



Janeane Garofalo, Comedian



Janeane Garofalo was one of the definitive comedians of the '90s. Her mix of deadpan sarcasm with heartfelt (and often angry) earnestness would set the bar for what has become an ever growing "alternative" comedy scene throughout this decade. She still is very much a part of that scene, performing around town regularly at places like UCB and Union Hall with local staples such as Eugene Mirman and Todd Barry. Tomorrow she'll be co-hosting a stand-up show with Best Week Ever's Paul F. Tompkins at the new 92Y Tribeca in a showcase that features an all-star lineup that includes both David Cross and Kristen Schaal amongst others.

While her no-bullshit politics have been at the forefront of her career since her two-year stint as a radio host on Air America, she is still finding work as, what Gene Siskel once dubbed, "one of the best supporting actresses of our time." She'll take up a regular role this season on 24, premiering next week.

Thanks for catching up with us. I just walked in the door from Trader Joe's. Stocked up on you on all your organic needs?

As much as I can in twelve items or less. Ahhh, Express. Yeah, Trader Joe's is too much for me. I do the one in Los Angeles, but here I shop at Lifetime on Sixth Avenue.

You never feel like you're overpaying too much? Yeah, I do. But that's the nature of that beast. I think that the market bears that for whatever reason, especially in urban areas, that people are willing to pay more for the offerings at co-ops, Whole Food chains, Trader Joe's chains and Lifetime.

This seems like a good time to be an Air America alum. Why?...Oh, Al Franken!

Yeah, and Rachel Maddow. Rachel, I know. I'm waiting for Sam Seder to get what's due him. He deserves his own show as well on MSNBC. He'd be great.

You've lived in the same apartment in the Village for 15 years now. That's pretty impressive to pull off here.

Well I just made the final payment on my apartment last Christmas. And it would take a ridiculous amount of work for me to make it inhabitable for another person if I wanted to sell it. It's too embarrassing what I would have to do.

There's a lot of duct tape. It smells like a dog. And I'm not the cleanest person in the world. I'm a little messy. So

even if I wanted to sell it to move, it would just be too embarrassing for someone my age to show it to others. Because it looks like a low-rent Montessori school at the moment. It looks like a bunch of kids live here. So I'm staying.

A lot of the stories you tell about getting recognized around town tend to be embarrassing ones. Is that really the case? Well it's not like I'm particularly famous. It's not like I'm Drew Barrymore walking around. But oddly it seems if I do get recognized, it happens to be when there's a big dump by my dogs I'm picking up or I slip on the ice or if I'm buying tampons or toilet paper, as crass as that sounds—please forgive me. That is when someone will say—you know what people say a lot actually, "No offense, but you look like Janeane Garofalo." Or "I don't mean to offend you, but you look like Janeane Garofalo." I never really know how to respond to that: "None taken?"

Do you have a favorite spot around town, a go-to? There was a place on 7th Street that seems to be closed now I would go to every day called Chocolate Bar, because I'm addicted to hot white chocolate. I also love spicy hot chocolate. With that closed though, now I'm forced to go to Max Brenner, chocolate by the bald man, which is always packed, but they have a nice white hot chocolate.

Can you share any good "only in New York" stories you've experienced Golly, I wish I had some "only in New York" stories. A lot of times people will say "only in New York," but how do you know? It probably could happen in any urban area. There's a lot of homeless pooping and then wiping themselves with a random flyer. I've seen a number of times where a homeless gentleman will squat and take a dump and then grab a flyer off the wall and wipe themselves. Is that only in New York? I doubt it. But the matter-of-factness could be. I've seen a random blow job given in the West Village late night. Is that only in New York? I doubt it. But it's the matter-of-factness again.

I'm always amazed when I see condoms on the curbs. I've seen sex happening...on the hood of a car...outside my window no less. I just looked out the window one night and there was a young hippie-looking couple, like a Grateful Dead-looking couple, having sex on the hood of a car.

