



The Cho Must Go On

Back on the medium that made her famous, Margaret Cho delivers a naked glimpse at her (almost) real world.

Words: Scott Kearnan

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and children of all ages: welcome to *The Cho Show*, an explosive series of delights bound to shock, awe and entertain. At the center of it all is ringmaster Margaret Cho (comedian-actress-author-activist-fag-hag and semi-professional hyphenate), welcoming you into the three-ring circus of her “semi-scripted” off-stage life. Gape at the gaggle of gay chums; coo at the celebrity cameos; and behold the diverse array of familial and external relations, from Cho’s modest and sweetly unassuming Korean-American parents to her devout, 3 foot 10 inch tall burlesque dancer pal-cum-personal assistant.

Of course, ask Cho herself about the most titillating attractions on display, and you’ll receive a far more direct response:

“They’re gonna see my hole!” she gleefully exclaims. “And everyone knows that once you see someone’s hole, you can’t predict what’s going to happen.”

Margaret Cho’s new reality sitcom isn’t just putting the V back in VH1; it’s also putting the star back in her familiar television stomping grounds. Lest audiences forget, before she was headlining her sell-out comedy tours and receiving liberal kudos as an outspoken political activist—especially on behalf of the GLBT community, Cho came to mainstream attention as the star of her own TV vehicle, *All American Girl*. Though the mid-’90s sitcom was a short-lived foray on to the small screen, it left a long-lasting impression on both the greater culture and its leading lady’s psyche: On the former, it had a positive impact as the first show to revolve around an Asian American family; but on the latter, its behind-the-scenes drama over Cho’s weight, personal appearance and cultural identity led to a period of personal self-destructiveness and an indelibly negative impression of the television medium.

"I was really gun-shy when it came to doing television again, because of my past experiences," says Cho.

But Cho was also determined to have the last laugh at the industry

than willing to show her hole to the TV land audience, other elements of her life remain off limits.

"I want to stay married," she explains, when asked why her hus-

band does not appear on the show. However, every other member of core crew is well represented.

"We are totally different from anything else on TV," says Cho. "We are Asian American, we are Mexican, we are gay, my assistant is a little person... we look different. We're like *The Hills*, but with eyes."

and sought out another opportunity to bring Asian-American faces to television. And in fact, the first episode of *The Cho Show*—titled "Korean of the Year"—sees the comedian hemming and hawing over whether to accept an award from the Korean-American community, the same community that lambasted her first attempt to represent them.

"They were angry that they didn't get to choose their own representative," says Cho of the reaction *All American Girl* received from the Korean-American community: "I was way too female... I was way too queer... I was talking about sex, and it was hard for them. They did not accept me. I was threatened; Korean groups would picket and write petitions to get me off the air; and little girls would write me letters saying that I made them ashamed to be Korean."

As *The Cho Show* makes clear, the reaction has come full circle. "It was a horrible experience. But then all those people died," she laughs. "Now, their kids worship me as the first Asian person they saw on TV... I'm revered because of my longevity and I've become an icon within the culture."

Cho has also become a popular icon in gay culture, and one episode of the show will celebrate the momentous arrival of equal marriage rights in California. But while Cho says that her politics are too integral a part of her personality to totally take a backseat on *The Cho Show*, most of the season's setups and scenarios will focus on fare lighter fare: Margaret goes camping! Margaret makes a sex tape! Cho makes no bones about the fact that the show is semi-scripted, an improvisational mix of reality show and sitcom that she likens to "a Christopher Guest movie." Indeed, while she's more

thing else on TV," says Cho. "We are Asian American, we are Mexican, we are gay, my assistant is a little person... we look different. We're like *The Hills*, but with eyes."

Eyes to see, that is. And for a star who once struggled with her small screen self-image, *The Cho Show* is a liberating exercise in showing the skin she now wears more comfortably.

"When I first did television, they thought I was too fat. I ended up anorexic because of it, and I was hospitalized and fucked up," says Cho. "So now, I'm like, naked in every episode. That way, they can see my ass and kiss it."

Pucker up.

