

funny, and I think anybody laughing is improving their lives.

We also do programs. The All Jane Comedy Festival is one of our outreach programs to help women in comedy have more opportunity to be seen and encouraged and inspired. We also use improv with senior citizens, with kids to improve literacy, seniors with dementia, and in February, we will be starting a program with the police. We are building a training to help police be kinder, more compassionate police officers.

The Hillsboro Police Department is great – the trainers and officers. We are recreating certain events. We're starting with mental illness, and we're going to recreate events where officers have had a challenging time in the past and things didn't go as well as they could have. The officers will go through that same exact scenario and then have to respond in the moment. We will have clinicians who are going to coach us ahead of time. It's pretty amazing.

S.Z.: *It's fantastic. And again, here is this common thread: improvisational thinking.*

S.H.: When you think about what a police officer is doing, they have to be able to think on their feet and have a clarity of mind and know what their options are in a situation that can be very threatening and scary to them. It's a hard thing to know how to do well unless you have practiced in a heightened situation. So that's what we're helping to do.

S.Z.: *Oct. 1, the community in Roseburg suffered tragedy after a public mass murder of nine people at Umpqua Community College. What the hell is happening in our society?*

S.H.: Ugh. Wow. That is a huge question. I think people are scared – and uneducated. We are taught to be afraid of one another instead of friendly toward one another.

I was in Canada, and they are so different than us and they are just to the north. I was in a park on the phone and a man walked by with his son, who was probably like 3 or 4 years old. He was holding this little kid's hand. The man said, "Hello!" and I was like, "Oh, hello. How are you?" And we had this really nice exchange. And the son said, "Do you know that person?" and the father said, "No. But you never know who could be your next friend, or your best friend even."

I was like, "That's not how we (Americans) think." We aren't raised to think that any person we might run into could potentially be our next best friend. We are taught to be very afraid and very guarded with one another.

Aside from all the issues with acceptability of guns and lack of mental illness care in this country, there is also a pervading sense of animosity between people unless we get to know each other and start from a place of good will towards other people.

S.Z.: *You curate the freshly renamed All Jane Comedy Festival. I liked the old title – All Jane No Dick. I thought it was funny, but I get it.*

S.H.: Right. That's the thing. I had to weigh the cost. If I erred on the side of



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"Comedy is powerful," said Hallal. "When you are sad or stressed out, how do you relieve tension? You can scream. You can cry. Or you can laugh."

being too safe with the name, well, it's less funny than it used to be. But if I err on the side of the safety of the funniness of the name, then there could be somebody who wants to apply to the festival and doesn't feel welcome because she is a trans woman. I just couldn't let that happen.

S.Z.: *Curating a show composed of people who all identify as female must be fun. I don't know about you – and this may be my cynical America upbringing – but when I am in a room of all women, I have two thoughts running through my head: "I am part of the wonderment of womanhood" and "Where are the emergency exits in case things get weird?"*

S.H.: It has been amazing. We have not had an issue with All Jane. At all.

We're all standups and improvisors, so we're all women who have been in male-dominated environments. We're comfortable adapting to different situations ... and we're all weirdos. You don't get into comedy as a woman unless you're a weirdo in some way or another.

Everybody seems to love and appreciate each other for our differences. We're all different. That's what I love about Curious (Comedy Theater) in general, is comedy is the place where you get to celebrate those

parts of yourself that used to be the things that people would pick on you for. The things that make you unique and different and stand out are the things that make your voice unique and distinct and awesome.

Typically, people only put one woman on a show. They're still resistant to have two on one show. We (female comedians) are hungry to meet each other and talk to each other and get to be on shows together.

Last year, we had Subhah Agarwal and Aparna Nancherla, and they're both Indian women comics. We put them one right after the other because Aparna is dry and intellectual, and Subhah is high energy. We weren't even thinking about them both being Indian women. Subhah came out and was like, "Two Indian woman comics in a row? This has never happened in my entire life."

S.Z.: *You welcome all genders as viewers though, yes?*

S.H.: Totally. And any gender will enjoy it as well. It is not catered to a female audience. Our audiences have been split fairly evenly between men and women, and it has been equally enjoyed every year.

S.Z.: *For people who haven't been to the festival, what can they expect?*

S.H.: The biggest surprise will be how diverse the festival actually is. Even though it is all women, we curate for the most unique styles and points of view and perspective that we can find. It ends up being one of the most diverse festivals anyone has been a part of despite the fact that everybody is a woman.

You can expect all different kinds of comedians who are all hilarious. This year is pretty cool. We've got Paige Horowitz, who is the producer of "Last Comic Standing," coming. And she's bringing a bunch of the finalists from the show with her.

We do a show called "Minority Retort" – you guys actually did a story on it. One of our headlining shows is all comics of color. We ended up having a lot of women of color this year, so we are doing a Minority Retort (during the All Jane Comedy Festival).

There are so many great women who will be performing during the festival. You may not have heard of these women yet, but this time next year, you'll know. That's something else I love about the festival – you're going to see all kinds of talent that is about to break out into the world.

S.Z.: *We say that laughter is the best medicine. Can you attest to the healing power of comedy?*

S.H.: Definitely. The biggest example I have ever witnessed was when we were doing improv with Alzheimer's patients. We went in for just an hour a day, once a week for 10 weeks. We worked with a group of about 10 Alzheimer's patients. They couldn't stand. They were sitting the whole time. We would play (comedy) games with them. They were so much fun, and they had a great time.

By the end of that 10 weeks, the activity director – who was very skeptical of us at first – couldn't say enough about how much she saw the patients change. They were happier. They were easier to work with. They would recall and talk about the (sessions) we had with them earlier in the day, and it would cheer them up later in the day.

Living in a state of trying to remember is very annoying. If you think about a time when you were like, "What's that name of that thing? Oh! It's going to drive me crazy." Having Alzheimer's, you are constantly living in that state. Physically, the patients became more mobile. Because they would move more because they were having a good time and laughing. So the physical therapists said that they were moving with much more fluidity and range of motion at the end of the 10 weeks from just playing simple improv games.

So if that's what is happening for a patient with Alzheimer's, what effect is it having on all of us?

Comedy is powerful. When you are sad or stressed out, how do you relieve tension?

You can scream. You can cry. Or you can laugh.

If I have to choose between those three things, I'll pick laughter every time.