

WORKING WOMEN: Professional Comics

By Rachel Powell

They say laughter is the best medicine, but the road to comic success is often rife with heartache. Just ask **Jessica Golden**, who spent the last eight dogged years building her act and reputation.

She defied her wealthy parents' career and romance advice, left hometown Detroit, and readily admits if her dad had just told me her she was pretty when she was little, she wouldn't be up on stage trying to get laughs and constant attention.



Jessica's flirty candor, graveled, deep voice and relatable self doubt, make her stand out in a sea of stand-ups. She's also a tireless storm of energy. *"Everyday I wake up with a rock concert playing in my head"*. When I ask what calms and focuses her, she blurts *"Sex... or meditation — or both!"*

Like most comics, her material is culled from real life and Jessica's is lived far outside boxes. I trailed her through a typical day that would culminate in an audition for HBO's COMEDY ARTS FESTIVAL in Aspen, Colorado. If she wins, she'll perform alongside Jerry Seinfeld, Garry Shandling and Chris Rock. Her recent stint at Montreal's JUST FOR LAUGHS FESTIVAL brought an onslaught of bookings and an HBO score would mark a double coup for this comic on the rise.

Before breakfast, Jessica blasts out invites to her several thousand fan base, checks her MySpace and Facebook pages for comments and performance offers, and updates her website: www.JessicaGolden.net.

By early afternoon, she's auditioning for a guest role on *According to Jim* and later for a Latino sketch show—she's not Latina, but is frequently mistaken for that or half-Black -- to her delight. It expands her work options and, like most LA artists, Jessica needs every one. She ekes out a living with a mishmash of sitcom bit parts, commercials, voiceovers and substitute teaching. The latter is fraught with standup inspiration:

"Imagine me parking daddy's Mercedes in a South Central school lot alongside roosters and pick ups, and then explaining to my students (who have US president names like Franklin, Hef-ferson and Jorge Bush) why I'm not married at thirty-something."

She nails one of the two auditions (which means a call back tomorrow) then calls best pal Matt Boren – a writer/actor/producer - to work on their comedy pilot about a religious Right family living in a basement with their rebel Left kid. They brainstorm for an hour before heading to volunteer at *The Art of Elysium*, Matt's LA-based charity that brings art classes to gravely ill kids. Jessica teaches joke writing where her own childlike, goofball antics make her an instant hit.

Back home with just an hour before show time, Jessica confirms her guest list, chooses an outfit that accentuates her lady lumps, laughing, *"Sex sells – even in comedy"* and speeds through her material for flow and timing. Tonight, she's doing eight minutes, but prefers longer sets so she can play with the crowd. *"Interacting with a live audience and their unique energy and personality is my absolute favorite part of this work."*

After a corn nuts and Cheetos dinner, she rushes to the IMPROV. There she finds the audience full of teenagers on a camp tour... not a target demo for her R-rated material. So Jessica bubble gums up the jokes, and is met with heckling. The teens prod her for racy stuff. She finally concedes, within reason. After the show, a lovelorn boy slips her a note: *"I'll be sixteen in two weeks. Call me if you're ever in Alberta, Canada."*

She heads to network in the Improv bar with HBO's head of talent, then watches two friends' late night shows and around midnight reconvenes with Matt Boren at DJ Samantha Ronson's karaoke night at LA's trendiest bar. There, wall-to-wall hipsters, A-list actors, celebrity offspring and wannabes belt popular tunes - and Jessica is no exception. She croons AC/DC's *You Shook Me All Night Long* way off, off key, but blissful in her element.

Her day finally closes when she invites a beautiful woman to come home with her. *"What can I say, I'm bi-cur. I blame it on Telemundo. Have you seen how hot those women are? They'd turn anyone from bi-cur to bi-sure!"*

Before she leaves, I ask her advice to aspiring comics: *"Be patient, the cream will rise to the top. Focus your energy, get as good as you can, and perform as much as you can...even if you think you're hilarious right away... you're not! You definitely don't want to be seen by agents and managers too soon. When you get really good, the right people will find you. No hilarious comic ever goes unnoticed."*

In the parking lot, Jessica finds her car blocked in by paparazzi pining for a shot of Lindsay Lohan, Joaquin Phoenix and Nicole Ritchie - still inside the club. Jessica chastises them to *"Leave the stars alone! They're here to relax and have fun!"* Then she abruptly retracts and compliments the paps. She hates to come down hard on anyone, even hecklers and paparazzi. Then she pauses and wonders *"Why aren't the celebrity hounds vying for my picture?"* They will be. Like comedy, the timing must be perfect and Jessica is fast approaching spot on pro.