

INTERVIEW: ZOE LYONS

Meet Miss Machismo

Zoe Lyons cracked 'the funniest joke' at last year's Edinburgh Fringe, and managed to wind up Germaine Greer in the process.

By **Anne Giacomantonio**



STEVE ULLATHORNE

Zoe Lyons has been on the UK comedy circuit for six years, gigging in clubs and fringe festivals all over the country with her own brand of observational wit. She was made a patron of Pride in 2007, and will be performing at the Southbank's Underbelly venue as part of this year's festival, alongside Craig Hill, Susan Calman and Jonathan Mayor, in *Stand Up with Pride!*

Are you looking forward to your Pride London show?

Yes, I'll be doing some material from my Edinburgh Fringe show, and some will be old stuff. I won't be doing the full hour - I don't think the other acts will be very impressed if I said: "I've just got to run through this stuff, I hope you don't mind."

What does being a patron for Pride London mean to you?

This year I'm going on the march as patron of Pride. I was very honoured to be asked to do it [in 2007], with the likes of Stephen Fry and Sir Ian McKellen, who does an awful lot for Stonewall and gay rights.

I am looking forward to this year and being a bit more visible. However, if I was asked to dress up as a very proud pineapple, I'd be outta there - that's not happening.

You won the Funny Women award in 2004, just seven months after your first gig as a stand-up. What was it that made you want to be a comedian?

Utter desperation! No, I'd done psychology at university, I'd studied to be an actress at drama school and I didn't

really feel very comfortable in that world. I ended up waitressing and not getting any acting work and not really pursuing acting work either.

I got to the point where I thought: if I'm really honest, what I want to try and do is be a stand-up. So I booked myself in to do five minutes [at a new act night] at the King's Head in Crouch End, north London. I had no material, obviously, but I thought I was funny, so I just wrote five minutes and did it. From that week on, I gigged continually.

How did you summon up the guts to do your first gig?

The first gig I wasn't even that nervous... It was the second gig. I almost soiled myself and went blind with fear in one eye - I couldn't see the microphone. It was like: "I've gone blind with fear, that does really happen."

You have a show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival again this year. Are you looking forward to it?

This will be my third one. Yes and no. I'll be fine once I get up there, but it's always very stressful beforehand, previewing it and making sure you have enough material. I always have fun when I get up there. It's a long old festival - four weeks is a long time and I always get homesick by the end.

I'm previewing at the moment. It's still on bits of paper and I record it on my Dictaphone, listen back later and cry to myself. It's a long, drawn-out process.

What's the theme of your show?

It's called *Miss Machismo*. I was slagged off by Germaine Greer in an article about whether women are funny, and I've used that as a kicking-off point. She described my sense of humour as

"astonishingly vicious", along with Joan Rivers, and I was like: "Well, that's it: I've made it - now I can retire." It was basically because I did this quite hard joke about Amy Winehouse which won [the Dave award for] the Funniest Joke at the [2008 Edinburgh] Fringe".

I don't get the idea that, because we [Joan Rivers and I] are women, we shouldn't be able to take the piss out of another woman. It gave me a bit of a swagger and a sense of machismo. The show is kind of about the stupid things that people have said to me while I have been gigging around the country.

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Catch Zoe at Pride London on 3-4 July. Her Edinburgh show, 'Zoe Lyons: Miss Machismo', is at the Pleasance Courtyard, from 5-30 August. Ticket line: 0131-226 0000

NEWS IN BRIEF

Assembly sparks complaints

An assembly at a Kent school that mentioned gay relationships has led to a raft of complaints from parents. Children at Bromstone Primary listened to a song by Elton John and were told what being gay means as part of an assembly on bullying. In a statement, Kent County Council education officer Lynne Miller said: "Young children are exposed at a very early age to homophobic language. Pupils may call each other 'gay' without really understanding what it means, but learn that it means something negative, useless and not positive. If such usage is not challenged, it makes it much more difficult to address homophobic bullying in secondary schools."

Three open gays in Cabinet

The recent Government reshuffle means there are now three openly gay figures in the Cabinet, with MP Ben Bradshaw having been appointed as the Culture Secretary - alongside Peter Mandelson, the Business Secretary, and Nick Brown, Chief Whip.

US rejects military change

America's Supreme Court has rejected a challenge to the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rule, which bans openly gay men and women from serving in the US military. President Barack Obama had promised to repeal the ban in his election campaign. But Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell

confirmed there are no plans to repeal it. Support for repealing the rule has risen in the last four years, with a Gallup poll showing Americans are 6 percentage points more likely to favour the lifting of the ban than they were in 2005. The biggest increases in support are among conservatives and weekly church-goers.

Radio station apologises

A Bristol radio station has had to apologise after a presenter called homosexuality a "pestilence" and claimed that "right-thinking" people thought it was unnatural. The segment was broadcast in March on Ujima Radio, a community station serving Bristol's black community.

In *The Noon Show*, its daily news programme, the presenter said: "Goodness knows what I would do if my sons turned round and told me they [are gay]. I know what I would do, but I won't tell you on-air." Ofcom ruled the programme was in breach of the broadcasting code.

MSPs back protection Bill

The Scottish Parliament has voted to pass legislation to protect gay, trans and disabled people from hate crime. The Sentencing of Offences Aggravated by Prejudice (Scotland) Bill, proposed by the openly gay Scottish Green MSP Patrick Harvie, will bring Scotland in line with the rest of the UK.

Tories ahead of Labour

A survey of PinkNews.co.uk readers has found support for Labour has plunged since the last general election. Thirty-nine per cent of respondents said they planned to vote Conservative at the next general election, compared with 29 per cent for Labour. In 2005, 37 per cent of them had voted for Labour, 24 per cent for the Liberal Democrats and 23 per cent for the Tories.

Bringing up baby penguin

Two "gay" male penguins have hatched a chick and are rearing it as its adoptive parents, according to a zoo, in Bremerhaven, Germany. The males were given an egg that was rejected by its biological parents.