

**HAMEISTER, from page 1**

one of the questions he gets ask more than any other is "is this normal?" About any sexual act. Because we all want to know — am I normal? There is no such thing as a normal family or a normal person. But you can hear that moment when you go too far with an audience, *I was with you right up until... Now you're weird.*

Every single show with Live Wire!, I feel like I'm throwing a party, and if people don't have a good time, it's my fault. And also I'm talking to really, really brilliant people and I want to make them look good and make sure I don't look bad.

**J.Z.:** *It's interesting that Live Wire! is a nonprofit, a 501c3.*

**C.H.:** We're independently produced, and I think we're pretty original. The majority of these shows come out of their stations, and we don't come out of OPB, and part of the reason that decision was made was so we can get grants, and it's been extremely successful for that.

**J.Z.:** *How have you weathered the economy, selling a comedy show to major funders?*

**C.H.:** We're more an arts organization, so we approach foundations as if we are the opera, or the symphony or Portland Center Stage, but it's rough. It's rough for us. We obviously have some really brilliant and forward-thinking and nationally recognized thinkers come on our show, but we also have sketch comedy, and sketch comedy isn't perceived as particularly high brow, which is why it has a little difficulty finding it's place in public radio. They love political satire, and they love comedy that teaches you something, but comedy for the sake of comedy doesn't live in a lot of places on public radio. Because "The Moth" is so successful and there are so many funny stories being told, we're just hoping there will be more and more. And obviously "This American Life" has (David) Sedaris and Sarah Vowell and people come on and tell funny stories, but they're obviously funny in a more quiet or public radioey way than a sketch about a phone with a subtexting feature.

**J.Z.:** *Are we missing something?*

**C.H.:** On the majority of public radio stations, these are people who are journalists, and they're used to there always having to be a reason to have content. You have to be teaching something, or you have to be making people think in a different way. But honestly, the best comedy that I've heard does make people think in a different way about whatever it is you're doing a sketch about. Or it focuses a laser light on it. We did a sketch recently where Osama Bin Laden, Muammar Gaddafi and Kim Jong-Il had a terrorist club and they were trying to come up with who to attack next, and they were having trouble picking a city. It was all about how these cultures hate us so much but they can't help but love the things we create. We weren't trying to make a statement with it, we were just trying to be absurd, but for me, I like the skewed vision of the world, where you take a really ugly thing and you're able to laugh at it. And of course now we know that Osama bin Laden had porn in his hideout.

**J.Z.:** *What's your take on Portland politics? What gets your goat, what turns you on, and what do you roll your eyes at?*

**C.H.:** I don't read a lot about local Portland politics, so I don't really get angry about a lot of local stuff. I'm talking with Caitlin Baggott with the Bus Project now because I guess BRO is about to launch a bigger campaign. I'm really concerned with Planned Parenthood losing funding. The gay marriage issue — and I keep coming back to it, in my work and elsewhere — that to me is probably the biggest social policy issue that pisses me off and I don't understand why people are so upset about it. I'm not



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**"I know that had I not had a creative outlet, I don't know what would have happened to me. I very well could have taken all that neuroses and allowed it to feed on itself instead of sending it out into the world. I think that all of our fears inside of us can just grow to be gigantic, and as soon as we speak them, they shrink."**

gay myself, but I have people in my life that I really care about, and it feels like it's so simple. It feels to me like the one issue that more than anything else is fueled by fear and hate and misunderstanding. Almost like people have to work to be that unempathetic. You see all the stories out there and I'm like, how many stories do you need to see to show that gay people are just people. I was fascinated to see that "Modern Family" is one of the top three or five shows among Republicans. That doesn't jive with me. How can you love the couple on the show and watch their lives and still legislate against it?

**J.Z.:** *How do you leverage your profile to do something about it.*

**C.H.:** I talk about it whenever I can. I had just mentioned that Schwarzenegger vetoed marriage rights for gays and lesbian's twice. He vetoed it twice in California. And when I see people like this who are so clearly fucking up on the marriage front, and they're allowed to vote on this legislation; I say once you've had two failed marriages, you're not allowed to vote on marriage legislation anymore. It's like losing your license. I talk about it on (the podcast) Cort and Fatboy. And I did a piece on OPB on Measure 1 in Arkansas that said even

straight couples who weren't married can't adopt. So whenever I can, I write about it and we do sketches about it on Live Wire! We did a sketch a few years ago where gay marriage had become legal and this couple was in their home, and the guy said, "You know, it's weird, I feel like just cooking our children and eating them!" Like gay marriage had just caused this massive hysteria and horrible stuff, that everyone claimed was going to happen. So we try to comment on it when we can.

