

THE COMEDY GAZELLE



**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:
SARAH PERRY**

ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I first moved to Chicago, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey supercharge herself with a firm slap of the puss.

Why haven't I heard of her before?

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it's easy to miss.

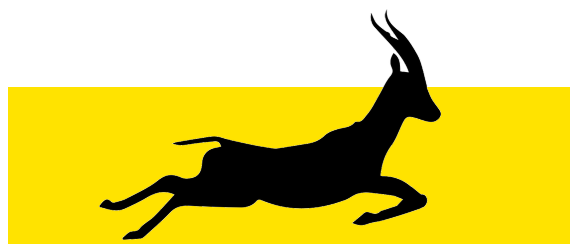
That's why I'm starting The Comedy Gazelle — to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to showcase this city's unrivaled talent. To keep everyone up-to-date on the scene, and to do it in a fun way. And not just in a one-off article, but all the time.

Each issue will include an exclusive interview, as well as whatever else I can pull together.

Hope you enjoy.

— Jerry

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INTERVIEW: SARAH PERRY

Voted Best Stand Up Comic 2020 by The Chicago Reader, Sarah Perry (@sperrycomedy) is one of the fastest rising stars in Chicago comedy. We talked about her quick progression, hosting for Natasha Leggero, sucking dick and more.

I know you went to Columbia College, where they have a comedy major. At what point did you know that comedy was it for you?

Ever since I was like nine I wanted to be an actress. I thought I was gonna be a serious actor in stuff and I wanted to be a movie star. Then in highschool I found out I could make my friends laugh, and I was kind of part of every little clique. I was the goofball and I got into theatre, but I enjoyed making people laugh more. Then my parents took me and my twin sister to Chicago and we saw a Second City show and I was like, "That's what I wanna do with my life." I didn't wanna go to college. I wanted to go straight to LA and live under a bridge.

They were like, "No."

They were like, "Sarah, every person in this family is getting a degree." Then I found out Columbia College offered a comedy degree. I had tried stand up like once in college, it was mostly sketch and improv. I liked watching stand up and stuff, but the thought of doing it just petrified me. And my first couple of open mics — I would throw up, that's how nervous I would get. I would rehearse my three minute open mic set 100 times, I'd make my mom listen to me, then I'd be shaking in front of like two people. It was like the biggest deal to me.

That's funny because now you don't see that at all. You seem very comfortable.

That is a compliment I get a lot and that means so much because I remember looking back at my first recordings and tapes and looking at the person and I'm like, "That's not even me." It's me, but I'm not acting like myself, I'm not talking like myself. I remember veteran comics being like, "You'll get there, it just takes a while." And now newer comics are coming up to me and saying, "How do I get more comfortable on stage?" And unfortunately, it's just practice and doing it all the time.

I'm surprised you were throwing up and then you were able to stick with it. You were still enjoying it?

I love attention, so I was enjoying it. I remember my very first open mic at Laugh Factory, Curtis [Shaw Flagg] was



Photo by Ashley Nicole (@ashfoto.jpg)

like, "You should try it" cause I was a waitress there. I remember getting off stage and him being like, "Well, yeah, that was really bad, but you got something there. Keep going." Who knows if he says that to everybody, but for some reason him being so honest helped. "Keep trying at it." Because I had the past performance background of acting and being on stage in front of people, it definitely made it a lot easier every time I went up. But it took a while. It definitely helped working at the Laugh Factory because I would see other people go on stage and make the audience laugh and I'd get so jealous. I'm like, "That's what I wanna do! I don't wanna be here serving drinks. I want to do that, so I have to keep practicing." It was a good motivator working there. I think for the first year after I quit, a lot of people still thought of me as Sarah the waitress. And it took me getting booked at other places and getting respect at other clubs for them to be like, "Oh, she's a comic now."

Were you really motivated to change that perception of being Sarah the waitress?

