

# SCRATCHPAD

## Dude, sit down

A plea for audience etiquette

By ERICK BENDEL  
COAST WEEKEND

You're at a well-attended event. The featured entertainer has wrapped up, and it's time for the Q-and-A. You're looking forward to a satisfying denouement.

Then it happens. *They* happen. Sometimes you can spot them before they even open their mouths. Indeed, you can practically hear

them licking their lips in anticipation, for their time has come.

They are that small but powerfully annoying minority of audience members who use their question to do anything except ask a question.

Instead you are treated to bad jokes, or rants loosely germane to the evening's topic, or the spectacle of watching someone attempt to banter beyond their intellectual skill level. And all you can do is quietly cringe and thank the

gods you were born with impulse control.

During my quasi-vacation last week, I caught the New Yorker's satirist extraordinaire Andy Borowitz at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall in Portland, followed a few days later by an Oregon Humanities Conversation Project presentation at the city's Alberta Rose Theatre with three veteran reporters about journalism and democracy.

Wildly different shows, but they had much in common. Both had speakers who touched on urgent issues facing free societies. Both were sobering, high-

mined and fun, reflecting on where we are as a nation and where we're going. And both had Q-and-As that were briefly hijacked by spotlight junkies.


You'd think anyone familiar with Andy Borowitz would instinctively realize it's not the brightest idea to try out stand-up material on Andy Freaking Borowitz, at least not in front of hundreds of spectators and with other would-be questioners waiting in line. One guy actually began his "question" by informing the comic that Portland, you may have heard, is a city where young people go

to retire — a "Portlandia" line that had become stale back when I was in college. Unless that guy was Fred Armisen, he should be ashamed of himself.

Borowitz shut these clowns down hard and fast, reminding them that the nice people around them paid to see Borowitz speak, not some random dude using his question as a pretext to showcase his own comedic brilliance. And don't even think about pulling that old trick, he advised, of prattling on about whatever and ending with, "What do you think?" (When an older gentleman recited his poem, apropos

of nothing, at the Oregon Humanities event, there was no such public humiliation from the journalists onstage. They were a polite bunch. Pity.)

As a matter of audience etiquette, please remember: These events are not opportunities to focus group test your hilarious material, share aimless anecdotes about your fascinating life, lecture experts about their field like you know better, or act as if you and the headliner are old friends unless you and the headliner are, in fact, old friends.

You know who you are, and you've been warned. 

## coast weekend

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From left: Gigi Chadwick, Rick Grey and Sheila Shaffer rehearse a scene from 'Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike.'

PHOTO BY BOB KROLL

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