

Interview with Janice Perry

Janice Perry; Aka GAL, has a new show this year, *Queen Lear*. The performance at Burlington City Hall was to a sold out audience, in Gal's usual give-all style. Gal was receptive and gracious while we met in the offices of Outright/OITM. She spoke about ... Everything! Here are slices of the conversation...

OITM: I read the last interview that OITM did with you, they were basically interviewing Gal, rather than Janice, keeping them separate...

Janice: There's a reason for that. My work is interesting and readable, and my life is a regular life. And it's mine ... and I have no life other than my work.

OITM: When I saw your *Queen Lear* show at Johnson State College, you made a comment about a person leaving in the middle of your show, you said, 'oh a Christian', Do you improvise much in your show?

Janice: If someone gets up and storms out when I'm talking about S/M bondage, you have to assume it had something to do with me and not that they had to get a drink of water. Everyone sees them leave, to not acknowledge it, I don't think is good. The audience would be worried now about how I'm feeling. I need to let them know it's ok.

OITM: I read about your experience at Southern Utah University. Were people a little shocked?

Janice: That was when I did my show with the big penis. It was a lecture demonstration so some students were required to go. There were four hundred people at the show. All through the show people were jumping up and leaving, and one person pointed at me and said, "You are the devil Which was really cool. When they ran out they went to call the police, the school President, radio and the newspapers. Finally the police came over and we had a chat. They didn't throw me in

jail, but they asked me to stay in town for three days until they decided what to do. I've always regretted that they didn't throw me in jail. What was interesting about that was a lot of people left, but then I had to hang around over the next few days and people were coming up to me on the street and saying, 'I saw you but I had to leave because my boss was there, or my roommate was there or my minister was there'. People came up to me and said, 'you must be that convocation speaker that I heard about.' After the convocation they always hold a luncheon, to sit and have lunch with the speaker, normally only about five people attend. There were sixty people there, and they couldn't all fit in the room. They were all like, 'Wow, I thought I was the only person like this, People invited me to their homes. These two women invited me to their house. They were lesbians and they had never met another lesbian. So when I got back to Vermont, I sent them Lesbian Connection, Out in the Mountains, and On Our Backs, (laughter) Just to have a kind of overview That kind of stuff is really exciting. It makes me happy that I didn't go "oh I'm working with a bunch of Mormons I should tone myself down".

OITM: Is that the most extreme situation you have ever been in?

Janice: Yeah, I've never had anyone jumping up and calling me the devil until that. Normally in a university students get embarrassed by the sex stories, sometimes men are offended by my presence. Normally the response is really good.

OITM: I was thinking when I saw your recent show about the four women stoned in Somalia, the 20,000 women raped in Bosnia, the gays in the military, it was as if everything you were talking about came out of the newspaper. Somehow you put it together in a funny, thinking way. How does that happen?

Janice: Gee, I don't know..(laugh) Sometimes I don't know what I'm thinking about till I'm on the stage. There is a really outline, there's also room in there for that stuff

OITM: Do you always have a message in your work?

Janice: My feeling is that it is a waste of time not to. I hate stand-up comedy, I hate these jokes about nothing. Anything that's not really powerful and emotional is superfluous. I have to have some of this 'superfluity' just because I want to be accessible to everybody. But it's really fun when I play in a place where the people are really smart, like Smith College. I can use whatever vocabulary I want, I don't have to fiddle around. Although fiddling is fun, don't get me wrong...

OITM: In the *Vermont Times* review of the City Hall show, your piece on incest is criticized. When I was sitting in the Johnson theater, with a very, mixed audience, someone's grandmother, all the way down to high school age students, and I thought, not only are there survivors of incest, but perpetrators of incest in this room. It is obviously a painful part, there is nothing humorous about it at all. Why is it important for you to do it?

Janice: Well, you know why. You just said why.. I thought about not doing it and I think about not doing it every night. I don't think that addressing a serious subject is any indication about my commitment to performance. My commitment is to personal freedom and social justice. My feeling was not that the audience had been dulled, my feeling was that the audience was moved. It did take them a while to come back. That was the way I planned it. The first time I did that piece I didn't know how to get out of it at all. In Cologne, Germany, (the first performance of the *Queen Lear* show) we all



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