

art



QUEEN OF THE GAYS!

KATHY GRIFFIN REIGNS SUPREME, UNITING GAYS AND STRAIGHTS UNDER A BIG, PINKISH TENT // BY STACY DAVIES

KATHY GRIFFIN LOVES THE GAYS. In fact, she claims she's a gay man—at least that's her explanation for her obsession with kitschy, campy, pop culture, and her ability to verbally bitch slap just about anyone, including the almighty Oprah. (Of course, Griffin's also said she's a "strong black woman" and "not Nicole Kidman"—both of which also seem to be philosophically and anatomically correct, respectively.) The truth is this two-time Emmy winner is just a snappy, sassy straight woman who wants you to believe she's your BFF. Especially if you're gay. And this makes

her a marketing genius.

How to sell to gays—the wealthiest minority population in the U.S.—is still somewhat of an enigma for both Hollywood and the corporate mind. If you include a gay perspective, Jesus freaks will call for a national boycott; if you purposely avoid it, GLAAD will call you a Neanderthal. Popular marketing wisdom still demands that "gay" remain a niche market—gay novels, gay films, gay cable series—with only a few noteworthy exceptions. And gay comedy is especially hard. Just ask the dozens of gay standup comics who can't get off the alternative circuit—perhaps because straight people would find gay jokes as confusing as we find all those Mars versus Venus complaints?

The irony is that many of the top female comics *are* gay—Ellen, Rosie, Wanda, Paula and Lily. But none of them really talk about it, and they certainly

don't give shout-outs to their lesbian posses. Male comics rarely even mention gay unless they're dusting off some antiquated slam. So, for whatever reason, white people will watch Chris Rock talk about being black, gentiles will listen to Sarah Silverman talk about being Jewish, but no one (not even gays) really wants to hear a gay talk about being gay—except in Britain, where straight audiences steadily flock to see guys like Graham Norton be *very* gay.

Like with most hot-button stigmas, it usually takes an outsider to truly gain ground, and here's where Griffin stakes her glorious claim—even if it's on a plot that no one else seems to want. Following in the pump prints of the grand dame of the gays, Joan Rivers, Griffin doesn't just call out to her boys (and demand they be in the front row, as Rivers does), she actually weaves them into her entire act, beginning to end, and does it so naturally that the g-word ceases to be a stigma the minute she opens her mouth. (Lesbians are included, in theory, though seldom addressed, but Griffin does make it clear that Rosie is a part of her personal sewing circle.)

The result of Griffin's unwitting "civil rights activist comedy shtick" is an *ideally* homogenous audience. People of every color, gender and persuasion all pack together into sold-out shows for one unifying purpose—to hear Griffin give a vicious and usually well-deserved tongue-lashing to some delicate celebrity egos. But she also talks about her own daily faux pas, and this self-deprecation is the *other* half of Griffin's genius: She's a master storyteller with a light-speed response time who tells us how she dumbly took "half-eaten" birthday cake to Cher's house, ineptly packed her ass crack with tissue to soak up flop sweat and then lost the stuff somewhere in a TV exec's office, and shamefully went fanatic when talking to Mary Tyler Moore in the green room of the Emmys.

More incredibly, even with a laundry list of star tales that would rival a hundred *I Love Lucy* episodes, Griffin still manages to convince us that she, herself, is *not* a star; she is one of us, she maintains, and her life is as dreggy and imperfect as our own—a mother who drinks too much wine in a box, an ex-husband who stole her money and broke her heart, and dogs that go poo where they shouldn't. This mixture of mundane universal truths and haphazard brushes with the famous are what bond Griffin to her gays—and her straights—for it's clear that like all good royals, Griffin knows an accessible and inclusive monarchy is the only kind that can truly endure. Long live the queen.

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WORLD WIDE WEB

PERFORMANCE ARTIST SHYAMALA MOORTY FACES YOUR FEARS

LONG BEACH-BASED PERFORMANCE artist Shyamala Moorty will appear in TeAda Productions' seventh annual TeAdaworks: Healing Aloud festival. Along with other performance artists (Maria G. Martinez, Marcella Pabros-Clark and Raquel Salinas), Moorty has been commissioned to create and perform a piece—in partnership with various community immigrant health groups—to draw attention to overlooked issues concerning the immigrant community.

What was it like to collaborate with other social organizations? The organization that I work with is called NISWA—a Muslim group that is about promoting healthy families; they work on providing support for cases of domestic violence. I interviewed members of the staff and got a range of the typical cases they receive. I worked with a youth group in the library at a local mosque once a month and encouraged them, in their time there, to do some self-expression physically, mentally and verbally through yoga, theater exercises and writing exercises. The relationships I developed through the organization helped inspire my piece.

What is Carrie's Web, your performance piece, about? It's about two characters. One—inspired by my work with NISWA—is a Southeast Asian girl who is dealing with domestic issues at home. The story is about her learning to empower herself. The other character is fantastical—the spider. This idea came to me before my work with NISWA. I was always interested in the idea of fear and how we, as humans, react when we are afraid of something. The spider is a metaphor; it is something a lot of people are afraid of and usually react to in violence. The two main characters' stories eventually interrelate and reveal something I think is very powerful.

What do you hope the audience takes away from your performance? I hope for a couple of things. I hope that they come out of it having had an emotional journey. I hope that it starts conversations, and it opens the door to people fertilizing talk about issues of domestic violence and women. It is about opening a dialogue and shedding light on the things that are usually kept secret. // VY PHAM

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