

# Radical chick

Margaret Cho doesn't mean to be bad — she's just drawn that way

By Arnold Wayne Jones

If you need to know what Margaret Cho is all about, just look at the titles of her most recent concert tours: *Revolution*, *State of Emergency* and the brand-new *Assassin*, which she just launched this month. These counterculture anthems, coming to Dallas and Houston next month, are full of radical images like Che Guevara and Patty Hearst.

But ask Cho about the theme she's developed, and she pleads ignorance.

"To me everything sort of came at once. The artwork, the symbols are all a recurring motif, not to represent myself as countercultural, but to put out images that I like," she says.

In other words, she's a counterculture icon and didn't even know it.

Margaret Cho may be the most politically charged standup comedian working today. She's an unabashed liberal who, though heterosexual, identifies herself as "queer" in an effort to embrace the edges of mainstream society. It's little wonder, then, that she called her new tour *Assassin*.

"It's about the idea of shooting down old ideas like homophobia, hatred, classism, conservatism. The show is about character assassination — even doing it to myself," she says.

When we talked, Cho had just performed the first two dates on the tour so the material is still in a transition phase —

## ON STAGE

### Margaret Cho: The Assassin Tour

The Majestic Theatre, 1925 Elm St., Dallas April 1 at 7 p.m., April 2 at 7:30 p.m. \$30-\$45.50.

Sarofim Hall, Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, 800 Bgby St., Houston. April 7 at 8 p.m. \$29.50-\$43.50. 713-629-3700.

although she insists that's always true of her humor.

"It's very fast. Things are moving so quickly now that the show changes and evolves with whatever's going on," she says. "I don't think writing shows is hard for me. Keeping everything current and relevant is pretty easy."

There are certain topics that are constants in this show — and close to Cho's heart: Progressive politics, marriage equality, abortion rights, the death penalty and the Bush administration.

She's very involved in marriage equality and was concerned by how much of the

Republican base was mobilized to vote in favor of anti-gay-marriage legislation. Another passion is her opposition to the death penalty.

So how does she reconcile treating these serious issues in a comedy routine?

"I have a different way of speaking as a performer than as a person," she says. "I have so much training it's impossible for me to go on without making it funny or having a reward. There's an automatic reflex that makes me want to make sure there's a joke in there."

Bush, she says, "is easy. He's like a fountain of mirth. It's a good situation for a comedian.

but probably a bad one for people."

She doesn't fear bringing her radical messages to the Red States — in fact, she thinks she's needed there most of all. (She did a swing state tour during the presidential campaign last fall.)

"I love going to Texas; the people are incredibly receptive," she says. "It's really amazing how these states represent themselves [as conservative or liberal] when it's not completely true. It's almost like I'm what people need — a different voice than what's being represented as the status quo. People have a need to feel a reflection of themselves and what they believe in."

In her personal life, Cho is more subdued discussing her politics than she is in her performances. She's not one of those who seriously thought about leaving the country if Bush was reelected, and while she was surprised that Kerry lost, she's not obsessing about it.

"We don't know how good a president John Kerry would have been," she opines, "but we know George W. Bush is gonna fuck it up."

She takes comfort in that predictability — and in knowing that at least four years from now, she won't have to deal with Bush anymore. Of course, that also means she'll have to look elsewhere for material. But it seems unlikely that will present her with much of a problem.

E-mail Arnold@btnewsomag.com



Cho