

[← Back to Original Article](#)

COMEDY

'One-Two Punch' comedy show really hits home

At comedian Barbara Gray's Echo Park-area home, laughter reigns — especially on 'One-Two Punch' nights when other comics get in on the laughs.

June 24, 2011 | By Deborah Vankin, Los Angeles Times

Comedian Barbara Gray's underground comedy show, "One-Two Punch," has become something of a staple on the L.A. alternative comedy scene, drawing about 80 to 100 people per event, largely "comedy scenesters." It's held irregularly, about three to four times a year, and is open to the public in exchange for a \$3 donation. Like any number of recurring group shows these days, established comics cycle through (Maria Bamford, Matt Braunger, Kyle Kinane) along with younger and emerging stand-ups, performing eight- to 12-minute sets each.

What sets "One-Two Punch" apart, however, is that the show is held in Gray's living room.

From the outside, Gray's house is a nondescript, yellow stucco bungalow atop a hill overlooking Echo Park on one side, Silver Lake on the other. But on select Saturday nights, it's home to a raucous happening à la "Last Comic Standing" meets "Dance Party USA." With punch.

FOR THE RECORD: A previous version of this story contained Gray's address. That address has been removed.

"I think the key to comedy is intimacy," Gray says. "That's why it's such a good show. You're in a house. The set-up is perfect. We've got a big pile of boozy punch in the corner — it's very inviting."

More than a dependably comfortable comedy show, "One-Two Punch" is also a placeholder for Gray on the local comedy circuit. She curates/hosts the show and performs jokes between sets. And it speaks to the DIY, if somewhat disenfranchised, nature of today's comedy and entertainment landscape. Comics are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial about creating stage time for themselves, rather than relying on local clubs or the national touring circuit.

"You want to have something you have control over," Gray says. "You don't have any [time] limit, you can do whatever you want. I've always started stuff myself. I know I can run a good show, so I thought: 'Let's just do it.'"

Like her seemingly ordinary home, Gray, too, is something of a contradiction. She's a 27-year-old bespectacled brunette from Salt Lake City on the outside; a comic who's "the bad girl next door" on the inside. Her humor is an unapologetic mix of goofy and dirty, traversing all the expected sex, dating and relationship jokes, but with a somewhat loopy air. One of her signature jokes is about a space abortion on Mars.

Since moving to L.A. three years ago, Gray has eschewed the mainstream comedy clubs and forgone TV/film auditions. Instead, she has focused almost obsessively on the local alt-stand-up scene, attending shows nearly every night of the week, isolating role models like Sarah Silverman and Patton Oswalt, and launching her own platforms like "One-Two Punch."

Gray also produces the monthly stand-up showcase "Space Boners" at the Silverlake Lounge, which caters to "younger, hungrier" comics, she says. But "One-Two Punch" is her baby. When she started the show 2 1/2 years ago, it drew mostly friends and friends-of-friends. But it's grown steadily — seating regularly spills onto the front porch — and the lineup seems to get increasingly solid with each Facebook flyer. This Saturday's show will see Kumail Nanjiani, Baron Vaughn, Paul Danke, Tamra Brown, Dave Child, Whitney Teubner, David Christenson, and special surprise guests.

Bamford, who played "One-Two Punch" last October, says even though the room was "super-crowded, you had to squish to get in," it still felt like a safe place to try out new material. "It was a lot less pressure [than a comedy club]. At the Improv or the Laugh Factory, you're really exposed. There are high expectations because people have paid," Bamford says. "If you're invited to someone's home, you're less likely to heckle or be hyper-critical."

Staging is a critical part of cultivating that comfort zone, albeit "comfort" with a decidedly kitschy edge. Gray and her roommates Teubner (co-producer of "One-Two Punch") and Christenson methodically transform their home before each show. Furniture is cleared, folding chairs are rented, and a makeshift stage, dressed with a red curtain and white lights, is set up, along with a decent sound system. Obscure, creepy VHS tapes, salvaged from Goodwill, play silently on a TV in the kitchen. The final touch: an elaborate, three-tiered electric punch bowl overflowing with heavily spiked pink juice.

"I believe the environment is so much of it," Gray says. "I love shows so much, I love comedy so much, and I want to foster a great show. To have something unique that will remain memorable to people — that's a big part of it for me."

