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-Sarah on whether who show just goes for "shock" value

Shakefire talks with comedian Sarah Silverman about the upcoming season of The Sarah Silverman Program. Now in its third season, the show focuses on satirizing the conventional "family-friendly" or wholesome television programs.

Shakefire: What kind of subjects will you be touching on this season. You've featured many controversial or taboo subjects on the show in the past. Will we see more of that?

Sarah Silverman: We do, although I don't think we ever really go, "What can we tackle this season?" I think that would kind of be a slutty way to go about it. We just continue to still try to just write stuff that makes us laugh, and when a bunch of comics are in a room, it takes more to make us laugh; or less. I mean, aggressively stupid goes a long way in the room and on the show.

My imaginary friend from childhood comes back as an adult and we have a lesbian affair. There's some wedding action, and it's very funny; there's a new mayor in town who makes gay sex and brunch illegal. I should just look through the—let's see, I go on "Real Time with Bill Maher. Andy Samberg plays my imaginary friend this year. Ed Asner is in an episode as a Nazi war criminal. It was really, really—let me tell you something about older actors. Ed Asner is about 80, and Murray, who is on our show, Gershams, is 87, and they're such pros that when they're not shooting, they are in their chair sleeping. Just like containing their energy. And we have some really great pictures of elderly Nazi war criminals in set chairs sound asleep.

Billy Crudup plays himself on the show in an episode. I know you didn't ask who guest stars were. Let me think. There's some heavy psychedelic drug-taking in an episode. There's a lot of drugs this season, actually. I try to fight the taboo of child molesters and vans.

SF: Well it sounds like you have a good season coming up.

SS: It does, right? I know I'm forgetting like eight episodes. There's one episode; our eighth episode actually is a Steve and Brian story line that, you'll actually, dare I say, cry at the end. It was written as a drama. Rob Schrab, actually, who directs most of the episodes, and writes so much and created the show with me, wrote this episode; and he wrote the "A" story like it's a drama. I don't think it's like a very special "Family Ties," but I think you might get choked up at the end.

SF: Now how many episode ideas have been shot down by the network?

SS: None. I could complain about Comedy Central about plenty of things, I guess, but they are super cool about the most important thing, which is content. They may have gripes or they might complain or try to lure us away from a topic, but they never put their fist down and say, "No." It's awesome. They really have not meddled with any of the content we like to do.

They're great about it. They never really censor us, and even the standard and practices people can make is crazy, but really as long as we can give them a way to defend it, they'll let us go. They just always need to know how to defend something that they're worried about.

SF: It seems like you've got kind of a shock and comedy and shocking comedy, and you know some things are just there to just shock. During the writing process, how much is, "this is really hilarious" versus "this is kind of shocking and funny?"

SS: We never go for shocking if it's not funny to us. I mean, I think that we go for aggressively dumb, but I don't know because that has been what really makes us laugh in the room lately, like the biggest compliment you can get is, "That is so ... dumb."



But shock—I don't think we go like, "Ooh, that will really shock them." I mean, does anything shock anyone anymore? I think we kind of hopefully reach beyond that a little bit with our fart jokes, no. But, I think that this season there is actually growth and character arc and stuff. Hopefully still just really dumb and funny and silly. And anything smart you can infer from it from you smart brain is great. I don't know that it's pure shock value. I don't know how long that can last, and maybe that's what you're saying. I feel like we've got a really, really full season.

SF: Since you were nominated for an Emmy, has that created higher expectations for yourself, and for the show now?

SS: Well, we've always had high expectations for the show. Not in terms of accolades, but we work on it the same. I think everyone that works on it has this awesome love for it. I know it's so corny when people say that, but we really are like a group of friends. We stand on the set, not just the cast and the writers, but the crew. With all our huge, crazy insane gaps in production, all the crew works their way back to the show because we just have such an awesome time. We stand around going, "Oh my God. We're making show business. Like this is going to be on TV." It doesn't seem fair to get to do what we all love so much.

We didn't expect it so much, that none of us knew they were even announcing the Emmy nominees. I just woke up to my alarm clock and looked on my phone, and saw like eight calls, and I thought there was an emergency. It just never occurred to us ever, and then it was so great. We couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it, and we're so happy that anyone, especially the hoity-toits, would appreciate our show as much as we do. It was awesome.

It would have been great to have some sort of momentum with the other award shows in the season, but we weren't eligible for any of the others; Golden Globes or SAG Awards, or any of that stuff because we weren't on the air in 2009, at all. It will have been 14 months since the last time we were on when we air on February 4th. You'd think we were "The Sopranos" or "Lost" with these gaps, and not a 21-1/2 minute show about fart jokes, but we'll take it. We really love it. We love being together and making this super-super dumb, funny, silly show.

SF: You are now being televised on The Logo Network, and the commercial is hilarious. How do you feel about your gay fans?

SS: Well, they saved us. We wouldn't be on the air if it wasn't for Logo. Not that that's the only reason why, but I mean—it's funny because I was talking to some gay friends of mine, and they were just like; it's not just that Steve and Brian are gay, it's just kind of the subversive humor. I'm just so grateful.