I was. There were a few people that were really cool about it, like Chris Redd, who's like a fucking superstar

now. I remember him being so nice, remembering my name, treating me like a comic immediately once I was on a lineup. But there were other comics that I won't name that would be like, "Oh, that's so cute you're here to watch me." I'm like, "I'm on the show, bitch." I'll never, ever forget that. That kinda shit just felt like digs, you know? And I think I did progress very quickly and people don't like that. Because people have been at this for years, and now I have as well, and I totally get that — when people are only a year or two in and they get opportunities that took you twice as long to get, that is frustrating. There is jealousy and blah blah blah. I don't fault anybody for that. So yeah, it was important for me to branch out of that.

And why do you think you were able to progress so quickly?

When I'm doing something, I go 150%. I want to be the best. Like lacrosse in high school — not to brag — I was the only freshman to make varsity. Like I needed to be the best. I pick the one thing and I really kind of go for it. I've always loved comedy and knew I had something. Then going to Columbia, meeting all the people, doing iO, doing Second City, I don't regret any of it because all of it taught me little bits and pieces and made me the comic I am now. I think every class I took, every person I performed with made me progress really quickly. I think I got lucky in the sense that I waitressed at Laugh Factory and was able to do the mic there every week or every other week. And it does kinda help when you're female. 99% of the time it sucks being a woman in comedy, but there's that one percent where they're like, "Oh, a new funny female? We need a female for this lineup." And if you crush, they remember that. That's the only thing I feel bad about for straight white men, is that there's a thousand of them trying to do comedy. I would not want to be a straight white man. They all blend together sometimes, you know? I feel bad for them. It's hard to stand out because there's so many of you guys.

I appreciate your sympathy.

Well, other than that you guys can go fuck yourselves.

You said you have a twin sister. What does she think of your comedy?

Oh, she loves it. She really does. But we're very, very different on so many levels. We don't look like sisters at all, we're complete opposites. She could never, ever get on stage. She didn't even like doing presentations in school. But it does mean so much, cause she is very proud of me. I remember doing a show, my first huge show in St. Louis that I headlined where extended family,

high school friends, my parents friends, everybody came, and she was in the front row the whole time. I kept looking at her, and just the look — she was just so proud of me. And she's a tough critic. When I can make her laugh, then I'm like, "Alright this is a good joke." She will tell you how it is.

What are you most proud of in your stand up career so far?

I think it was really, really cool to host for Natasha Leggero. I got to host a couple shows and then before the last show, I woke up and completely lost my voice. The hotel I was staying at, their heat went out. I was wearing two winter coats in bed at night, shivering. It was winter in Madison, Wisconsin. I'm freezing all night and I wake up and I can't talk. I feel totally fine, I'm not sick, but I cannot speak. Like, I can't even get on the phone and call the front desk. All day I'm in the shower, steaming my throat, drinking hot tea, googling what I should do, and I finally get to the club and I'm like [struggling to speak]. And they go, "Sarah..." I go, "No, you don't understand! I have to do this!" And I'm crying. I will never forget, Natasha looks at me and she's like, "God, I wish I loved stand up as much as you do." I was like, "What? How could you not love it?" Like, "Yes, yes it's amazing!" Being able to laugh with her about that and opening for her, that was very, very cool. And more recently I did the SXSW virtual show for Zanies.

How was that?

For what it was, during the pandemic, masks still mandated, social distance still happening, it was awesome. I'm not even gonna guess the number, but we got a lot of views on it online. That was very cool and a very cool thing I get to say that I did. I was so honored to do it. I couldn't believe I was on the lineup with like five of the most amazing comedians in Chicago. I was like, "This is fucking cool."

What are you still trying to accomplish in your career?

Oh my god, so much. I wanna be famous! I would love what everybody loves. I would love a Late Night spot, I would love a Netflix special. I would love to write and star in a TV show. I remember my dreams when I first started was to get passed at the Laugh Factory and Comedy Bar and Zanies, then once I did that it was like, "Okay I wanna get CYSK," then I got that and it's like you have a 30 second celebration then you're like, "Okay, but what's next?" I've talked to many, many people about this and they're like, "It's never gonna stop." I'm sure Amy Shumer and Natasha Leggero are like, "What's next? What else can I do?" I really do enjoy acting. I would love to branch out and be a comedic actress, but also do the Kristen Wiig route. She just went so serious and she killed it.

