

culture

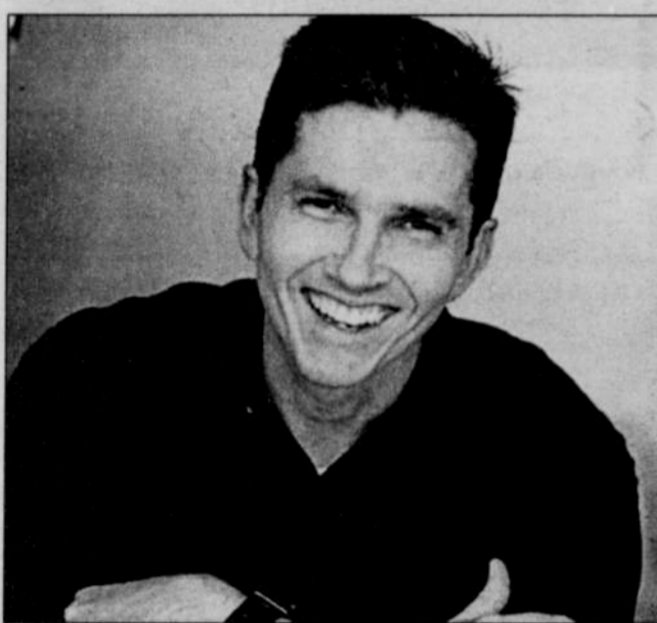
# Grin and Bear It

DVD spotlights standup routines; gay comedy show puts the "sketch" in sketchy

## Laughing Matters: The Men

The Logo network has been a mixed blessing for queer culture mavens. For every successful show (say, *First Comes Love*) there's been a corresponding dud (say, *Noah's Arc*, mercifully canceled). And the fact that Logo famously censors words like "fuck" and "shit" tends to make the network seem a bit less revolutionary than it would have us think. Logo seems to function best in the reality and standup comedy shows. *Laughing Matters: The Men*, available Feb. 19 on DVD, is a good example of the latter.

The show combines typical standup routines by six comics with informal chats. Some of the guys, like



Bob Smith riffs on "total bottoms" in *Laughing Matters: The Men*.

Bruce Vilanch, are familiar faces; others, like Scott Kennedy, are rising talents. Alec Mapa works some of the same identity politics as Margaret Cho, although he doesn't rise to her heights. He does get in some sharp digs at President Bush in an amusing flight of fancy involving a coked-up Dubya on a "cleaning binge" after Hurricane Katrina. Bush also gets righteously slammed by the promising Andre Kelley.

Perhaps the standout in the group is Bob Smith, who's at his satirical best in this hilarious riff: "I'm a total bottom." That doesn't sound sexy. It sounds like a disability [or] like a gay breakfast cereal. 'Every morning I have a big bowl of Total Bottom. It gives me all the vitamins and minerals I need to keep my legs up in the air all night long.'"

Some of the most fascinating material here comes after the stage show. While hostess Honey Labrador is overly earnest in framing her questions, the boys field them with panache as they discuss their lives, their coming out and their thoughts on contemporary culture and their careers as gay comics. In clear evidence of how far we've come in gaining acceptance, Kennedy and Kelley both say they play mostly straight clubs, starting with non-gay material and then coming out, with apparently no problem. Smith shines in these interview segments, sardonically undermining the host's pompous affirmational style with deadpan declarations like "I just want to say that being gay is a sad and lonely life." That's the kind of statement, so

damaging in another time and context, we can now afford to laugh at.

—Gary Morris

## The Big Gay Sketch Show

Anything goes in the second season of *The Big Gay Sketch Show* on Logo.

Liza Minnelli acquires superpowers by swilling dirty martinis and slurring diva battle cries as she protects queens from homophobic thugs.

In a spoof of the 1980s soap opera *Dynasty*, archenemies Krystle and Alexis make out in an inflatable swimming pool after a knock-down, drag-out catfight.

A man in drag plays Maya Angelou, bringing statuesque dignity to narrations of "men seeking men" ads from Craig's List. At a mail delivery joint, gay and straight characters get their rocks off while watching a lusty Latino man process their packages.

Most of these sketches appear in the consistently funny season opener, which airs Feb. 5. If the second episode, scheduled for Feb. 12, is any indication, viewers are in for a bumpy ride for the rest of the season.

Executive producer Rosie O'Donnell watches each episode from a balcony, a playful dyke twist on the crotchety critics on *The Muppet Show*. As the lowbrow fun of the season premiere gives way to the painfully unfunny second installment, you can't help



*The Big Gay Sketch Show* kicks off its second season Feb. 5 on Logo.

but deduce that O'Donnell doesn't have the world's greatest eye for investments. First *Taboo*—her failed stage venture with Boy George—and now an uneven gay knockoff of *Saturday Night Live* and *Mad TV*.

The second episode hits its low point with the final sketch, an endless parody of May-December relationships in which David Furnish and Catherine Zeta-Jones vomit excessively when they contemplate the aging body parts of their partners, Elton John and Michael Douglas. Like other sketches in this episode—including a sendup of closeted Republicans—it's written at a third-grade level. It's too stupid to be insulting and too dull to be a guilty pleasure.

A few of the cast members are terrific, especially Kate McKinnon and Coleman Domingo. But they'll be looking for work before long, unless the show's creators can figure out how to sustain inspired silliness for more than one episode.

—Stephen Blair 10

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