How long did you watch? I watched until they were done. How could you not? I seem compelled to watch sexual acts and blow jobs happening. There's just a weird way your eyeball catches it in the peripheral vision. People tend to notice oddly any kind of sexual act or violence out of the corner of your eye. I don't know why, but I think the human condition dictates you're hyper aware of it.

I'll watch strangers, but I can't stand when a nearby roommate is doing it. I've been known to listen. We are voyeuristic by nature. It's kind of humorous to listen. In hotels, I always listen. I'll turn down the volume of the TV to listen. I don't know why it amuses me, but it does. I'm a listener and a looker.

That's a New Yorker. Or a human.

This month's Geek Magazine has a photoshoot where you fall off the wagon and start drinking again to celebrate the end of the Bush era. Do you think the president's ever fallen off the wagon? I think that there were a couple of times where he's so overwhelmed by his job because he's in no way qualified. I feel like the alleged "pretzel episode" where we were led to believe that the cuts on his face were from choking on pretzels and the episode where he allegedly fell off his bike, he may have been hitting the sauce and fell down. Or because of his medication—I think he's on antidepressants, who could blame him? And he fell down. That's just my theory. I have no evidence to back it up.

Do you think Obama's gonna crack and start smoking again? He's promised not to. I think he's allowed to smoke. Secondly, Laura Bush smokes. She's a smoker. It's not a crime. According to historians, many presidents have been driven to smoke because of the stress. And they smoke out on the deck of their bedroom. Who could blame them? That's a lot of stress.

Do you miss getting to talk politics on a daily basis on your old Air America radio show? I do. I definitely do. It's a nice way to express yourself. If you're kind of a news junkie, you build up a lot of anger towards our terrible

coverage for what passes for mainstream news in this country. And then also the pundits just theorizing, speculating, repeating themselves—it's just absurd. Nothing gets accomplished.

Where are you getting your news from these days? I love Pacifica Radio—Amy Goodman, Democracy Now. I also subscribe to In These Times, Mother Jones, The Nation, The Progressive, things like that. I also like to read historical novels and political books, like *The Wrecking Crew* by Thomas Frank is just one example. I subscribe also to Foreign Affairs magazine. So I sort of read a lot and I get most of my news from the radio. On CUNY television, there's also a simulcast of Amy Goodman. That's on twice a day, Democracy Now, on CUNY, which is for me, channel 75 on my cable.

You had a lot of cool cachet in the '90s. You were attached to a lot of cool '90s landmarks (*The Ben Stiller Show*, *The Larry Sanders Show*, even *Reality Bites*). Did you feel it slipping away at some point? Oh yeah, of course. It ended around 2000. I had a lot of work in the '90s. And then for females especially, as you get older—I'm 44—it's really difficult for a 44-year-old woman to get acting work. That's just the nature of the beast. And because it's an elective profession, it's hard to complain about it because nobody makes you do it. Also I did a lot of mediocre stuff towards the end of the '90s and then sort of the novelty wore off. And then I left acting to work at Air America for two-and-a-half years.

When I decided to go back into acting, it wasn't very easy. "I took two-and-a-half years off, but I'd like to work again. Please hire me." It sort of doesn't work like that. So I'm just sort of grateful anytime someone wants to hire me. And TV seems to be one of the only places where older women can seek employment. Unless you sort of get lucky. There's a saying: "you're always just one part away from being back at work in film" for women especially. So I'm just waiting for someone to give me the green light, "Oh, let's hire Janeane again!" I think I'm on the "has been" list until I'm not. It's like a game of Red Rover and somebody says "come over." Or you can create your own work, but I'm not really a screenwriter. I don't really feel like I have the story to tell. It would just be creating content for the sake of creating content.

You're about to make your debut as an FBI agent on 24. Is Mary Lynn Rajs kub still doing the show? Yeah and she's one of my best friends, so that was a real treat. She loves it there and I enjoyed working there. She's just one of my favorite people and one of my favorite stand-ups. She's one of the most easygoing people I've ever met and I wish I could emulate her in life more often. She just is nice and goes with the flow. She's affable and funny and has a new baby. His name's Valentine. He looks just like her.

