



JENNIE BAKER PHOTOGRAPHY

It's ... it's, Courtenay Hameister!

The host of Portland's own Live Wire! Radio talks the ugly business of comedy, stagefright and mental health — with a nod to the familiar freak inside us all

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

Courtenay Hameister has a great job. It just scares her a little. Most of us know her as the host, head writer and associate producer Live Wire! Radio, on OPB radio Saturday nights. But Hameister is also a prolific essayist, writing humorous pieces for specific events or on random, but important observations, and she is perpetually working on compiling her essays and musings into a book. She helped write the successful and quirky "Road House the Play," with creator Shelley McClendon, and created, with Marc Acito, the reading series "True Stories." She has written and produced short films through the film collective Cinema Syndicate, and is a regular on the podcast Cort and Fatboy podcast, on which, she admits, she ends up talking about sex a lot.

See? Great job. And to listen to her, this font seems to flow effortlessly. Which, of course, is simply the polished veneer of a seasoned professional.

Writing, for Hameister, is a kicking and screaming process, she says, and the creativity always needs to be fed. A typical meal is a combination of collaboration, deadlines and a morbid fear of being figuratively naked in front of 400 audience members come Saturday night, when Live Wire! comes to life.

J.Z.: *Speaking about being in front of 400 people naked, I've read about your stage fright. You still struggle with that?*

C.H.: Oh yeah — absolutely.

J.Z.: *Is that a symptom of your craft, as a comedian, or are you just sadistic for pursuing a profession on stage?*

C.H.: It is a little oddly sadistic. The majority of the people that I know who are comedians have a little bit of a self-hating side. I led a panel with (comedian, author and filmmaker) Paul Provenza at Wordstock. And I agree with him when he said

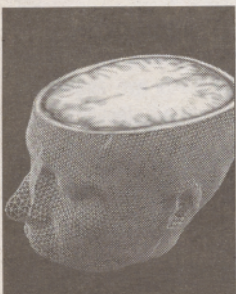
comedians aren't anymore screwed up than anybody else, we just deal with it in a different way. It's just out there more, and the way that some people deal with it is to shove it down, and it comes out in quirky ways. Whereas with comics we just filter it out in this way that is somewhat socially acceptable. So it's strange that I've chosen to do this thing that scares me a little bit, but it's also a necessity.

When I started doing "True Stories," it was in Mississippi studios, and at the time it was much smaller and intimate, and it felt like you were sitting in your living room. And what happened in that series is we would tell these humiliating stories. I always have a sense that I'm a freak in some way, so it's really satisfying to get up in front of people and tell these stories and hear people recognize themselves in the story. When I hear that recognition and I hear them laughing, it feels like I'm less of a freak.

When we had Dan Savage on the show, he said

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