

Hot naked girls!

Comedian Margaret Cho brings burlesque to Chelsea

COMEDY/VARIETY

THE SENSUOUS WOMAN

Wed. & Thurs. 8 p.m., Fri & Sat. 8 & 11 p.m., Sept. 26-Oct. 20

The Zipper Factory

336 West 37th Street

(212.352.3101; thezipperfactory.com)

BY WILL MCKINLEY

Margaret Cho is a troublemaker. And that's why her fans love her.

The 38-year-old Asian-American comedian launched her stand-up career at the age of 16, performing in a club above her parents' bookstore in San Francisco. Cho spent the next decade paying her comedic dues in clubs, colleges and on late-night TV, but her big break nearly broke her.

Her 1994 ABC sitcom "All-American Girl" was cancelled after one tumultuous season, during which the comedian practically starved herself to placate weight-obsessed network executives. Cho descended into an abyss of substance abuse and eating disorders, re-emerging in 1999 with a critically acclaimed one-person show, concert film and book about the ordeal.

Since then Cho has become an outspoken advocate for women's and gay rights, her live shows teetering on a tightrope between broad comedy and group therapy. But her devoutly loyal fans seem perfectly willing to follow her in whatever direction she chooses to venture.

Now Cho is about to break the rules again, bringing her sexy, gender bending burlesque show "The Sensuous Woman" to Chelsea's Zipper Factory for a month of performances that are bound to generate controversy and headlines.

WILL MCKINLEY: For people who are unfamiliar with your work, how would you describe yourself?

MARGARET CHO: I'm very queer. I'm very feminist. I like to be provocative and say things that are wild and out there.

You say you're queer, but aren't you married to a guy?



Austin Young

Margaret Cho gets "Sensuous"

Yes, but I still identify as gay. That's where my politics are and that's where my friends are. That's where everything is for me.

Was there any sense of betrayal among your gay fan base when you married a man?

No, because I believe in marriage. I think marriage is important. That's why I believe in gay marriage. I think gay marriage is just as important.

In 2001 you said, "I'd like to get married and I'd like to have a tattoo, but I'm afraid of being stuck with something I'm going to hate for the rest of my life." Since then you got married and you got a whole bunch of tattoos. How's it working out?

Well, I got to the stage where I'm old enough to realize that I'm only going to have to live with it for so long. I think it's just about growing up. I'm a more mature person now.

How do you feel about what's going on now politically and how does that inform what you do on stage?

I am really fed up with the way that conservative politics have let us down. I'd love to see more responsibility and accountability in this country. I think that's really important. There are a lot of things that I feel politically that work their way into the show. I'm having a lot of fun with the whole Larry Craig scandal. I love all of the gay scandals. That's my favorite thing.

Over the years your stand-up has grown increasingly personal and confessional. Has that played a role in the development of "The Sensuous Woman?"

Well this show is pretty provocative. It's pretty wild. I'm actually getting naked in it.

So you're going to be on stage without clothes on?

Yes. And there will be lots of other people with no clothes on.

Is that legal?

I think so.

What other acts are in the show?

We have a gay rapper named Lisp, a female-to-male transgendered comedian named Ian Harvie, a little person named Selene Luna and Princess Farhana, who is a belly dancer. And I'll be doing some different characters. The cast is pretty incredible.

Did you create the show with a gay audience in mind?

I think it's for everyone. It's for any audience.

So what's the hook for straight dudes to come out for it?

Well, it's hot naked girls. And it's really fun too. It's a comedy, music, dance, and variety burlesque show. It's my own version of an extravaganza, like "Donny and Marie."

So are you the Donny or the Marie of this show?

I think I would be both. I'm a little bit Country and a little bit Rock and Roll.