**J.Z.:** *Do you hear from people who say "thank you." Do you ever get the feedback that you helped someone or are making people's lives better?*

**C.H.:** That would be the ideal situation. I tend to get that when I do essays. I write more personal stuff, and people will come up to me afterward — and so many of our experiences are universal — and they come to me and say that just happened to me. You just wrote my life for the last six months. That's hugely satisfying, and I'm really grateful that people are even willing to come up and say something like that. Part of the reasons that I would love for my book to be published is it just makes me feel better when I read something that somebody has written that makes me feel the same way. Like when I'm reading an essay and I can hear people recognize. It's the same thing. It's, *thank God, somebody feels the same thing.*

**J.Z.:** *Goes back to the not being the only freak in the room.*

**C.H.:** Exactly.

**J.Z.:** *You've gotten involved in the homeless front, doing an event for p:ear a few years ago.*

**C.H.:** I did, and I got to go in one time for a writers group with some of the teen-agers there, and I got to sit in with them, and I got to read some of their stories and talk to them, and that was an amazing experience.

And I was just blown away by the talent and how genuine these kids were and how much potential they had. It was just extraordinary. The work that p:ear does is unbelievable. I was really lucky growing up. I was slightly upper-middle class, and so I never had to deal with being afraid of not having a place to live, but I do know that had I not had a creative outlet, I don't know what would have happened to me. I very well could have taken all that neuroses and allowed it to feed on itself instead of sending it out into the world. I think that all of our fears inside of us can just grow to be gigantic, and as soon as we speak them, they shrink. So an outlet like p:ear for these kids, it's a place, for people to go and have that recognition — that there are people like me, and we matter. If that person matters, then I matter to.

**J.Z.:** *There's that shared freak issue again.*

**C.H.:** Exactly. I've had mental illness in my family, and for me the way our country and our culture deal with the mentally ill is a devastating problem, and the fact that mental illness isn't viewed as an illness in this country, in the same way that cancer is viewed as an illness, in terms of the way that health insurance companies deal with it. So for me, the mental health and homeless issues are intertwined. I just think that if we were able to address the mental health issue, it would address the homeless issue as well. That pisses me off, too.

**J.Z.:** *True, they don't treat it the same even though we're talking about the most complex organ in our bodies.*

**C.H.:** I've had a couple of experiences where I've had to either take people to the mental ward of a hospital or visit people in the mental ward of a hospital. One was like 15 years ago in Ohio — my father was bipolar — so we had to take him to the hospital. And I remember walking into the hospital, through the maternity ward, going down an elevator, and then through a series of creepy hallways until you got to the mental ward. The maternity ward was this beautiful, warm, gorgeously appointed room, everything to make you feel better. Huge amounts of money spent on this ward. These are the happiest days of your life. And then you get to the mental ward — worst days of your life. It looked like they hadn't changed things since 1930. Metal, linoleum floors, ugly, grey, no money. What the fuck is wrong here? And it's because our health system treats the mentally ill and believes that they're not worth as much as other patients.

**J.Z.:** *That they're not normal.*

**C.H.:** That they're not normal, and I just think it's utterly and completely backward, in my experience. Recently, I had a friend who was having a rough time and I went to visit her in a hospital and same deal — it's like the worst, ugliest part of the hospital. 15 years later — same deal.

**J.Z.:** *You've been riffing on Portland life for years. What do you think of the TV show "Portlandia"?*

**C.H.:** I think it's funny. I think it's great for Portland. And it could be really bad for Portland. I'm on Twitter, and when you're on there you just see the public consciousness flying by you really quickly. And when "Portlandia" came out, my favorite comment on Twitter was "Great, now no one's ever going to take Portland seriously again." It was so adorable. Like when the fuck has anyone taken Portland seriously? We're taken seriously in terms of sustainability, absolutely. Sustainability, city planning — there are lots of things about Portland that are amazing — but still — seriously? No.

If anything that calls attention to Portland is good to a point. But what I don't want to happen is for one day people to say, "Oh, Portland's so over." We're not a flash in the pan. We're not a trend — we're a city.