

LAFF Interview Extra: Sara Benincasa



Interviewed by Danna Williams | Photo by Lauren Goldberg

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EXTRA!

Danna Williams: Comedians, like musicians Decider talks with, have influences. But we're really interested in yours. Who are they?

Sara Benincasa: I would say the big ones are Margaret, Amy and John... Margaret Cho is a primary influence, which is interesting because we have the same manager now. [Laughs] It's kind of funny and cool how that worked out. Amy Sedaris is another influence. I love how weird, how unabashedly strange she is – how fearless she is in performance. And John Leguizamo: I love his one man shows, and he's conducting a work shop, finding material for a new one right now. I have to get to the theater to see him. He's been a big influence on me. I saw him tell stories about his family and how he was able to incorporate acting, comedy, and dance – all kinds of stuff, and I was just so impressed.

[View Margaret Cho "Gettin' Wet" w/ Sara Benincasa](#)

DW: You covered the 2008 Presidential election as a citizen reporter for MTV's Choose or Loose Street Team and Emmy-winning *Think*. What was the most annoying (or horrific) display of voter ignorance you encountered?

SB: Of course, my target group was young people, and most of the people I spoke with here in New York were very well informed about politics. I talked to students at Yeshiva University and the young women were well informed, but when I talked to the young men, who live on a separate campus, they were well informed but their position was very slanted. I spoke to one

young man he told me he felt like a pariah because he was voting for Barack Obama, and most of the male students were voting for John McCain. The ones I spoke to cited the opinion that McCain was stronger on Israel, which I thought was code speak for the view that Obama identified more with the Palestinians because his father was Muslim. They felt very nervous, even though he is a Christian, that his father, who he barely spent any time with, and that his Indonesian stepfather, were Muslim. It wasn't a question of racism, it was a question of discrimination based on creed and religion. As much as I am a bed wetting liberal, many of these guys were bed wetting conservatives. Honestly, that's a minor example of ignorance. Most of the people I spoke with had strong reasons about who they were going to vote for, and because New York is so liberal, the young people who are skewed to be liberal were supporting Barack Obama.

[View MTV's Think Campaign Videos by Benincasa](#)

DW: How did you get the idea to satirize what is referred to as women's literature and film, like *The Reader*?

SB: *The Reader*, specifically, was born of the fact that the film appeared to be what I would characterize as holocaust porn. There's this idea it seems that if you make a film about the holocaust it will automatically be critically revered, loved, and will carry with it the chance of getting amazing awards. There's something pornographic to me about taking the tragedy – the genocide – and using it to sell popcorn and win awards. It's a complex issue, and I haven't quite figured out all my feelings about it yet. But it seems to me that *The Reader* in particular was such a baldfaced attempt to appeal to people's sentimentality while at the same time making them horny. You have Kate Winslet, who is amazing, naked and making out with a boy, who in the book is 15 but in the film he's supposed to be 16, and it just seems like an absurd amalgamation of different attempts to entertain and have people say "Oh, this is a sad movie, a tragic event... But there's also boobies!" I just thought that was ripe for satire.

[Watch *The Reader* Trailer Parody on YouTube](#)

DW: You've gotten in the tub with Reggie Watts on your internet video show "Tub Talk". Is the myth true - about his huge vocal range?

SB: [Laughs.] Yes. Reggie's vocal range is extraordinary... He's an incredibly talented human being. I don't think there's anyone else out there like him. There's probably some people out there like me, but there's nobody out there who's like Reggie Watts. His talent is pure and unique to him – wonderful.

[Watch "Tub Talk"](#)

DW: Feel free to describe in your own words how fabulous your one woman show AGORAFABULOUS! will be for LAFF audiences who haven't seen the YouTube promo.

SB: AGORAFABULOUS! Is my one woman show. I just premiered it in North Carolina the other week, and it went really well, which was great. It's about the fact that I'm agoraphobic, and that I grew up having panic disorders. The show is a lot of different things. It's not exactly biographical – it doesn't go from point A to point B. I just tell a lot of funny stories from my life. There's definitely a lot of stuff about religion, about being raised Catholic, Italian and from New Jersey. Then there's a lot about dealing with panic attacks and agoraphobia. Sex, birth control and abortion are other fun topics. It's about searching my brain and creating a show with it – and the main focus is finding a way to deal with mental illness – in a creative, funny way.