

Q&A WITH RITA RUDNER

Comedian Rita Rudner is right at home on the stage. She moved to New York at age 15 to become a professional dancer and appeared in several shows on Broadway.

While performing in New York, Rudner started exploring the comedy club scene in Manhattan and in the early '80s she made the leap from dancing to a comedy career.

Rudner was a frequent guest on "Late Night with David Letterman" and "The Tonight Show," starred in several HBO specials and made appearances across the world.

In 2000, Rudner was invited by the MGM Grand to fill their showroom for six weeks, an engagement that turned into six months.

MGM built her a theater at their New York-New York property and in 2006, she moved to an even bigger theater at Harrah's.

She has written four books, including two novels. A frequent collaborator with her husband of 20 years, Martin Bergman, the pair wrote a play called "Room #776" about two strangers forced to share a hotel room in Las Vegas.

Rudner recently signed a contract extension that will keep her performing at Harrah's until January 2012.

Q: Congratulations on the new contract extension at Harrah's - What made you want to continue to stay here in Vegas?

"I have the best job in the world, that's why. I love Vegas. I get to be with my husband and my daughter and get to do my act. That's not a normal existence for an entertainer. You usually have to travel all around and sit in a hotel."

Q: Do you still perform outside of Las Vegas?

"Not really. Maybe two or three shows a year. I'm going to Hawaii tomorrow and I'm doing a show in Hawaii. But I'm bringing my family because you can't go to Hawaii without having a little vacation along with your work."

Q: You're known for wearing some glamorous gowns in your show. Do you have a favorite designer?

"Yes, his name is On Sale. Whenever I see that, I go right for that dress. Isn't he good? He's in every store and he's been everywhere lately."

Q: Do you change dresses every night?

"I have about 15 dresses now...it depends on what I had for dinner and how fat I feel."

Q: What's your typical audience like? Is it equally made up of men and women?

"It absolutely is. I have to say I'm getting lots of families now and I get lots of groups of women celebrating birthdays or reunions and I also get couples who have just gotten married



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or are celebrating anniversaries, so I think it's across the board."

Q: Do the men find the jokes just as funny as the women?

"Yes, absolutely. A lot of the men say 'I brought my wife with me, but can I take a picture with you by myself?' And the wives are very accommodating. They say 'okay.' They know that my humor isn't based on anything that's malicious and it's all things that happen to everybody every day."

Q: You were a professional dancer. What made you decide to give up dancing for

comedy?

"It was a good idea. I was 25 and you don't get to be a better dancer after you're 25, you gradually get worse. But I noticed that the comedians like George Burns and Bob Hope were in their eighties and they were still doing okay. So I said let's do a career where I don't have to jump and kick."

Q: Do you still like to dance? Ever thought about going on Dancing with the Stars?

"No. I don't dance at all. It's very strenuous. I do stretch every night in case they call. But I haven't had that phone call yet. I had somebody

inquire last year but I'm still not sure... I know that it would be a very disappointing experience for me because I used to be very, very, very good and I know I wouldn't be very, very, very good anymore."

Q: Where do you get the inspiration for your comedy?

"He's sitting next to me right here. Martin is a big inspiration. My daughter is an inspiration and just life in general. I like to point out the things that everyone experiences."

Q: Do you have any comedy heroes?

"Yes. Woody Allen and Jack Benny were my two comedy heroes because Jack Benny had the most complete comedic character, in my opinion and Woody Allen wrote the best material, in my opinion."

Q: Speaking of writing, you've written some books. What made you want to do that and is that something you want to continue doing?

"Absolutely. I'm not doing anything this year because I had a new book last year, but it's a good release. I like sitting down at the computer. My husband and I wrote a play last year and we're thinking of writing either another play or a movie because we used to write movies. I might write another book when I have a really, really firm idea. It's an extension of what I do. So anything that's an extension of what I do, I like to do. I like to keep trying to do things that are a bit different."

Q: You've written books, performed on Broadway, done television - is there anything you haven't done yet that you still want to do?

"I'd like to write something that I'm proud of. Either a movie or a play and I like working with Martin. I'm really proud of the play we wrote last year and the movies that we've written, but another one - that would be good. I always want to keep improving and I like to keep improving my act. Whenever I have a new joke that works in my act it's very satisfying."

Q: Are you constantly updating your act?

"I have two or three new things I try and put in every week because I have so many repeat customers that when they come back six months later or a year later I usually have about 20 new minutes."

Q: Do you ever get any crazy questions from the audience when you open it up for questions at the end of the show?

"Usually they're pretty normal. I can't even remember what the crazy ones were - something like what's the square root of 62? I can't answer that - you have to ask me the easy ones."

— *Interviewed by Kristine McKenzie*