But I didn't sign on for another season. One of the reasons I would have gone back to 24 was because it was fun, but I didn't feel like I had much to contribute on that show. I'm not knocking the writers or anything. But unless I feel like I can contribute something, I'm not really motivated to participate. I didn't feel like I could make the most out of that part. So maybe someone else could do a better job.

You're performing tomorrow at 92YTribeca. What's that new space like? I love the space! It's a little newish for the comedy vibe. But the audience is so polite at this point, that it seems like comedy isn't a great fit yet. But it's getting there. Because it's got so many ties to the Jewish cultural center, it almost seems like a great space for somebody to be discussing the situation in Gaza. It has that civilized, polite vibe to it. The audience seems a little embarrassed sometimes to be talking about comedy. I like to sort of talk to members of the audience. I like to be able to walk around in between the tables. I just started doing that a couple years ago for some weird reason.

I wouldn't have guessed that of you. I wouldn't either. It just sort of happened.

Maybe your body is telling you that you want a daytime talk show. (*Sing-songy*) I doubt iiiiiiiiiiit! I think it's just that I've been doing stand-up for so long, that I'm always looking for ways to freshen it up, that any new thing is fun for me to see what happens. And then I just started doing that. And I thought, "I like doing that."

Is this an all-ages venue? I think it's eighteen. And for comedy in the city, I think it's important to let younger people in. Because I think that there are a lot of younger and younger comedy fans because of the online comedy

community. Shows should be all-ages the same way there are music shows are. It's something younger people can share in and have a stake in and want to be part of.

I think that you've been a pretty important comic to a lot of young people. Well those young people would be old now. But especially in political seasons, I like to have teenagers involved. I like that they can hear political discussions outside of arguing pundits. I like that they are interested or could become more interested by coming to a politically-themed comedy show in the same way that they are motivated by Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart and DL Hughley and Bill Maher.

Well you certainly were a figure for a lot of people who are hovering thirty now. I think that I'll have a fair amount more integrity because of being exposed to you at a young age. You're too nice. I think that you're giving me too much credit, but I'm thrilled. That's really kind of you. If that's really true, I'm really happy about that.

And that's what I meant by younger people being exposed to people like DL Hughley or David Cross or Kristen Schaal. Because for a lot of teenagers, it gives them something to think about about a way of living. Because you know how difficult it can be inside the conformative confines of a high school situation or a college situation. People can very reticent to express themselves, reticent to be passionate about something. Everybody's so petrified about being uncool, embarrassed by emotion, embarrassed to even think big thoughts in a way among their peer group. It's also nice for guys and girls who are young to be exposed to not classically good-looking performers. It's nice for them to see me, Jon Glaser, Jon Benjamin, David Cross and you go, "Wow, look at them! They look like me. They don't look like everyone I see on TV."

Those guys didn't succeed because people wanted to put them on the cover of magazines. They made it because of their personalities and the way they think. And they made it while retaining their personalities and the way they think. And they pursued what they wanted to pursue for a career—but not just that. They were people who thrived who were probably not the most popular people in their high school or in their college for that matter. And they thrived. I think it's important for people to see, for young people especially.

Well with that bunch performing tomorrow, it sounds like it should be a special show. Plus I just found out from Paul F. Tompkins' girlfriend's video blog that he recently got engaged. Oh really?! Wow, I am thrilled. That relationship has just been the best thing for him. I've always liked Paul. He's a great guy and one of my favorite comics. But I'm telling you, once they started dating, he has become one of the nicest guys in the world. Honestly, he has been on top of the world, walking on air, whatever the sayings are. He's been so happy since they got together.

Wonderful. Marry Lynn had a baby. Paul's getting married. Something's in the air. Love, I guess.

By [Billy Parker](#) in [Arts and Events](#) on January 7, 2009 8:30 AM  [123 Recommends](#)



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