

Are You There, Crowd? It's Me, Margaret.

WORDS MASON LERNER PHOTO PIXIEVISION PRODUCTIONS

Margaret Cho is reinventing herself once again. But of course, she is being comical about it. The San Francisco native, famous for her controversial, extreme left-leaning political humor, is recording a musical comedy album and working on a new show for the Lifetime Network called "Drop Dead Diva."

Cho is known for speaking her mind and letting fly her biting, from-the-hip humor. She recently talked with ENZY correspondent and fellow stand-up comedian, Mason Lerner, about her new projects, the challenges facing the GLBT community, female body image and whether or not Sarah Palin really is the worst thing to happen to America since 9/11. She's angry. She's hopeful. She's Margaret Cho.

ENZY: You have a music album coming out soon, right?

Margaret Cho: I'm writing the songs for it now. So it probably won't be out until sometime next year.

What kind of music is it going to be?

It really is all over the place. I don't write music. I am writing all the lyrics, but I am collaborating for the music with a lot of different artists. It's pretty incredible, the range of people that I'm working with. People like Jon Brion, Grant Lee Phillips, Kathy King and all these different people. There's no genre. Everything is all different. It's crazy. It's great.

Which has kind of been the theme for your entire career. What inspired you to cross over to music?

It's still stand-up comedy. It's a lot like the old comedy records of the '70s. Things like Steve Martin used to do with the banjo. All that was still considered stand-up comedy. And I do play guitar, so it is a way to do something that I grew up with. This is the comedy that I grew up with. Stuff that was pretty diverse. I really loved Dr. Demento, which was

this great radio show that was on when I was a kid. It was all stupid comedy songs.

Of course, you are very active in issues that affect the GLBT community. What do you think is the biggest issue in that realm now?

Well, right now, it's gay marriage, because it's symbolic of a much larger issue of whether or not you can put limitations on equality. It's a much bigger issue than just relationships or marriage. It has to do with whether the government views gays and lesbians as human beings. So that is an issue that I have been involved with for a long time. And certainly in the last four years, it has gotten very intense.

I read recently that the first openly gay fraternity was established at the University of Texas at Austin. Which is a big deal, because up until now, all of the fraternities there have only been openly homo erotic. What do you think the biggest step forward for the movement has been over the last few years?

Well, the big step forward was that gay marriage was legalized in California. And then also in Connecticut. Those are exciting steps forward. But a big step

backwards was, of course, Proposition 8 passing. And just the way the whole Proposition 8 campaign in California was handled. It was really based on fear, ignorance and lies. It was really distorted by the proponents of Proposition 8, who were telling voters that they would be teaching gay sex at schools, which is so ludicrous. So I think the major events around Prop 8 were definitely the ones that people will remember about this whole marriage business.

I read several articles that said a lot of money that supported Prop 8 came from out of state Mormons. Who better to moralize about what a marriage should be?

Well, I think they are trying to escape their own weird Polygamist past. And they're trying to kind of put a smokescreen over what they've done. But I mean, that church has a real history of bigotry. Not only towards gays and lesbians, but they have a history of racism that is pretty apparent to anybody who knows anything about that church. So I imagine they wouldn't have any trouble being behind any campaign that reveals ignorance and their own bigotry.

This is not directly related, but I just read that South Carolina is actually making arrests and trying to build a case against Michael Phelps because of the picture of him smoking [pot].





That's a real step back. He's definitely a national hero. And why should pot make a

'HOW SHITTY TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF YOUR WEIGHT—ESPECIALLY AT A CHILI COOK-OFF.'

difference in that? His ability to win all those gold medals wasn't affected by it, so why does it matter? He still won those medals. It's not like steroids. I think pot is something that is a waste of time for law enforcement. I don't think of it as a date rape drug. I don't think of it as anything but what it is. It's not a big deal.

You famously had some Hollywood-imposed struggles with weight when you did your sitcom. And just recently, Jessica Simpson has been in the news so much for allegedly being overweight. And she is obviously a stunning beauty by any standard. What did it take for you to get comfortable with yourself? Is there anything that can be done to allow women to be more free with their bodies?

The whole Jessica Simpson thing is really appalling to me. She is

beautiful. She is who she is. There is no reason to be so critical of her. All the people who are being critical online and all of the people who are saying stuff about her, I am sure they don't look better than she does. It's ridiculous. And I think the problem is the way the Internet has put a lot of people's opinions out there, but it doesn't hold them accountable. So you have a lot of meanness and a lot of real misogyny in that realm. For me, I'm older, so I have a sense of freedom about myself. I don't even care.

I'm 40. I don't give a shit. I think when you get older, you just don't give a shit about stuff like that. But I feel bad for Jessica. It just sucks. How shitty to be discriminated against because of your weight—especially at a chili cook-off.

Who are your favorite comedians of all time and active right now?

I have a few. People who I never miss are Wanda Sykes and Chris Rock. I never miss them. I am also really in love with "Flight of the Conchords." I love what they do with music. I love the guys.

Do you really think that Sarah Palin was the worst thing to happen to the United States since 9/11?

Well, I never really believed that anyway. I was just saying that because I thought it was funny. So I still don't really believe it, but I stick by it.

She might be the worst thing to happen to America, but do you think she also might be the best thing to ever happen to comedy?

Sure. I would say that is true. She certainly invigorated comedy. There is no doubt that she gave comedy a shot in the arm.

Catch Margeret Cho in Austin during SXSW from March 19 to 21.
margaretcho.com