

THE ARTS



Are female comedians finally in demand?

Shaun Eli Breidbart *Guest Columnist*

Fewer than a third of stand-up comedians are women.

It's true at all levels, from aspiring comedians at open-mic nights to newer comics at comedy clubs to working professionals to big stars. Ophira Eisenberg has her own show on NPR. Carmen Lynch and Cory Kahaney have performed on both the Letterman and Colbert shows and Kahaney's also been on "America's Got Talent." Wendy Liebman was an "AGT" semi-finalist and performed on both Johnny Carson and Jay Leno's versions of "The Tonight Show" and has had specials on HBO, Comedy Central and Showtime.

But I can count on just one thumb the number of female comedians who can fill Madison Square Garden.

Yes, Amy Schumer is my thumb. It was only recently that she broke the glass ceiling at MSG.

In the 1990s Elayne Boosler, after three award-winning Showtime specials, still couldn't get booked to headline comedy clubs. Club owners said that people wouldn't turn out to see women tell jokes. A friend ended up booking the two of them on nights the clubs were typically closed. He opened the show but it was she who sold out the rooms. Still, clubs continued to resist booking female headliners.

I'm a stand-up comedian. For the past 13 years I've been booking colleagues for shows at nontraditional venues — golf clubs, synagogues and other nonprofit organizations, for corporate events and at theaters in New York, New Jersey and across the country.

With few exceptions women asked for less money than their equivalently talented and experienced male counterparts.

That was then. The shows I book typically have three or four comedians. I try not to make these shows all men because I want diversity in viewpoint. It's easy enough to have a show that's all single, white, heterosexual male comedians in their 40s. But I, and audiences, appreciate variety.

I spoke to two female comics who are best friends. I said that it must be great to travel and work together. They said they never did — it's a rare show that has more than one woman. Bookers fear it will be labeled 'a women's show' and not sell well. I booked them together and the show sold out. I now arrange all-female shows and they continue to sell out.

I'm a feminist. How could I not be? I'm half woman — on my mother's side.

I book three shows a season at one theatre. Around Valentine's Day is our specialty show "Battle of the Sexes." It includes single and married women and men. Another show is "Fabulously Funny Females." Every season I book five to six women there. It's getting harder and harder to find female comedians for that venue's budget. This year two of them cancelled when they were offered corporate gigs. Comedians don't earn much money so I can't blame them for going where the money is. Cancellations are rare. That two of them found high-paying corporate gigs bodes well for female comedians.

Lately female comedians with major TV credits are asking for higher pay than their male counterparts.

Because they're in demand they're getting more money. I know it's bad for my bottom line to let the rest of them know. But what's fair is fair. If women out-earn men because they're in greater demand, so be it. It doesn't quite make up for the fact that male basketball players earn millions while women don't. Or that male movie stars command higher pay than female movie stars. It doesn't even make up for the fact that there is still no female late night talk show host on any major TV network.

But it is a start.

Comedy audiences: vote with your feet! Want to see more female comedians? Go to their shows. And talk about it. Nothing gets me to re-book a comedian faster than hearing someone mention why they came to a sold-out show. Just don't talk back to us when we're on stage. Male or female, hecklers are not welcome.

Shaun Eli Breidbart is a comedian and the executive director of The Ivy League of Comedy which performs at theaters, including the Union County Performing Arts Center, the Stockton Performing Arts Center, Cape May Stage and the Levoy Theatre.

ENVIRONMENT

Building a green wall

How New Jersey can fight back against Trump's anti-environmental agenda



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Jeff Tittel *Guest Columnist*

While President Donald Trump has declared war on the environment, New Jersey will be able to stand up to him. Under the next governor, there are many things we can do to make sure that our public health and environment are protected. We must work on all levels to reduce greenhouse gasses, fight climate change, and promote renewable energy and green jobs. No matter how regressive the White House is with science, we can still make progress here.

On the day Trump announced he was withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris climate accord, New Jersey closed two coal plants.

Clean energy won that day, but there are many more days ahead. We need to build a green wall around New Jersey to protect us from Trump's anti-environmental agenda. We have the benefit of dealing with Gov. Chris Christie for seven years gives us experience on fighting Trump.

CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Trump is a climate denier, besides turning the back on the world at Paris has rolled back Obama-era Clean Power Plan and climate protections. New Jersey can move forward by rejoining The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and making sure we have stricter environmental standards than the federal level.

While Trump is rolling back the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, we can move forward with electric vehicles. Lawmakers can pass legislation to have the state meet the goals of the Paris agreement, like Hawaii has done, and set goals for 100 percent renewable energy by 2050.

We can implement the Global Warming Response Act, a measure passed in 2007 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS AND PROTECTIONS

While the Trump administration is rolling back and getting rid of many important environmental regulations and standards, New Jersey can block many of these efforts. In certain cases, we have laws that allow our rules to

be stricter than the federal ones. The Sierra Club of New Jersey is currently working with legislators to introduce the Defend NJ Act: a package of bills to defend against Trump's rollbacks.

This will allow us to protect the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and more from federal rollbacks. We can also pass legislation giving the state the right of first refusal if Trump tries to sell, lease, or privatize federal lands in our state. The next governor can sue to block environmental weakenings and roll back Christie's Executive Order 1, which says we can't have rules stricter than the federal government.

RETURN FUNDING TO CLEAN ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

There are proposed severe cuts to the EPA budget in which the state could lose significant funding. New Jersey may have to come up with new sources of revenue to make up for those shortfalls. We can also stop Christie's robbing of settlements such as Passaic River or Exxon Mobil by dedicating those funds on the ballot. We need to do the same thing with clean energy with SCR151, a resolution that amends the state constitution so the money goes for energy efficiency and not to plug holes in the budget.

BUILDING RESILIENCY FOR STORM EVENTS

New Jersey has been decimated by climate change, including sea level rise and storm events. We need to address that. We need to close the loophole in the Coastal Area Facility Review Act (CAFRA) and have better coastal planning in place. Prince and Rutgers researchers say another Sandy event is 17 times more likely to happen again by 2100.

Places like the Meadowlands, Hoboken, back bays and the Barrier Islands are already

going under water. The next governor will need to reopen the Office of Climate Change and DEP's Coastal Program for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation. We need to be sure we're ready for the next storm.

PROTECTING OUR COASTS

The Jersey Shore is our jewel and Trump wants to open up our waters for offshore drilling.

We can block this by suing such as other states are doing. We can increase liability in case of a spill and we can block pipelines from offshore drillings from going through state waters into coastal land. More importantly, the next governor can actually implement our offshore wind programs, putting in place 3500 megawatts so we can have wind mills instead of oil wells.

New Jersey's next governor has his or her work ahead of them, not just standing up to Trump but fixing all the problems in New Jersey.

They will need to not only restore rules such as Flood Hazard, Water Quality Planning, and Wetland Rules, our next governor will have to move us forward, as well. We need to appoint appropriate members to councils and commissions who will work to protect our environment. They will have to upgrade and improve our transportation systems and work to remove lead from our schools and pipes.

One of the most important things our future governor can do is elect a DEP Commissioner to restore moral and confidence in the agency. We can make New Jersey a leader in environmental protections and clean energy and fight back against the Trump administration.

In no small measure, it will be up to our next governor to accomplish these goals.

Jeff Tittel is director of the New Jersey Sierra Club.