Is there anything you're particularly proud of having improved upon, skill set wise?

Being comfortable on stage and being myself. Because I really do get that a lot from newer comics. They're just like, "You are so yourself up there," and I cannot explain to you how much I wasn't. I saw my first clip, it's on my computer right now, and I made the mistake of pressing play and I couldn't even get ten seconds in. I was just like, "Holy shit this is so embarrassing." But being able to get on stage, be myself. My crowd work for sure. I'm very thankful that I've been given a lot of opportunities to host and work on my crowd work. The other day someone said I'm very good at weaving my crowd work into my written jokes, that meant a lot because I think that's very important.

What kind of advice would you have for people who are new to hosting or haven't hosted before?

I hated it at first. I didn't want to do it at all. Be energetic, upbeat, make the crowd feel welcome. You have to remember that these are normal people. We spend so much time dicking around with comics, talking shop. Like I go home and talk to my family and I'm explaining my life and they get it, but they have a lot of questions, stuff like that. So you are the first person that they are going to see and hear from. You gotta to the bits if anyone's celebrating -- I did not wanna do that. I remember telling Curtis. I'm like, "Can I just go into my stuff?" and he's like "No, trust me. Even if it's just one or two lines. Make them feel like they are welcome, they are here for a show." Don't be too gross or intense up top. I have issues with that still. Be fun and excited to be there. If you go up and



you're like, "Hey" they're not gonna be excited. And remember that people paid money to see this. I'm gonna sound likesuch a hack, but take it seriously. This is your career, hopefully that's why you're doing it or you're trying to make it your career and people paid \$20, \$30, \$40 to see the show. And you're the first person to get it started. But hosting is the hardest job. It's a job. You're running around, people aren't there. Who's up next? Why aren't they over here? COVID especially. Everyone needed to have a different mic. It was a job.

When I interviewed Blake [Burkhart], one of the things he was talking about was how he can host, feature, and headline. Not everyone has that ability. Has that gotten you a lot more opportunities, having that well-rounded skill set?

I think so, yeah. For sure. I've heard a few comics admit, "Oh my god, I suck at hosting." And they do. But they realize that, you know what I mean? It's not for everybody. Andy Fleming, one of the best hosts ever. Ever. Eric Emerson, incredible host. Paul Farahvar, great host. I hate that I just listed three men, but whatever. But they're great at it and they know they are, so they look for those opportunities and people book them for those opportunities. To be able to do all three of those things is very, very cool. It makes it new every time. If I

was only hosting all the time, I don't think I would like that. So I agree with Blake, it is nice to be able to do all three and know you can do all three.

And do you feel like you have a different energy when you're hosting?

Yes. I do feel like an exaggerated version of myself because I'm like, "Hiiii!" Me personally, I'm like a game-showey host. Like, "Oh my god, you're from Arkansas? Give it up for Arkansas!!" But I also am myself because I kind of am a dick. Like, "Oh, you're from Ohio? I'm sorry. Oh you're celebrating a month together? Great." I think it's exaggerated for sure, but you just need to get them excited to be there.

If you have a joke that doesn't land, what's going on in your head in the moment?

So many things. Should I be an accountant? Should I own a restaurant? Should I move back home? When I first started, I thought it was the end of the world. Comedians are dramatic, we're like, "Okay, if that's not funny then I'm not funny." Now if it doesn't work I'm like, "Whatever, I know I'm funny. That little bit didn't work, let's move on." Because it's so easy to shut down in a set. And I've seen people dig themselves out of the deepest holes. Like bombing for the first five minutes, and then finally getting the crowd and crushing. I've seen that happen so many times, so that kinda goes through my head. Like, "They didn't like that one, but you can do it." But I don't blame people under four years that are having a little freak out. Like of course. You sat down, you wrote these jokes, you thought they were funny, you added tags, you came back to them. These are your babies.