When the last joke is told and the curtain falls, a DJ will crank up Michael Jackson or Stevie Wonder and the evening will devolve into a full-on dance party. The overall effect is more post-college house party than professional comedy show; but the juxtaposition of well-known comics playing the Laugh Factory or Comedy Store one night, and Gray's living room the next, is distinctly L.A.

deborah.vankin@latimes.com

'One-Two Punch'

When: Saturday, doors open at 8 p.m., show at 8:30 p.m.

Price: \$3 suggested donation

Info and RSPV: onetwopunchshow@gmail.com



Talk for by Charlie Hales for Mayor

Search

HOME ARTICLES & ARCHIVES NEWS COLUMNS FOOD & DRINK MUSIC FILM ART THEATER BO

**THIS WEEK IN
THE MERCURY**

NEWS

Car-Free = Care-Free?Out with Traffic on NW
3rd, In with Drunks!

MUSIC

Up & ComingThis Week's Music
PreviewsARCHIVES
RSS FEED
TWITTER
BLOGTOWN TIP?**BLOGTOWN***Made in
Oregon*[« Bridgetown Last Night and Theme Par... »](#) | [The Easter Bunny Is Frightening as... »](#)

FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2011

COMEDY / BRIDGETOWN **Bridgetown Comedy Fest: Thursday's
Highlights**

POSTED BY COURTNEY FERGUSON ON FRI, APR 22, 2011 AT 2:29 PM



Highlights: The Music Comedy program at the Mt. Tabor Theater. Mindy Raf killed it as a crunchy singer/songwriter vegan lesbian chick (which totally doesn't sound as fun as it was, right?). She was rocking her guitar and itching her boobs in a most hairy-legged manner and it all boiled down to a great character who nailed the type without edging into groan-inducing. She was a

stellar surprise. The rest of the lineup was good, especially hunky Chris Garcia on guitar and host MC Mr. Napkins. I was kinda disappointed in Chip Pope's '80s British rocker RO Manse, but I think that was more a result of a persnickety sound system at the Mt. Tabor.

Oddness: Andy Dick at the Eagles Lodge was a bit disconcerting and awkward, but it was less traumatic (comedy wise) than I was expecting.

Randomness: The Tanker, as always, was fun, with the open mic-esque cavalcade hijinks. It's a great way to cap off the night, like a funny digestif. **Also, the ladies were hot last night—Barbara Gray's set at the Mt. Tabor Lounge... funny as get-out.**

Tonight: Go to the second Music Comedy program (Bagdad Theater, 10 pm, \$15). Mindy Raf will be there, as will Chip Pope, Howard Kremer, Nick Thune, Mike Phirman, DJ Real, DJ Dougg Pound.

"Women Aren't That Funny?" You Haven't Seen Barbara Gray

By Casey Burchby

Published Fri., Jan. 20 2012 at 8:30 AM

Barbara Gray closed a recent set at *Holy Fuck*, a free monthly comedy show in Los Angeles, with the following:

"I know what you're thinking right now," she said. "*Women aren't funny.*"

It was a direct jab at the antiquated notion that stand-up comedy isn't suited to women -- something that every female comic since Phyllis Diller has been forced to consider at one point or another. What's bizarre is that this idea continues to persist at all. It was recently spewed forth by David Letterman's just-fired comedy booker, Eddie Brill, whose comments to the *New York Times* last week caused controversy and cost him his job. (Read the original story [here](#), the follow-up [here](#), and comedian Jen Kirkman's brilliant response [here](#).)

Gray is anything but unfunny. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2008, she has earned a reputation as an active young comic. Her jokes have a frankness and honesty that comes from looking closely at herself and the netherparts of our shared culture -- including some topics that still carry vestiges of taboo (body image, sex, and disease, for example).

Besides participating in shows nearly every night of the week, Gray produces several group shows, including *Space Boners* and *Creepshow*. Her chief creation is *One Two Punch*, which takes place in her own home. An intimate alternative to showcase comedy clubs, *One Two Punch* hosts emerging as well as well-known comics (Maria Bamford, Kyle Kinane), and has received coverage in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Gray appears twice this weekend at [SF Sketchfest](#). She spoke to us by phone a few days before the festival.



Megan Curran

You've been doing stand-up for about four years. How did you enter the comedy world?

