

Filling UP

Jewish, lesbian *and* a kiwi! DEAN DURBER meets comic, Deb Filler.



There's a comic coming our way who chooses to identify herself as an "Export Kibrew". What does that mean? The definition has something to do with labels and categories, but perhaps more to do with the ridiculousness of their existence. Deb Filler is from New Zealand. Her family are survivors of the holocaust. She has sold futons in New York. She has memories of a childhood when all the kids around her munched on cute tiny sandwiches, while her own grandmother needed a crane to life the wedges she created. It's a Jewish thing. With all these experiences beside her, this "pretty sophisticated kiwi girl" brings her outsider life into the world of popular comedy. "I think we all want to laugh," she declares. "We all love to laugh. That's what intrigues me. What makes people laugh?"

DEAN DURBER: Does your identification as a "Jewish Lesbian Kiwi" comic bare relevance to the stories you tell?

DEB FILLER: Oh my God. That's outed me! I'm the only Jewish Kiwi comic called Debbie and that's hard enough to bear, but now this revealing question. Nope is the answer. I don't have a Jewish Lesbian Kiwi act at all. Though I have a song that I may add if I play Surry Hills or Darlinghurst: "I like to Pushy-Pushy with My Friends, I don't Care if they're straight or Lesbians." It got passed over at the Grammys. But only by a hare.

Do you feel a need to identify yourself in this way? Not in the least. Quite the opposite. I love Jewish jokes and being a Kiwi. But for me personally, sexuality and religion are mysteries, personal paths to explore. And I don't feel the need to talk about it really. Also, how I identify is more of a mystery to me in some ways and that's not funny. It's boring. Eddie Izzard doesn't do many jokes about the fact he's a straight Transvestite. But he is.

What does the Jewish aspect offer to your work?

Oh my God. I feel like I'm being dissected. I also have brown hair and pretty good tits. When do we get to those questions?

What does being a lesbian offer to your work?

It makes it richer, sharper, more edgy, more of me in there. But I don't do KD up there. I do me.

What does being a New Zealander offer to your work?

There's a part of me that is so Kiwi. And another that's so New York. I think that's an interesting juxtaposition, especially the jokes. There's a real Jewish joke and storytelling tradition. Doing that, mingled with my own adventure stories like how I met Leonard Bernstein and what a profound effect he had on me, plus all the characters I do, makes for a fun intercultural mix.

Do you think that those who identify with none of your 'categories' can find humour in your stories? Can they find more than humour?

What? Who? Where? Yeah! There are some great stories, pretty unique to me but I think people can picture themselves where I've been. That's one of the points of storytelling and joke telling. You understand it coz you know it.

Are there some things you would never try to make people laugh at? What are your taboos?

Rape, violence, homophobia, racism. Though I have stooped to a couple of cannibal jokes. Pretty controversial. Jeffrey Dahmer has a lot to answer for.

Do you find that you ever have to compromise your humour to suit the acceptability level of your audience?

Shit, if you'd been there that hot afternoon in Boca Raton, Florida. One woman was profoundly pissed off because of "The melon is soft"

Who are your comic heroes and heroines?

I love a good joke teller. Physical comedians like Harpo

and Danny Kaye and Robin Williams and Lucy and Ethel. I loved Mary Tyler Moore, Mel Brooks, Jack Benny, Imogene Coca, Gilda Radner, Lisa Kudrow. Michael Richards (Kramer) is brilliant. I must admit to getting a kick out of Billy Crystal's characters like Sammy Davis Junior. Ellen Degeneres is so brilliant because I love that self-deprecating thing she does: it's a winner. And Whoopi is very, very cool.

Do you believe in a universal language of humour? Absotively.

Have you ever experienced telling a joke and seen it fall flat on its face?

Please, let's not go there. It happened last night.

The wider stereotype is often that gay men are the bubbly fun people, while dykes are the sad, poorly dressed bunch with no sense of humour. Can you comment?

I know a lot of funny both. And a couple of misery balls in both camps too, you should pardon the pun. Gay men have a great sense of camp and when comics are camp it goes well with that audience. Dykes like humour more about things women identify with, stuff that's never been said before. Daring stuff. Sexy stuff. Gay men like sexy women too, but in a different way.

How would you wish for other people to identify you? Intelligent and funny and sincere and tall!

Deb Filler performs at the Hakoah Club, Hall Street, Bondi on Saturday 1 & Sunday 2 April. Tickets \$30. Call 9130 3344.