I'm just so grateful to Logo. They didn't even think twice about helping us, and in terms of the content, never, ever had even a request. They really are amazing over there, and I can't express how grateful we all are for them, because we wouldn't have had a third season without them, and they asked for nothing in return. The fact that their end of the bargain is that they get to air the episodes, it's like really? It's amazing to us, too. It's so win-win and we're just so grateful. So totally grateful.

SF: As we all know, your character on TV uses bad language, rants unashamedly, and is full of sticky-sweet self-importance at the best of times. But in real life, honestly, is there anything taboo to you? Some subject or person that you won't touch; and if so, why?

SS: Well, I don't like to make fun of people, real people, and the only times I've done that is if it's a Roast or stuff like that. You know what I don't like? When people ask me that, I always think of the same thing, which is I don't like jokes about fat women. I don't like fat jokes about women, and it's just not tit for tat, you know? Like fat women in white America don't deserve love, and I don't think that's anything to make fun of, you know what I mean? It's a bummer.

SF: You've talked before about your battle with depression. When you're in that dark place, how do you continue to think and write comedically?



SS: You know what? I think the best answer to that is just practice. Practice, you know, when you do it every day, and it's part of what you do. You're able to channel it through whatever mood. And also, I think my sadness or my happiness, or any kind of manic thing; it forms whatever kind of work I do in that day.

Sometimes it's hard. I have dark times. Honestly, I'm pretty much a happy person, and I like being happy. I like being content. I think people that romanticize it don't really know how bad it is, like sadness.

There was a time, actually—you know when you're just like—I don't cry a lot, but I felt like tears had been filling me up for days, and I'd been pressing down. Then I was shooting one morning, in my pretend bed with my real dog, and we're about to shoot all the good nights, and it just happened where literally Rob said, "Action" and I went to talk and nothing came out. And just like tears. I felt so—and it was just one of those things where I said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry." It just almost became totally physical. I just was like—and they were, "It's okay. Let's take five." And half of me is crying, I don't even know why, and half of me is crying because I just feel so bad for holding things up.

It's just so cool, because my real life sister plays my sister, and she was there to do the scene after that, and so they were like, "Do you want us to get Laura?" And I was like, "Yes." And she came in and she got into my pretend bed, and just rubbed my hair and told me stories about when I was little, and it just made everything better. It was just such a sweet, weird, bizarre, but homey, almost, experience. And then I felt better, and I was like, "I feel better, but I'm afraid to call the crew back, because I know when I see their faces, I'll cry. Because they love me."

But we ended up making the day, no problem. It was good. It was just one of those big cries that you don't expect every couple years, and it was so weird. But I think of it almost fondly, because I just love those guys so much, and to have my own sister right there was nice.

SF: How much is the character of your sister like with you and your sister's relationship in real life?

SS: Similar, only I hope to think we take care of each other more. More of an equal—Laura is actually in real life older than me, but I make her my younger sister because; one, she looks ... really good, and two, I decided it would be funnier for me to be mooching off of my little sister.

But there's four of us, four girls, and we're all really close. Sometimes I just feel bad for people without sisters. I remember one time I was having a fight with a boyfriend, and I was like forwarding all our emails of stuff to my three sisters. And we're having a whole conversation by email about, "If he said this, and you should ...," and I accidentally copied him in one, and he literally saw the whole thing. But I was just like, "You know what? Whatever you say to me, you should assume that all of my sisters can hear. That's how you should talk to me. I don't take it back. That's how it's going to be. So watch it."

SF: If you didn't make it into comedy, what would you be doing?

SS: I would probably work with retarded adults. I like being around the mentally handicapped.

SF: That sounds like a good episode for your show. Maybe season three?

SS: You know what? It is an episode this season, but it's not exactly that. It's less. But there is an episode this season where I get in trouble for peeing in a mailbox, and I get sent in to work at this place called, "The Little Buddies Program" which works with retarded adults; but I think I'm paired with a mentally handicapped adult, and she thinks she's paired with a mentally handicapped adult, and we're so condescending to each other that we never realize who's retarded, because it's like, "Do you like ice cream? I love ice cream!" "Do you like ice cream? I love ice cream!"

SF: What kind of cool things can fans expect from the DVD of Season 2, Volume 2 that's coming out soon?



SS: First of all, let's see. It's the rest of Season 2. Season 2 got split up by the strike for us. There's some great behind the scenes stuff. We did audio commentary. The behind the scenes stuff is really cool on it, actually, because we always just have somebody around with a flip camera or something, backstage, and they grab us between scenes, or whatever, and make something cool out of it. There's also a bunch of animated shorts.

Those were done by this guy named Justin Roiland, who is an amazing animator and writer, and Rob Schrab knew him from Channel 101, which is a website that they do together. It's a live show here in L.A., too, where people make TV shows that are under five minutes. I don't know if you know anything about it; it's pretty spectacular, and it's how I met Schrab, and Dan Harmon—the three of us created this show together. There's just this crazy pool of talent, and Justin does this great animation, so we just kind of gave him free rein, and he would write cartoons and stuff, and grab us in between scenes to record them. And that's that.

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