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Catching Up With Kate the Great: The Lesbian First Lady of Laughs Talks Pride, Politics, P-Town, Parties and Protesting

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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With her riotous, political, acerbic style of comedy, Kate Clinton has been the darling of the LGBT community since she first made us laugh way back in the early '80s. This denizen of New York City and Provincetown has talent to spare, with more than six one-woman shows under her belt plus three books, eight CDs, two DVDs and countless appearances. Clinton is renowned for her generosity, regularly donating her time and talent to emcee awards celebrations and Pride festivals.

EDGE sat down with Clinton to talk about her slate of new projects for this summer, among them a new comedy show, summertime high jinks in Provincetown, NCLR's 40th anniversary, the March on Washington, GLAD's summer party,

Bride Pride and blogs, vlogs and podcasts.



EDGE: Happy Pride, Kate! Tell our readers about your new summer show, 'Zombie Apocalypse!' What inspired it?

Clinton: People say to me all the time, 'You must have so much material.' And I do! It has overwhelmed my comedy-delivery system. But I'm a big experimenter and very tech-oriented, so I made a complicated comedy algorithm and ran all my material through.

And it turns out that knock-knock jokes are the most efficient delivery system. People love them, and the groaning is not always that bad. They were huge during the Depression. They were even in Broadway shows! Everyone loves them.

My shows usually run in spring and go through my summer in Provincetown. But things change so fast, we may have an actual apocalypse. Then what?



EDGE: Provincetown is your summer home base. Why is it such a great place to visit?

Clinton: The island nation of Provincetown is a natural beauty with extraordinary, untouched seashores, and it's a wonderful LGBT town. People come from Boston for day trips and from all over the country and world, but it will be interesting to see if anyone even comes to America anymore. If so, make sure your papers are in order.

Provincetown is a wonderful, welcoming place. And I think this year it has become sort of a sanctuary from Jefferson

Beauregard Sessions. For a lot of people, this is a shock to the system, and life is not going to go the way they thought. But LGBT people have always been insurgents: We've been fighting against this kind of thing for a long time. And we have skills.

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EDGE: Your brand of humor has always been very political-oriented. Now, with Donald Trump in the White House, do the jokes write themselves?

Clinton: Sometimes I just say what he did, then tilt my head a little bit. Trump being elected made a lot of people up their game. Before you could just joke that he looked orange, but not anymore. The job of a comic is to put it in context, to go a little deeper.

So let's give a shout-out to Samantha Bee's 'Full Frontal,' because she hired a full staff of women writers, and it really shows. Her work is not just an afterthought -- it goes deep into things. I think in many ways, we thought Trump was a giant joke, but the joke has been on us.

EDGE: You always lend your talent to emcee our community's events. On May 20, you covered the 40th anniversary of the National Center for Lesbian Rights at San Francisco's Palace of Fine Arts.

Clinton: Usually they are major party girls. They throw a very good party. Their 30th anniversary was at a pier in San Francisco, with girls on trapezes and everything. They're a really amazing organization that are happy to say they're lesbian, which I like. When you find the three-ring circus, I'll be right in the middle to guide you.



EDGE: You're also heading to Washington, D.C., on June 11 for the Equality March. Are you anticipating standing up to the Trump administration?

Clinton: I will be there for the weekend of the March on Washington, and then I'm doing two shows at theaters in D.C. Which is great: I haven't done a theater in D.C. in a long time, so I am expecting a lot of people. I write a column every month for the Washington Blade, so people know my work there. I also write columns for Huffington Post and for a progressive magazine in Madison, Wisconsin.

EDGE: I hear you also have a vlog that you record regularly. Tell us a little about some of the topics you cover?

Clinton: I do this pretty much every week, with some lapses. It's a two-minute thing on YouTube, which has been really great to do. I plan the show like I'm still a high school English teacher: There's three topics I talk about, and we just start recording and see what happens. I allow myself to be a little looser and confident, to be spontaneous.



EDGE: Tell us about your new 'Listen Up' podcast.

Clinton: I recently initiated this and am trying to hook it up with iTunes. I may have to hire some young people to make that happen.

I'm astounded by the number of people who listen to podcasts! My dream is to read the paper with my girlfriend as a podcast. In my house, it's become a contact sport. I also see a lot of people come through New York that I'd like to nab and talk to. I hope to have it up and running in another month.

EDGE: In late July, you are officiating another Bride Pride event in Provincetown, as you did last year. Why are you holding this

event again?

Clinton: Bride Pride will be held on July 22, and it's the world's largest all-girl wedding and renewal ceremony. It is huge and so wonderful! I hate to even say 'huge' anymore, but there were 50 couples and 28 got married, with the others renewing their vows. I planned it with two women from the Roux Guesthouse during Women's Week last year.

But so much goes on during Women's Week that it became out of control. So this year we are doing it in July, during Girl Splash, a 10-year-old party. Once again, I'll be the 'solemnizer,' which is what they call it. It's a beautiful moment and a wonderful celebration of love that is also celebrated by the community. I was so moved by it last year that I know it will be another wonderful event!

EDGE: A week later, you'll be emceeing the July 29 Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders 36th Annual Summer Party. How's that for a great ending to a great month?

Clinton: GLAD has been at the forefront of marriage equality and state marriage in Massachusetts, and I have



been literally flabbergasted by the work of not only Mary Bonauto but also the other amazing strategists who work there.

Now more than ever, we need them and the work they do. The way they can mobilize the broader legal system to defend gay couples, immigrants and more is invaluable. I love what they do, so I help them party at the Provincetown Monument. They say, 'Bring your skills to the table,' but entertaining them is a real honor.

EDGE: In closing, can you give your fans a taste of your new show, 'Zombie Apocalypse!'

Clinton: Sure. Knock knock. Who's there? Dozen. Dozen who? Dozen matter what you say -- we will resist!

For more information about Kate Clinton, visit kateclinton.com/kates-dates.

Kate Clinton - SIS-BOOM-BAH



Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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