



Improv Comic Christina Gausas Proud to be in Comedy



by **Rebecca Brooks**
2 WEEKS AGO

ENTERTAINMENT



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If you are a fan of improv comedy in NYC or LA, the name Christina Gausas probably conjures up feelings of delight. Christina has been transfixing audiences at New York's Comedy Festival and The Upright Citizens Brigade Theater for years with her comedic chops. Most recently, she has been performing in the wonderfully hilarious 2-person show, KempSas, alongside her improv partner and best friend, Ellie Kemper.

TimeOut New York has called her "one of the best improvisers in New York City" and she will appear on Hulu's *Difficult People* again in season 3. Her character is an NYC-based casting director who showed up

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in the first 2 seasons (and in my favorite episode of the series, “Patches”, no less). The absurdity of her character is underscored by Christina’s ability to play her totally straight.

I first saw Christina perform at the UCB Theater in Manhattan when she was doing a 2-person show with Kevin Dorff, a writer for Conan O’Brien. I was completely in awe of how realistically she played characters she was making up on the fly. Her ability to respond with hilarity that was rooted in truth was one of the reasons I continued to see any show Christina was in from that point on.

After nervously signing up for one of the rare improv workshops she does from time to time and taking a class with her, I realized what a kickass teacher and person she is. Her ability to bring out the best in people on stage and even in conversation is a gift that keeps on giving to the improv community.

Here I talk with Christina about being a woman in comedy, the pilot she’s been working on and more.



Photos by Courtney
Lindberg

What made improv comedy something that you wanted to pursue?

Amy Sedaris and Adam McKay were the first people I remember seeing improvise. Watching them perform made me want to pursue improv. I had never seen anything like it and I’m sure that I didn’t realize at the time that I was actually watching “the best” do the best work that could ever do. I was blown away and Chicago had such an intense improv community. The work was just so good. Tina Fey and Amy Poehler were on a house team together at IO when I was in Level 1 and Steve Carell was my Level 5 teacher at Second City.

It feels like that it’s finally being legitimized by mainstream media that women are indeed funny. Do you feel like we still have a long way to go to be seen as powerfully comedically as men?

I think there’s a long way to go in terms of numbers, like showrunners and creators. The blog “Women and Hollywood” just crunched the numbers for the 2017-18 lineups and just four of the 19 new fall series are created or co-created by women, and neither FOX nor NBC have any new women-created series for this fall. And what’s the intersectionality within that? Because of that disparity, I don’t think we’ve seen the true influence of what women can bring to mainstream entertainment. But, in terms of a horrific phrase like, “Women aren’t funny,” I think that will go down in cultural history as one of the most ignorant statements ever to be given a shred of attention or legitimacy.

You are such a force on stage and I know many people who are in awe of how you can be so intelligent, witty and rooted in truthfulness when improvising. What female improvisers inspire you and what about them makes them so awesome?

I’m really inspired by Amy Sedaris, Jodi Lennon, Amy Poehler, Natasha Rothwell, Kay Cannon, and Ellie Kemper. To me, they all have an amazing technical command, and, a confident personal style, plus, I think, they each have a belief system that shows onstage. They’re effortless but have so much gravity. They radiate light while also being firmly committed. I’ve also never not doubled over laughing when I’ve watched them onstage. I love being a “fan” and I fangirl out a lot over other improvisers. I recently taught a Women’s Only Improv Workshop and I was inspired by every woman in that workshop, improvisers like Zubi Ahmed, Sarah Michaels, Brielle DeMirijan, Jenna Cavrich, Sara Parelhoff, there are so many original voices out there right now. I think it’s important to stay inspired by other improvisers, recognize greatness in others, and know that we’re learning for life, it never stops, we need each other.

You have been working on a Pilot for quite some time that is just one of the coolest ideas I’ve heard in a long time. Where did the inspiration for your new pilot come from?

My obsession with the Spider Sabich and Claudine Longet murder trial from 1976, it was really the first celebrity murder trial and no one really remembers it. The trial was an event that contributed to transforming Aspen, Colorado into the town that it is now versus how it started out. It’s a fascinating and upsetting story. I also have an overall concept experience idea for the show that, fortunately,

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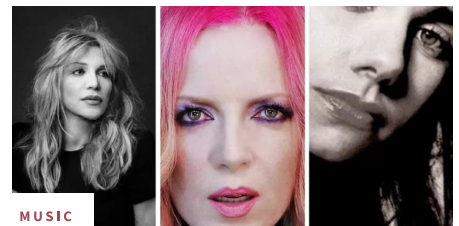
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people have really responded positively to. I love creating the world and characters for this pilot. I realize more and more how much improv training helps in writing dialogue.

Julie Klausner and Billy Eichner’s show Difficult People just keeps getting better. I can’t wait for Season 3. It’s really great to see a female lead of a show that, as Executive Producer Amy Poehler recently said, “doesn’t have to win hearts.” What is it like working on this show?

Being able to work on Difficult People is a dream come true. It’s a great environment. Julie is so hilarious and true to herself, and talk about having a belief system. She really knows who she is, there’s never a “fake” Julie. Plus, her work ethic should be taught on college campuses. Julie, Billy, Scott King, and Jeffrey Walker really create a warm set. They allow for improvisation, they’re serious and kind, and they’re just the best people I’ve ever met.

When you teach improv, your class is so powerful and everyone leaves realizing how badass they can be. I wish you taught every week because it would be my church! What traits do you think make for a great improviser and what is it you’re looking to bring out in others when teaching improv?

Oh, thank you! I love teaching improvisation. I really love improvisers. I think, when I look at a group of people in any of my workshops, I just know, right away, that they are more interesting, more complex – that they’ve had greater or more hurtful experiences, speak more languages, have more fascinating lives and family stories than I could ever imagine. Everyone has a greater depth than could ever be imagined. I’m always in awe of what I learn about improvisers and what comes out in their work onstage. There’s always so much more than meets the eye. That’s part of the bravery of really good improv, the ability to lay it all bare, to lay out the human experience through characters and collaborative work. I think getting to a place of vulnerability plus fearlessness makes an improviser great. A person who has great technical command plus their own original style. Listening hard and being open. I think I’m always looking to bring out the courage of confidence and the knowledge of their own magnificence to every improviser. I really wish every person could just see how great they truly are and just know it.

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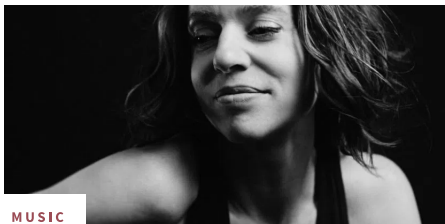
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