticism is nothing new to Margaret Cho. Last May during a corporate event in San Diego, her microphone was turned off, and she was pushed off the stage after 10 minutes of saying things like "I was glad to see [Defense Secretary Donald] Rumsfeld at Abu Ghraib prison, and then I realized he was not being incarcerated."

Two months later, while preparing to headline an event sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign (and 10 other queer groups) during the Democratic National Convention, Cho was uninvited to avoid "a potential media firestorm."

Such review only gives the fiery comedian a determination to keep it up. In her widely read blog, she calls herself "flak-jacketed and indestructible" and "impervious to criticism." The controversies also figure prominently in her new show, *State of Emergency*.

Somewhat different from Cho's other routines, *Emergency* will change as events happen right up to the election. "It's a raw interpretation of what's happening daily in our ever-evolving or devolving state of the union," she explains.

The show is touring many of the swing states this fall to coincide with the upcoming presidential election; it reaches Portland on Sept. 23.

Just Out spoke with Margaret Cho recently about her *State of Emergency*.

Floyd Sklaver: What happened at the HRC fund-raiser?

Margaret Cho: It was a weird atmosphere of caution being spread out by the Democratic Party. Everyone wanted to be very sure of what was going to happen and be safe. That really excluded me because part of what I do is bring the unpredictable factor, the wild card, and they didn't want to have that.

FS: Will it be included in your act?

MC: That's what's great about doing standup. I have the platform to talk about what I like to talk about and not worry about being censored.

FS: How often do you blog?

MC: I try to do it at least three or four times a week. I'm writing a book now, so I'm putting more time into that.... It's a humor book but also a criticism of the breakdown of the past year in politics.

FS: What topics elicit the most response?

MC: People always want to tell you that they disagree with you. Today I blogged about [the conspiracy theory that a jet didn't actually crash into the Pentagon] and how there's something wrong with our nation if we believe a theory that's so farfetched. But we are living in a state of emergency, so that's inevitable.



Margaret Cho declares a *State of Emergency* Sept. 23 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall

FS: What happened to your wedding plans?

MC: I've been married for a little over a year [to Los Angeles artist Al Ridenour]. I'm very happy. I love being married. It's a wonderful thing, [and] that's why everybody should be able to do it. Freedom to marry is a very big topic that I go into. I think it's the most important thing we're facing as a nation.... It's about acceptance, viability and accountability of our government to follow the Constitution. It's about embracing social change when it's so overdue. This is a natural and important step toward realizing the dream of our nation.

FS: Have you noticed that other minority communities don't embrace our struggle as a civil rights issue? What can we do to bring us all together?

MC: It's frustrating, and it certainly exists within other minority communities, including the Asian and Latin community. They are resistant to gay rights being as much a civil rights issue as their own civil rights struggle.

I think younger people who are politically active feel that the movements are linked, but there's a strange kind of repression superiority complex. Like we're the most oppressed so we should obtain the most rights. There is no value put on oppression because it's all terrible. Sorrow can't be measured by sadness.

FS: Where would you like your career to go in the next five years?

MC: I'd certainly like to do more political work, things that are more advancing of the cause of democracy or freedom for everybody—that are more close to the ideal of being an American.... I'd like to be of help to our society. That would be satisfying to me. 

MARGARET CHO presents *State of Emergency* 8 p.m. Sept. 23 at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, 1037 S.W. Broadway. Tickets are \$29.50-\$39.50 from Ticketmaster.

FLOYD SKLAVER is a Portland free-lance journalist.

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