

# LAUGHING MATTERS



## Cannon Beach Comedy Festival strives to challenge, entertain

By **BRENNA VISSER**  
COAST WEEKEND

**F**or Caitlin Weierhauser, the art of stand-up comedy is all in the introduction. In the liberal pocket of Portland, Weierhauser, a gender non-conforming performer, may open their act with a joke about being misgendered, or being yelled at in a public bathroom.

But travel outside those city limits to somewhere smaller — say, Cannon Beach — and Weierhauser may open with a story of what it was like to grow up in rural Douglas County, Oregon.

The way to the punchline may take different routes, but Weierhauser's comedy has an unobtrusive, unapologetic and universal goal: to make every audience laugh at and question the world around them.

"I think (comedy) is the easiest way to process ideas. I've always been attracted to stand-up specifically because it presents ideas and ways of thinking that aren't right on the surface," Weierhauser said. "They are layers below."

Weierhauser is joining a cast of seven comics featured in the second annual Cannon Beach Comedy Festival, which takes place Friday and Saturday, June 15 and 16. What started as one night of three comedians performing in a packed Tolovana Arts Colony building with a budget of \$268 has ballooned into a two-day event, with shows at both the Colony and the Coaster Theatre.

### 'A delicate dance'

The festival is the brainchild of the Arts Colony director, Andrew Tonry, who spent years covering comedy as a journalist in the Portland area. Tonry found himself missing the art form when he moved back to the North Coast, and decided to find a way to bring comedy to the community.

"There's an audience here — whether they know it or not," Tonry said.

Thanks to a \$4,000 grant from the Tourism and Arts Commission in Cannon Beach, the lineup grew from three to seven



mostly Portland-based comedians, including headliner Lachlan Patterson, a runner-up on NBC's "Last Comic Standing" and featured guest on Comedy Central's "Tosh.0."

One of the goals of the festival, Tonry said, was to "provide a little bit of everything" for a North Coast audience.

"It's a delicate dance," he said in reference to finding comedians. "There is still a misnomer that (comics) are all filthy and horrible, which is not true."

The current line-up balances this sensibility with comedians Tonry hopes will "challenge audiences in the way they think," from comedians like Mohanad Elshieky, whose act focuses on world politics and Arab stereotypes, to comics like Weierhauser, who dives deeply into the world of gender and sexuality politics.

Weierhauser doesn't shy away from the challenge. In fact, it was part of their journey to get into stand-up comedy in the first place.

### 'Wake-up call'

After the death of their sister a few years ago, Weierhauser had a "wake-up call," quit their job as a software manager and moved to Portland. Comedy became a tool to filter their grief, so much so that they gave stand-up comedy a shot on the advice of a therapist.

"I remember she said, 'All this sad stuff is somehow funny when you say it,'" they laughed.

Since then, Weierhauser has performed at the All Jane Comedy Festival, Bumpshoot and Bridgetown Comedy Festival, often being branded as a "political comic" and fervent enemy of the patriarchy.

But Weierhauser sees their comedy less as a political weapon and more as a mechanism for persuasive but accessible storytelling, punctuated by punchlines.

"Can you imagine the pain of doing a TED talk about gender theory? Ugh. With



PHOTOS COURTESY TOLOVANA ARTS COLONY  
ABOVE: Caitlin Weierhauser is one of the new comics featured at this year's Cannon Beach Comedy Festival. LEFT: Lachlan Patterson is the headlining act for the Cannon Beach Comedy Festival.

## IF YOU GO

**What:** The second annual Cannon Beach Comedy Festival

**When and where:** 7:30 p.m. Friday, June 15 at Tolovana Arts Colony and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, June 16 at Coaster Theatre

**Who:** Lachlan Patterson, Caitlin Weierhauser, Alex Falcone, Katie Nguyen, Phil Schallberger, Mohanad Elshieky, Anthony Lopez

**How much:** \$10 for Friday night, \$15 for Saturday night, \$20 for weekend pass

comedy, it lets you get these kind of ideas out there and process them," they said. "You'll recall it with fondness. (Comedy) fast forwards the learning process. It does all the work for you. As long as you're having a good time, you'll go home with that information." 