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COMEDY

Born Funny

Dana Goldberg baptizes PDX with tears of laughter

BY ERIN ROOK



Dana Goldberg is sort of, well, funny. But don't hold it against her, she was born that way. Finding and relating the humor in everyday life is as much a part of Goldberg's DNA as is being a lesbian or being Jewish.

"My kindergarten teacher told my mother I was the funniest 5-year-old she had ever met," says the New Mexico native.

As she got older, the audiences just got larger. Goldberg made her stand-up debut as a high school senior with a 10-minute set at the school talent show. It was also so natural, she found herself working the crowd before she began.

"Let's hear it for the emcee!" she remembers telling the audience. "I didn't even know who the emcee was."

After high school, Goldberg set aside dreams of comic stardom for what seemed like more practical ambitions—a degree in physical education and a career as a P.E. teacher.

But eventually, the desire to do comedy nagged at her once more and she decided to give it three years. If she didn't make it in comedy by the time she turned 30, she would relegate it to the category of pipe dreams. A wealth of material combined with a unique skill relating to all kinds of audiences put Goldberg on good footing, and she made it.

"I was raised by a Jewish mother in a single-parent household in which two out of three kids are gay," Goldberg says. Fortunately for Goldberg, her family is okay with the fact that so much of her comedy is drawn from their interactions.

In one variation on a recurring joke, Goldberg, 34, tells the story of how her mother knew she was gay. Her mother looks at the receipt after going to the grocery and sees "homo milk." Suddenly, she understands why two of her children are gay, but the third is not: She's lactose intolerant. Goldberg follows up with, "[It] turns out, that's the only thing my sister won't swallow."

After a successful first performance in front of some 700 lesbians (at 2002's Lesbians for Change comedy showcase), there was nothing stopping Goldberg.

"I killed it," she recalls. "I could literally see my heart beating through my shirt. I didn't want to touch the mic because I was afraid I'd turn it into an amplifying vibrator."

Before long, Goldberg was performing for Olivia cruise audiences, appearing on Logo and named one of the top five funniest lesbians by *Curve* magazine. Her talents, coupled with her passion for nonprofit work, have even landed her on stage between Barack Obama and Lady Gaga.

Goldberg was invited to provide comic in-

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terludes between speakers and performers at the 13th Annual Human Rights Campaign National Dinner in October 2009, a gig that put her on the same bill not only as the president and the pop diva, but also with Jane Lynch and the cast of *Glee*, Kathy Griffin, Portia de Rossi and Kathy Najimy.

But she's not letting any of it go to her head. When Goldberg's not earning her keep behind the mic, she lends her ability to elicit laughter to a wide range of charitable causes, especially those involving HIV/AIDS or LGBT rights work.

Goldberg co-produces the Southwest FunnyFest in Albuquerque, a comedy fundraiser for New Mexico AIDS Services that marked its fourth year in 2010 and has raised more than \$10,000. She says she chose recipients such as NMAS because it played a vital role in her early career.

"It's important to me to give back to the communities that support me," Goldberg says.

She also lends considerable support to the Human Rights Campaign—helping to raise more than \$200,000 during performances and live auctions in Seattle, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, Austin and Palm Springs—and plans to tour with the HRC again in 2011.

But it's Portland that gets Goldberg early this year. Aside from small local shows in her new home base of Los Angeles, Goldberg's Portland performance marks her first major date of 2011, as well as her first ever in Stumptown. New year. New city. New funny. ☐

Belinda Carroll Comedy Presents: A NIGHT WITH DANA GOLDBERG; Jan. 22, 8-11:30 p.m.; The Hawthorne Theatre, 3862 SE Hawthorne Blvd.; \$12 advance, \$15 door; danagoldberg.com.