



GO GUIDE
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A photograph of a woman with long, dark hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a red and white horizontally striped zip-up top. The background is plain white.

the
Fashion
issue

+ INSIDE: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET CHO

THE GIRL'S GOT MO-CHO

MARGARET CHO SPEAKS HER MIND

By Kerrie Kennedy

Anyone who's seen Margaret Cho perform knows she's not one to hold back. Opinionated, sexually explicit, outrageous, angry, fearless—and above all, funny—Cho goes where other comedians are afraid to tread. She speaks her mind, even if what's on her mind is really, really vulgar. Nothing is off limits.

But over the phone, there's almost no sign of that Margaret Cho. The woman I'm speaking to is low-key, soft-spoken and disarmingly sweet.

That is, until you get her started on politics. Suddenly, the sweet voice changes and the outspoken, funny Margaret Cho we've come to know emerges.

"I can't figure it out—there are so many people running," Cho says. "It's like America's Next Top President. I just want them to be eliminated. And I want John Edwards to be eliminated first."

Cho, who runs a pro-gay marriage website, loveisloveislove.com, takes issue with Edwards' opposition to gay marriage and his claim that it's against his religion. "Well, fuck you that it's against your religion," Cho says. "And fuck you for having a religion that doesn't include gays."

In the past, Cho has identified herself as bisexual, but over the phone she says she's "much more into trans-gendered people."

Married since 2003 to artist Al Ridenour, Cho has dated a number of high-profile men over the years, including Quentin Tarantino, Chris Issacs and Garret Wang.

Whatever her sexual orientation, Cho, a self-described "fag hag" enjoys a huge gay following and is a tireless gay rights activist. "I do talk a lot about queer culture," Cho says. "Because my outlook is very queer."

That outlook may have a lot to do with her colorful childhood. The daughter of Korean immigrants, Cho grew up in San Francisco, where she was raised by an assortment of stand-in parents, including gay men and drag queens (Cho's father was deported when she was a baby). Cho attended grammar school on Haight Street in the 1970s, and by the time she was 16 she was performing stand-up in the comedy club above her parent's San Francisco bookstore.

Cho's career began in earnest at 18, when she won a comedy contest in which the coveted first prize was opening for Jerry Seinfeld. It was a huge break for Cho—Seinfeld's approval gave her the confidence she needed to plunge forward. Today, she realizes just how lucky she was.

"It's a tough business for everyone, but especially for women," Cho says. "Women [comics] don't get a whole lot of support from the men. They don't have the same kind of support network. Men get a lot of

affirmation; they get a lot of strength from each other. We [women comics] don't have a community—we have to count on ourselves."

Although Cho's brand of comedy has often been compared to that of Richard Pryor and Lenny Bruce, perhaps it's no surprise that it's mostly female comics who inspire her. "I love Rosie O'Donnell, Roseanne Barr and Kathy Griffin," Cho says.

But of the three, Barr has the distinction, says Cho, of starring in one of three great television shows built around comedians (the others, she says, were "Seinfeld" and "Mork and Mindy.")

Unfortunately, Cho did not fare quite as well as Barr with her sitcom, "All-American Girl," which aired in 1994 and was cancelled after the first season. What's more, pressures from the show's producers led to an eating disorder and body image issues, and later, after the show was cancelled, drug and alcohol addiction.

Unlike many other comedic casualties, Cho managed to clean up her act, making peace with her body and transforming her pain and struggles into a moving—and ultimately funny—story of survival that became part of her act.

But she's realistic about the ever-present temptation that self-destructive behavior has for people in her industry.

"It's part of the whole drama of being





an artist," Cho says. "Certainly the lifestyle is pretty intense—traveling the road is hard. Then when you perform, there's an adrenaline rush that you get. You're always chasing after that rush."

These days, Cho gets her rush from belly dancing (which hopefully is the reason behind her recent, rather dramatic weight loss), multiple tattoos and her new burlesque/comedy show, "The Sensuous Woman."

"I love women and I love the whole idea of doing a show to celebrate women's bodies," Cho says. "It's fun and exciting."

And having fun, it turns out, is part of what makes Margaret Cho tick. "I like to have fun," she says. "I don't take anything too seriously."

It's a trait, says Cho, which allows her to be absolutely fearless on stage. "You have to be brave to be a good comedian," she says. "You can't be too sensitive about things. It requires a kind of stamina and resilience. You have to be willing to do pretty much anything."

And that's the thing about Margaret Cho: she's willing to do—and say—just about anything. And that's what we love about her.

Margaret Cho's variety show, "The Sensuous Woman," featuring a line-up of the country's most renowned burlesque performers, comes to the Lakeshore Theater, 3175 N. Broadway, 8 p.m. Sept. 19 and 20 and 8 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Sept. 21st and 22nd.



MARGARET CHO ON FASHION

She's had her own clothing line (High Class Cho), then introduced her own line of belly dancing belts (Hip Wear) and even played a fashion designer on "Sex & The City" (the episode that had Carrie modeling—and falling—down the runway), but Margaret Cho is no fashionista. "I've made a few belly dancing belts, but it's not really something I do," she says. "I love fashion, but I sort of make my own fashion." It is a response, in part, to the unrealistic demands that the fashion industry often places on women's bodies. "Some designers are good and there's a lot of artistry involved, but a lot of the stuff out there is so un-wearable," Cho says. "The way we view women in general is flawed. There is not an expansive image of what's beautiful at least in terms of fashion." But Cho admits she's a big fan of certain designers, particularly Grant Krajecki's Grey Ant line, which features campy 1980s fashion. "Every once in a while people come along and make things that actually flatter women's bodies," Cho says.