



PHOTO BY MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

STILL FUNNY AFTER ALL THESE DECADES

Paula Poundstone returns to Eugene this weekend with a show at the Hult

When comedian Paula Poundstone wanted to get in shape, she opted for taekwondo — not because she had a passion for self-defense but because it was the closest workout place she could find to her house.

“I wanted to get fit but I didn’t want to walk far to do it,” she says in a telephone interview.

Poundstone, who’s performing in Eugene this weekend, has been making audiences laugh for four decades. From intimate stage venues to her own cable television special, she has shared with the world her own hilarious perspective on life.

She has performed in Eugene several times. For this weekend’s show, Poundstone is unsure what material she will use, but she never starts from scratch.

“It’s whatever comes up — whatever life and news comes up,” she says. “I think of new stuff occasionally.”

Poundstone’s favorite part of stand-up is talking to the audience, getting to know them and asking what they do for a living. She says that in a world where electronics have dulled the senses, it’s refreshing to see people come together.

“It’s good to be in a room full of people who have come out to laugh for the night,” she says.

Poundstone has known she wanted to be comedian since 1965, when her kindergarten teacher called out her knack for making people laugh. Mrs. Bump, her teacher, wrote in a report letter, “I have enjoyed many of Paula’s humorous comments about various activities.”

Poundstone loved the idea of being a comedian, and she’s never looked back.

“I like the sound of laughter, and I like the response,” she says.

In 1979, Poundstone attended her first open mic night in Boston, where anyone could walk on stage and perform for five minutes. For the next few years, Poundstone took a Greyhound bus around the country to see what clubs were like in different cities.

Since that time, she’s been engaged in a wide-ranging career. In 1993, she aired “The Paula Poundstone Show,” and since then has written two books, played a role in the Pixar movie *Inside Out* and performed for President George H.W. Bush at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner.

She is currently a panelist on the NPR show *Wait Wait ... Don’t Tell Me!* and is the host of *Live From the Poundstone Institute*.

Throughout all those opportunities, Poundstone continued to perform stand-up and tour around the country.

“I can sleep in a chair pretty well. That’s pretty much what it takes,” she says. “I was a stand-up comic no matter what I was doing. It’s a great thing to be.”

Although stand-up is still her first and greatest love, Poundstone’s latest book was nominated for audio book of the year by the Audio Publishers Association. *A Totally Unscientific Study of the Search for Human Happiness* is based on her seven-year journey of completing various experiments with one goal: to find what makes people happy and to write humorously about it.

“It’s quite an honor,” she says. “I was very happy with it.”

In the book, Poundstone engaged in a range of experimental and sometimes humorous activities, from exercising to volunteering to sitting on the couch all day watching DVDs with her kids.

“I knew that the experiments themselves would be a playground for the jokes,” she says.

Her experiments reveal that the key to happiness is different for each individual, Poundstone says, but science also plays an important role. “The answer is biochemical — go outside, get some exercise,” Poundstone says. “Those things make a big difference.”

Though she enjoyed her literary pursuit, comedy will always be her mainstay.

“It’s the best job in the world,” the comedian says. “I find absolute joy in almost every crowd I play.” ■

Paula Poundstone will perform stand-up at the Hult Center’s Silva Concert Hall 8 pm Saturday, May 12. Tickets at hultcenter.org.