I moved out to L.A. in 2008 from Salt Lake City. I wasn't doing stand-up then, but I was a big comedy nerd. So I went to as many shows as humanly possible. And I was like, "I think I can do this." I started doing open mics around October 2008 -- just went into it head-first.

When did you start *One-Two Punch*?

That was in 2009 sometime.

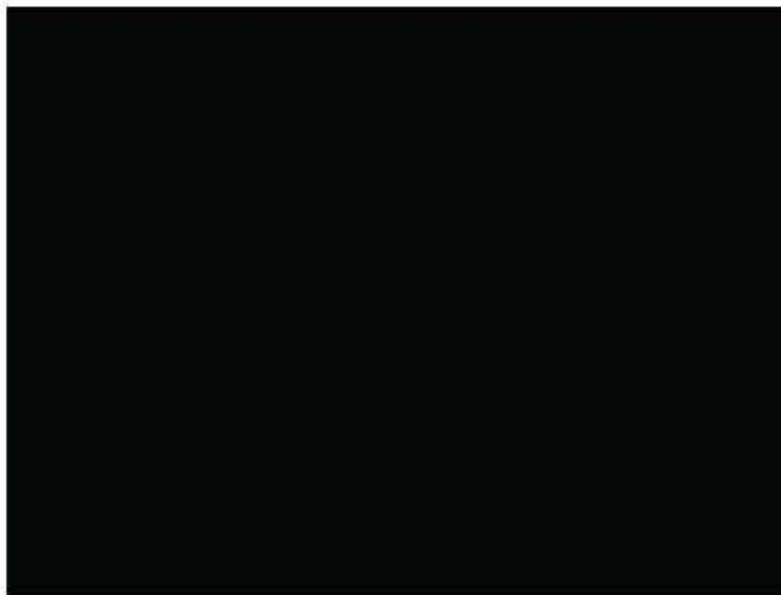
Are there many shows in L.A. of that type? Stand-up shows hosted in private homes and places like that?

The exact set-up I have is fairly rare. I have some friends who did a show called *The Comedy Garage* -- out of their own garage for about four years. There are a few like that, but not too many, so we're lucky to have that distinction.

To what extent is stand-up comedy still a

boys' club?

That discussion comes up every few months -- and now again with this Eddie Brill thing. I've never really thought of myself in terms of, "I'm a female comedian." I've always felt confident and fine with what I am doing. I haven't really been treated that differently as a comic. Sometimes you get an emcee who says, "Oh, this next person's a lady!" It is a boys' club, but I know so many funny women who are well-respected, especially in the L.A. scene, that I haven't noticed too much of a difference.



Given that you are still in the early part of your comedy career, what pays the bills?

I have a full-time day job, but I do shows every night. Getting paid as a stand-up is really difficult. I'm going on a southern tour soon, which will be my first time on tour. I have to evaluate how much I want to travel, and see if that's the right lifestyle for me. I'm not sure if it is. I really want to write for television. So I'm writing some scripts and focusing on those -- and hopefully selling something and getting paid to do that.

Are festivals like SF Sketchfest a good way to get exposure outside of L.A.?

Definitely. It's always nice to go somewhere else and do stand-up. It gives you some credibility when you get into something like Sketchfest. But just looking at the Sketchfest lineup and seeing my name on it was so insane, because I'm on the same bill as a lot of my heroes.

Barbara Gray appears tonight (Friday, Jan. 20) at 10:30 p.m. in the Rooftop Stand-Up Showcase at the [Purple Onion](#), 140 Columbus (at Pacific), S.F. Admission is \$15. On Saturday (Jan. 21) at 10 p.m. Gray hosts SF Sketchfest in the Mission (featuring *The Kids in the Hall*'s Bruce McCulloch and *Breaking Bad*'s Matt Jones) at the Dark Room, 2263 Mission (at 18th St.), S.F. Admission is \$15.

Follow [Casey Burchby](#) and SF Weekly's [Exhibitionist blog](#) on Twitter.

MAKE US LAUGH, FUNNY GIRL

Barbara Gray

By Libby Molyneaux

published: July 28, 2011



Comic Barbara Gray hosts "One-Two Punch," a semiregular comedy night in her Silver Lake home. She also performs at a bunch of venues that aren't the Comedy Store. On Tuesday, she'll host Holy Fuck with the Sklar Brothers, Kumail Nanjiani, Karl Hess, Andy Peters, Erin Lampart, Jeff Wattenhofer and Dave Ross.