It's a very personal rejection.

So personal! Absolutely! I remember I had an iO teacher I'll never forget, obsessed with him, he's the best, we still talk. Our very first class he goes, "It's so important, you guys, you cannot take rejection personally. And as soon as you figure that out, please let me know how to do that." And I never forgot it, it was so funny.

So you're a regular at every Chicago club and you're traveling on the road a lot. What advice do you have for people trying to break into clubs or start on the road?

Send out avails. Send a good, solid clip. Send a good, solid email. Short, to the point, don't kiss ass. Always include a clip. And this sounds so cheesy, but be nice to people. Because people talk, and if you were a dick to so and so, and so and so works with so and so, who owns so and so's club, who serves there and your name pops up in a meeting or whatever and they're like, "Oh no, he's a dick." People remember that shit. So many opportunities I've gotten, including Comedy on State, were from a comedian that I was kind to and friendly towards and they saw me do really well at a show and they respected me and gave my name. I could name three comics right now that really fuckin had my back when I first started because we vibed. I was nice, we were chill, they thought I was funny. Everyone's like, "It's about who you know," but that's not true. Part of it is, 100%. In every industry it's who you know. But you have to have the talent to back it up. If you don't, you're only going to get so far.

Sending avails goes for both clubs in Chicago and clubs on the road? Same approach?

Somebody was just asking me that. Yeah. Or know somebody in the city you're looking at who knows the best way to get in touch with so and so. I did the Laughing Skull Festival in 2019, so I met comics from all over the country and became friends with them. So then when I was back in Atlanta or wherever, I could be like, "Hey, remember me? How would I go about getting into this club and this club?" Even if they're like, "Oh I don't know how" or "They're all booked up," they'll be like, "But I got a bar show you can hop on." That kinda stuff. It sucks cause literally every city is different and every show is different and every club is different. You just have to ask around.

So about Chicago in general. What would you change if you could change anything in the scene?

Unfortunately, anywhere you go being a woman in comedy is gonna be so, so hard. The shows are going to be predominantly men. At least twice a week, I'm the only woman on a lineup. The other thing is, I don't like having shows that are all female and then are advertised as that. Like, "We've got an all women show for you!" Just say it's a comedy show, you know what I mean? It's all women? Whatever. When it's all men, which it is a lot of times, you're not like, "It's an all male comedy show! Come on out!"

Yeah, you don't like having that label.

I've been a part of a lot of it and I totally get it because we have fewer opportunities, so it's important to advertise it like that. But it just sounds gimmicky. Like, "It's ladies night!" You know? Come on. I'll do the show and I've done them before, but I just wish those labels weren't on it. Like you're doing a favor for us. "We're letting the ladies do jokes tonight!" The other thing is — I was reading Toomey's interview that you did with her and something that really stuck with me is that she gets upset when people don't take it seriously. And I was so fucking glad that she said that, because if you take it too seriously you're a hack, but if you don't take it seriously enough, you're an alt comic. And you have to be that perfect in between. It's like, why are you even doing this then? Are you doing this because this is a hobby of yours? Are you doing this cause you wanna get wasted and make your friends in the back laugh? It's embarrassing when those are your goals and you get booked on a club show at the Laugh Factory in Chicago and that's the product you put out. You know what I mean? I really, really appreciated her saying that, because if you're not taking it seriously and you're making fun of other people for taking it seriously and getting booked and grinding and blah blah blah — it's like, what are we doing? Very recently, Comedy Gazelle readers, me and one of my best friends were both told that the only reason that we get booked is because we suck dick and do sexual favors for spots and we steal jokes. We don't write our own jokes. And that's what happened, and that person did that in my home club. Screamed it. It was just — I felt like I was in a time machine when I heard that. I was like, "This really is a thing? This really is a thing?" Like you really think I got on my knees and sucked a dick to get stage time?

