

# arts

mimicry knocked me out. And that this self-proclaimed “fag hag” loudly trumpets a fair shake for all – regardless – and not just Korean-Americans such as herself, ices the cake. She has a boldness that enlivens audiences of today just the way Clinton did when she burst into the scene, I remembered.

Also on video is Julia Sweeney’s adaptation of her play *God Said Ha*. Her monologue, delivered on a set stage in front of an audience, told of a time in the 1990’s when her family crowded into her tiny Hollywood bungalow to give support to her 31-year-old brother who was dying of cancer. Great comedic set up? Hardly, one would think. But as she took us through the ordeal – which came to include her own battle with cervical-and-beyond cancer, concurrent with her brother’s terminal phase – she infused the event with a kind of fastidious humor without ever once demeaning the experience. It was admirable, and although some might remember her as Pat, the androgynous-voiced lump on Saturday Night Live, I’ll always remember her moving exactly, dressed tastefully (much as Clinton), relating her life to us, in a way, I realized, like Kate Clinton did.

And Nia Vardalos made good use of her Greek-American bits (developed when she was with Second City in Chicago) in the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. It was entertaining and the supporting cast shone – if a bit over the top, yes? And Vardalos is so real and so easy in her bones. The easy, familiar approaches to the confusion of clashing cultures made the film like a breather. I mean, it certainly didn’t rattle your brain or require real focus. Kate Clinton always does and, it was dawning on me, she could summon an easy familiar approach when she sensed the audience needed a breather.

And I realized something else when I thought back to my initial disappointment: because I always find film and video so involving, it’s easy for me to forget how *just* looking or *just* listening – not the both together – offers another way of knowing that’s as real as the alluring mix of sight and sound. And thinking of this, I put Kate Clinton’s album on again, and I stopped doing my usual three things at the same time. I just listened. After all, she was coming to me in voice only, and I would really have to see her in my mind’s eye.

I did. She was great this time. And all the accolades currently flowing her way – well, sure.

It was all there. Bush lampooned. Viagra-Bob Dole

sent up royally, so to speak. A wicked take on the Supreme Court, and Giuliani gets his. There’s Kate’s trip down Annette Benning’s birth canal (on her back) and the “ex-gay” folks get quite a good going over. When “the Rapture” never came for the evangelicals, Kate was there to comment. And I heard about the Pope (Kate was, after all, a good Catholic girl), Capri pants, her troubles in a Dot Com world, godless global capitalism, evolution, Bush fatigue (?), Vermont’s civil union, and gays that have become too nice – and more!

It’s not that she’s better than any of the young women I’ve mentioned. They are powerful performers, reaching beyond the stylized stand-up style polished by Clinton. Often these women (and so many others) don’t include words like “feminism” or “transgender” in their performances – or if they do, it’s not the whole deal. After all, they have grown up after Friedan, after Erica Jong’s “zipless fuck” and all that encompassed feminism’s “second wave.” Whatever benefits have come down to women are taken in stride, unnoticed by most young women today. And that’s a good thing, I think, for the most part, that they step into their chosen arena unfettered by the restraints that had to be broken by those who came before.

But it’s nice to read that a young woman – Jennifer Baumgardner – and others like her want to bring back the classic books of the women’s movement for today’s young women so that they’ll know their history, thereby possessing the perspective and reassurance that knowing one’s place in the stretch of time can provide.

But Kate Clinton as a Mother Figure or an historical icon is no reason to go to Dartmouth on October 5, 2002, to hear and see her.

I’m hoping to go to see Kate Clinton and watch her strut her stuff because she’s wonderfully entertaining and provides a good intellectual workout. Who knows what trajectories her scintillating rants will take? But it’ll be fun and she’ll have an audience composed of everyone because that’s the way it is for performers today, thanks in no small part to women like her. ▼

*Kristin Pettit is a retired English and drama teacher with no immediate plans to go onstage. She lives with her partner in Underhill.*

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