L.A. WEEKLY: You hold comedy shows in your home. Any regrets?

None, except for when we run out of booze for the punch bowl. Then I regret not buying more booze.

Have people snooped around where they shouldn't?

It's usually not a problem, as I know about 80 percent of the attendees. It's been an underground show for the most part, with just friends in attendance, and everybody is good about looking out for suspicious types. I did have someone steal my phone once, but it turned out to be a friend's roommate who really liked drugs and wanted to sell things like my phone for those drugs. I tracked it down with the help of technology, like a goddamn detective. It was sadly exciting. I credit my detective skills to Lenny Briscoe and many dedicated hours spent watching Law & Order.

You also do comedy in some offbeat, smaller venues (which this paper seems to miss). What's your ideal venue for live comedy?

Yes -- people don't realize that there is a comedy show lurking in caf  s, laundromats, attics, bookstores, bowling alleys and dive bars all over Los Angeles. Anywhere there is room for a mic and some chairs, people will try to do comedy there. A dream venue is a place like Upright Citizens Brigade -- a laid-back, cozy theater, where you can see the comics' faces clearly and take in everything onstage. Good comedy can be done anywhere, but I think intimacy is really key for great comedy.

Ever had a bad experience at a mainstream comedy club? C'mon -- name names!

I really haven't had a lot of bad experiences with them. Probably the funniest thing to happen at a club was at the Jon Lovitz Comedy Club. I was the only female on the show. The host started to bring me up by saying "this next guy" -- then looked over and realized that I wasn't a dude. The DJ who was playing intro songs heard this -- and when the host did introduce me, the DJ played the beginning of "Lady Marmalade." You know, "Hey sister, soul sister." I couldn't stop laughing about it when I went onstage.

Why call this show Holy Fuck?

Well, it's not my show, my good friend and hilarious comic Dave Ross created it, and produces it with Jeff Wattenhofer and Jessica Ruiz. I like to think that it's because when you are at the show you say to yourself, "Holy Fuck, this is a great show" and "Holy Fuck, these seats are comfortable" and "Holy Fuck, it's Holy Fucking free? HOLY FUCK!!"

What can we expect at Holy Fuck?

You can expect one of the best alternative comedy shows in Los Angeles. Packed with talented comics, some big names, some future big names, but all with names. And if I'm there you can expect to hear my loud "distinctive" laugh as I guffaw unapologetically. Guffaw is a great word. That's what you can expect! Lots of guffawing!

Can unhip people come to the show?

Yes, of course! Please do. It gets really tiring only doing jokes to guys wearing bear hats and girls in tights. Both of which I will be wearing at the show, because I'm superhip! Have I mentioned I live in Silver Lake?

Who are your comedy heroes?

I'm fairly obsessed with British comedy, people like Steve Coogan, Ricky Gervais, Chris Morris, the guys from the Mighty Boosh. I really want to go over there and see what the comedy scene is like in London, and overdose on British accents. I also love Jon Dore and Rory Scovel, who do some great audience-prank type comedy. Right now my biggest comedy hero is the obvious, Louis C.K. Not only for the amazing honesty in his stand-up, which is something I strive for, but the fact that he directs, produces, stars in and even edits his great show on FX. I really admire that, as a comic and as a control freak.

Do you have a day job? What do you do

?

I work at a fancy-pants Hollywood biz magazine, photoshopping ads for the online department. I keep my head low. Most people there have no idea I have a secret life telling dick jokes at night.

If you could eliminate one overused comedy premise, what would it be?

I honestly can't think of an overused premise right away. Subjects that have been talked about forever, like dating, or the difference between races, may seem like they should be played out, but as long as someone brings a fresh and smart perspective to them, then it doesn't matter. I mean, these are things we can all identify with, and they change over time, so they deserve to be revisited. However, I would like to eliminate the comics who approach these premises the same boring way. Or make them move somewhere where racist impressions of Chinese waiters are still appreciated.

Holy Fuck at the Downtown Independent Theatre, 251 S. Main St., dwntwn.; every Tues., 9 p.m.; free. (213) 617-1033.

Tuesdays, 9 p.m. Starts: July 26. Continues through Dec. 20, 2011