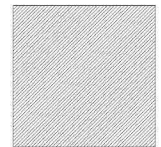




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**A joke
is a joke,
is a joke**

Women comics refuse
to be limited by outmoded
gender stereotypes



LAUGHTER EQUALITY

Funny women assure gender is hardly a consideration

By Kevin C. Shelly

Courier-Post

Are women funny?

That's an age-old question in the aggressively male-dominated world of stand-up comedy.

In some ways, the question seems quaint. Satirist Sarah Silverman killed at Sunday's Emmys in a \$60 little black dress she bought online, an implicit slap at the whole red carpet culture. But it wasn't long ago the only way to be a woman in comedy was to make fun of yourself and your partner, ala Phyllis Diller, Joan Rivers and Roseanne Barr.

As Silverman said herself in a Sept. 19 tweet: "Dear Men, Just b/c we don't need you anymore doesn't mean we don't WANT you! Love forever, Women"

And while the set-upon spouse schtick is no longer required for funny women, there's still a strong dose of sexism in comedy — intentional or not. Consider, for instance, how the Levoy Theater in Millville promotes an Oct. 17 appearance by comedian Kathleen Madigan.

"One of America's funniest *female* comics," says the theater's website in a quote attributed to Jay Leno, host of "The Tonight Show."

Madigan, who will also be in Morristown and Red Bank during her October swing through New Jersey, laughs off the Leno quote and even the question of wom-

en being funny during a telephone interview. But she goes on to acknowledge her career has also benefitted "from old-school sexism" in an HBO special featuring all-female comics.

"I really don't think this is a question," notes Madigan, who has a new comedy special out on Netflix, right before she points out that dividing the world into male and female is part of the larger culture, way beyond the tiny world of stand-up.

"The Academy Awards are divided by male and female. The women call themselves 'actors' now, but then there are awards for 'actresses.'

"When there's one award for the best actor and it is male *and* female in the category, then we can talk about comedy," Madigan added. "We need to talk to whoever is in charge!"

"Comedy is on the same level as jazz: a weird group that no one understands." Madigan believes there is no way for comedy to change sexual roles when something as popular as the Oscars pigeonholes performers by their gender.

"To me, everything works like the mob: If you make money and do your job right, you're OK. Man, woman, monkey; it doesn't make a difference. If you sell tickets, everyone is happy.

"I have so much fun. I make plenty of money. More than I ever dreamed of. The only boss I have is me and I'm a great

boss!” Madigan says, adding that stand-up satisfies her, unlike some fellow comedians who are chasing sitcom dreams.

“I’d rather go to golf school for a year — and I don’t golf — than take the time out to chase a sitcom. Life is really short.”

South Jersey’s Dena Blizzard, who does a routine built around her life as a mother and as the former Miss New Jersey, says “in the future, this won’t be a discussion,” but for now it remains a given that gender is part of the talk around female comedians.

“There’s always been the idea that women aren’t as funny as men. After a show, I’ll have people come up and they’ll say, ‘You are the funniest girl I’ve ever seen,’ Blizzard recounts.

“It is something people don’t mean to say, not meant as a slam. It is just what comes out of their mouth.”

Blizzard is prepping a one-woman show to play New Orleans starting in October. It “goes back to what I know,” as the mother of teens and a 1995 pageant winner who just finished a stint hosting the preliminaries for the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City.

The fact that she does a show that is “more in line with the Roseanne and Rivers” comedy tradition is fine with Blizzard, but so is the fact other female comedians mine different areas of life.

“Now women have so many more choices; there’s room for what other people are doing. Me, I want to be the next great comedian who talks about her family.

“In the future, this won’t be a discussion,” Blizzard insisted. “The question will just be: ‘Isn’t that a great show?’ Women should just worry about being funny; there are so many role models.”

Gioia De Cari has a one-word response to the Levoy’s promotion of Madigan as a great female comic: “Wow!”

“I dream of a world where we don’t do that. Or do it less,” says De Cari, who herself is doing a one-person show poking fun at the male-dominated world of math and academia. It plays the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia beginning Oct. 1.

As a “recovering mathematician” — she was a grad student at M.I.T — De Cari often heard the phrase “woman mathematician.” That was part of what led her to craft her show: “Truth Values: One Girl’s Romp Through M.I.T.’s Male Math Maze.”

“Woman” is a modifier De Cari says she hears often to describe people in business, law, theater, fashion — occupations where

no one first says “male.”
 “Maybe someday, no one will say that.”

Reach Kevin Shelly at kshelly@gannett.com, (856) 449-8684 or follow him at @kcshlly

ON THE WEB

■ For more information about Kathleen Madigan, visit kathleenmadigan.com.

To purchase tickets for Madigan’s performance at the Levoy Theater, Millville, on Oct. 17, go to levoy.net.

■ For more information about Dena Blizzard, visit onefunnymother.com.

■ For more information about Gioia De Cari, visit unexpectedtheatre.org.

To purchase tickets for De Cari’s performance at the Annenberg Oct. 1 to 5, go to annenbergcenter.org/tickets/?id=316.

“In the future this won’t be a discussion. The question will just be: ‘Isn’t that a great show?’”

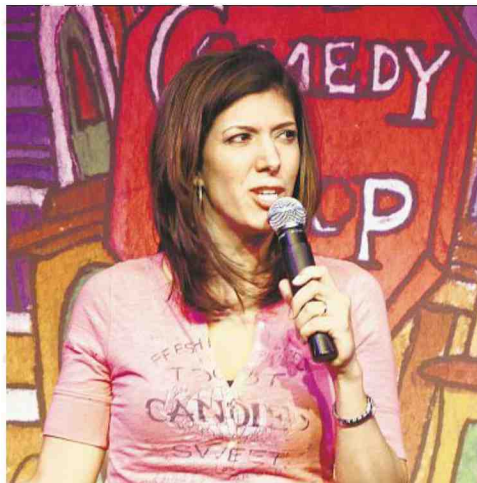
DENA BLIZZARD

Comedian



Gioia De Cari ‘dreams of a world’ where women are labeled ‘female comedians.’

PHOTO PROVIDED



Blizzard makes it very clear she's a quick-witted joke teller first, and a mother second. COURIER-POST



“To me, everything works like the mob. If you make money and do your job right, you’re OK. Man, woman, monkey: It doesn’t make a difference. If you sell tickets, everyone is happy.”

KATHLEEN MADIGAN
Comedian

A veteran comedian like Kathleen Madigan recognizes that gender barriers in comedy exist, but is too busy busting guts to care. PHOTO PROVIDED



Dena Blizzard, a Camden County resident, is a former Miss New Jersey, but don't be fooled — she brings the funny. PHOTO PROVIDED