Well, maybe not on your knees.

I'm a classy broad, I just lay here and you can shove it in my mouth! Like the audacity and the balls. It stung for a second, then I was embarrassed for him. To even have that sense. And I know he feels that way about a lot of minorities: homosexuals and black people and women, it's everything. It's not just women, we're not special. This is a bad egg of a straight white male that's making it harder for other straight white males who are nice and kind and good human beings. But you hear this one story and people are like, "Fucking kill all men!" But it's unfortunate and it was very directed towards me, which I'm still confused about. And I've talked to some of my friends who are a little more successful than I am and they're like, "The better you get, the more shit people are gonna talk." And when you're a female it's a thousand times worse.

How does that make you feel about progressing in your career?

I got really lucky because I think I realized this right when I started. I kind of had an epiphany because Laugh Factory Hollywood posted one of my videos on their Instagram. And I was not funny yet. It was fine, but looking back at it now, I'm like, "Oh my god I'm so much funnier now." You know what I mean? But they went semi-viral all over the platforms and everyone said, "Don't read the comments, don't do it." Yeah I did it, and I had like a week where I felt bad for myself. Because it wasn't even about my stand up, it was "She's fat. She's ugly. She can suck on my balls and die" — that was a real one. "She shouldn't be alive. How dare she think she's funny. Women aren't funny." I let it hurt for a week and then I was like, "Okay, I am two years into this and this is happening and this is how it's gonna go. Do I keep doing it and suck it up and take it, knowing the better I get the worse it's gonna get? Or do I stop right now and cut my losses?" That was a

conversation I had to have with myself. And I'm seeing it happening with other women just starting out. I can see it in their eyes. They're like, "I didn't think it was gonna be this." It's hard enough to write jokes and be funny, then to be criticized for your gender? It's 2021, what are we doing? But you have to grow a set of balls, unfortunately. That's what my mom said, you gotta grow balls. She's totally right, though. It never stops. You see interviews of Sarah Silverman, Amy Schumer, it's never gonna stop, ever, ever, ever. So you have to decide how much you want it and how much you love it. That's why this screaming incident hurt for like a day, then I was like, "Whatever."

The first thing bothered you for a week, then this only bothered you for a day.

I'm moving up! Soon someone's gonna threaten to kill me and I won't even think twice!



"IT'S NEVER GONNA STOP, EVER, EVER, EVER. SO YOU HAVE TO DECIDE HOW MUCH YOU WANT IT AND HOW MUCH YOU LOVE IT."



BONUS: Sarah Perry's Top 10 Chicago Comics

- 1. JEANIE DOOGAN**
- 2. ERICA NICOLE CLARK**
- 3. CORREY BOYD-BELL**
- 4. JAMIE SHRINER**
- 5. JACKIE COOPER**
- 6. VICTORIA VINCENT**
- 7. DEANNA ORTIZ**
- 8. AUDREY JONAS**
- 9. LUCIA WHALEN**
- 10. CLARE AUSTEN-SMITH**

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ARTWORK: CASEY THE ICON





CASEY THE ICON. THE KANYE OF COMEDY. THE FUNNIEST DESIGNER, & THE FLYEST COMEDIAN. CASEY IS A COMEDIAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER AND FASHION STYLIST ALL IN ONE. HE IS A TRUE ARTIST. HIS GOAL IS TO EVENTUALLY BRING THOSE WORLDS TOGETHER AND CREATE CONTENT THAT WILL INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION. CASEY JUST RELEASED HIS OWN COMEDY SPECIAL ON YOUTUBE SHOT BY MARK WALTERS TITLED "THIS MIGHT GET ME IN TROUBLE." COMEDIAN RODNEY PERRY SAID CASEY'S COMEDY IS "RAW LIKE HIS ERA BUT HE DRESSES LIKE THE YOUNG KIDS". COMEDIAN LEON ROGERS SAID "IF HE KEEPS ON WORKING LIKE THIS HE'LL BE ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN COMEDY." HIS ART IS INFLUENCED BY BLACK CULTURE AND USUALLY INCORPORATES SOME TYPE OF HUMOR. @CASEYTHEICON

BOOK REVIEW: ZOMBIE SPACESHIP WASTELAND

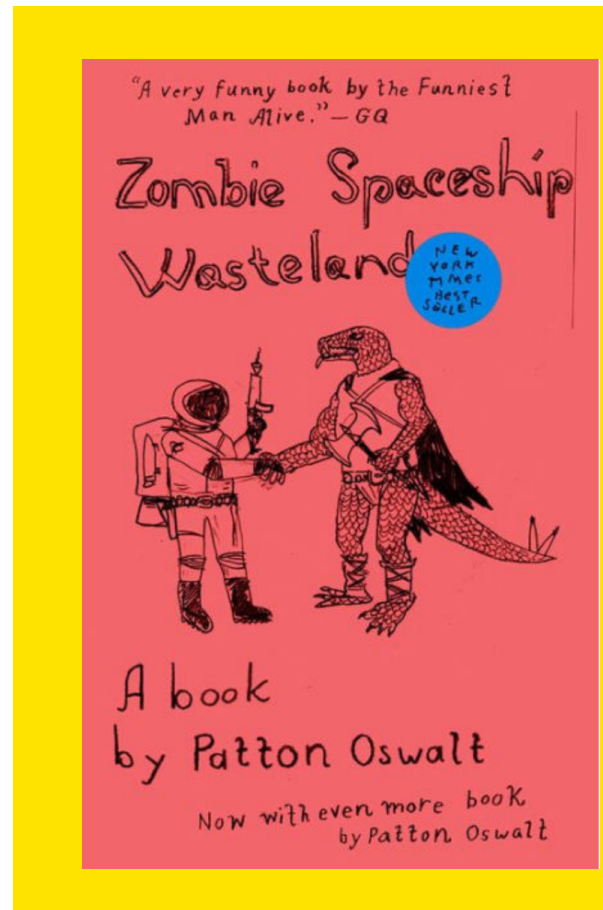
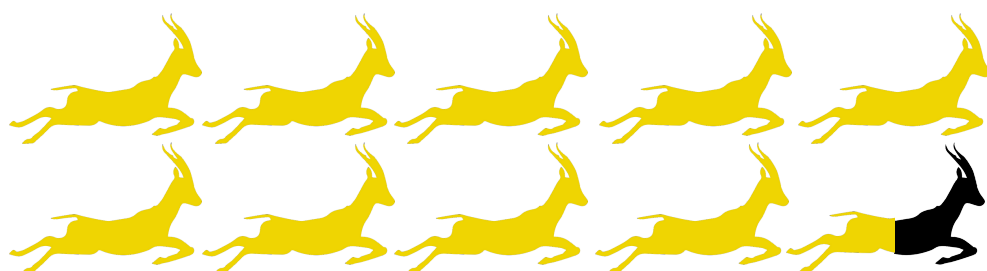
Review by Keay Crandall (@keaycrandall)

This book was such a fun read. Patton Oswalt takes you for a ride through his imagination, exploring adolescent and adult problems through science fiction motifs. I was truly entertained by the variety from chapter to chapter. Poems, satiric menu, graphic novel, script review, each section was at once creative, delightful and bizarre. I appreciate that Patton followed his own rules in creating this book.

Motifs I didn't think would resonate with me did. In the chapter about Patton's days playing D&D I was thrown back into memories I had forgotten of my own high school days. It didn't matter if I dated the dungeon master or brought the group snacks, the guys never let me play with them. I plan on forgetting about that all over again.

Albeit the music references mostly went over my head, I think this is would be even more enjoyable for someone who has a better appreciation for bands and song lyrics. If Patton was trying to show off the variety of pop culture in which he is well versed, he definitely succeeded in coming off as knowledgeable but not as a pompous ass.

Overall Rating: 9.5/10 Gazelles



**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO
MADE THIS POSSIBLE.**

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

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