

Interviews: Eric Andre, Natasha Leggero, Susan Messing at Just for Laughs Chicago

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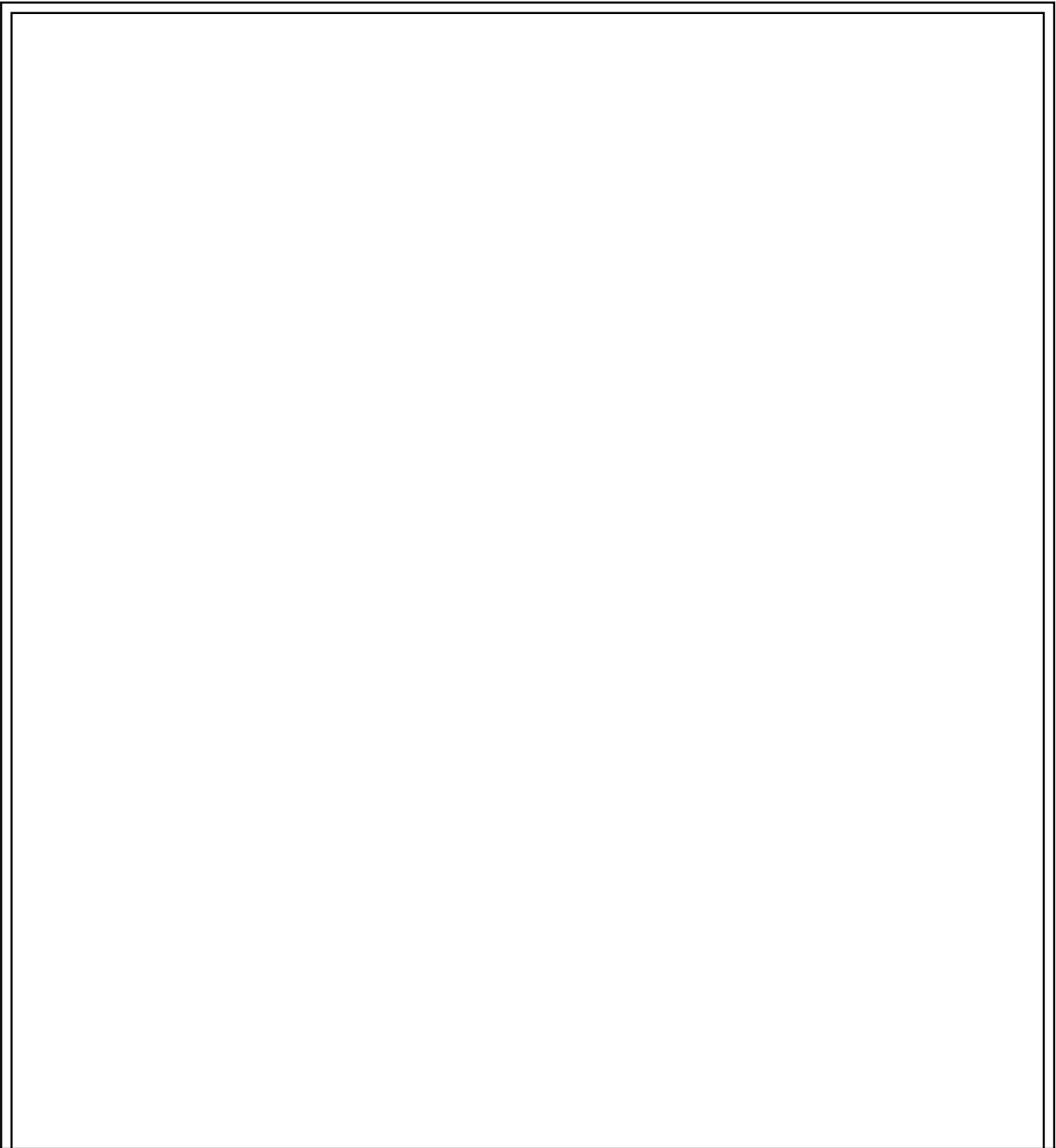
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CHICAGO – The cliché “up and coming” applies to Eric Andre, Natasha Leggero and Chicago’s own Susan Messing. While not quite household names, they are all on the cusp of comic greatness, and had notable shows at the recent “Just for Laughs Chicago” comedy festival, sponsored by the TBS Network.

Eric Andre is just about to launch a talk show parody on the Cartoon Network’s Adult Swim, smartly titled “The Eric Andre Show.” Natasha Leggero had a role in the recently canceled “Are You There, Chelsea,” is the voice of Callie Maggotbone on Comedy Central’s animated “Ugly Americans” and makes frequent appearances on the late night show “Chelsea Lately.”

Susan Messing is a local Chicago treasure, and is one of the top improv instructors in the Windy City. Besides appearing on the Second City main stage, she is an artist-in-residence at the Annoyance Theatre, where she’s performed in “An Ode to Judy Blume” and “The Real Live Brady Bunch.” She currently has a weekly show there entitled “Messing With a Friend.”

Eric Andre of “The Eric Andre Show”



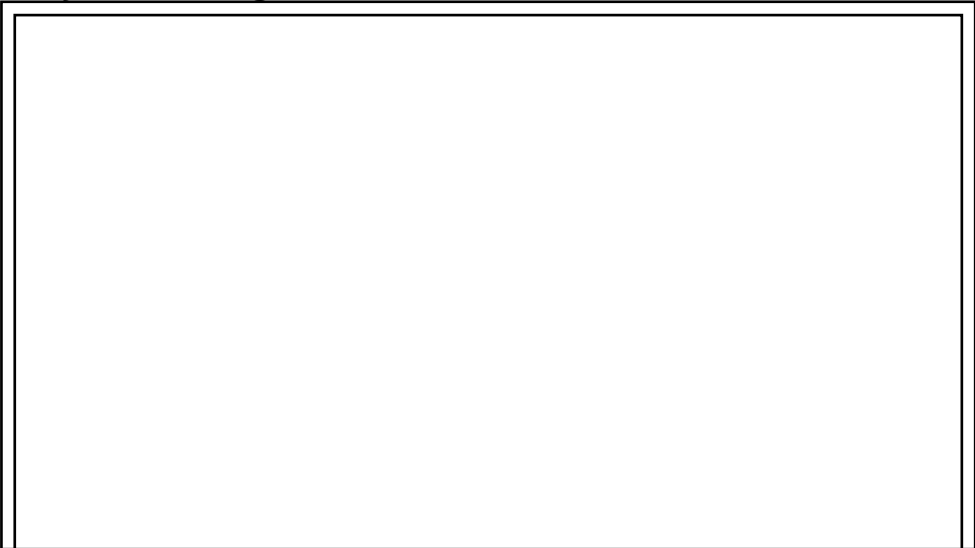


Eric Andre at 'Just for Laughs Chicago,' June 15, 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: How did the Adult Swim talk show come into fruition, and what idea made sure that it would be in your wheelhouse?

Eric Andre: I don't remember the first time I had the idea. I pitched it to my manager, and she told me to flesh it out more. I wrote an 11 page script, and she still didn't get it, so I knew what was in my mind wouldn't translate to text. I knew I had to shoot it on my own. So me and my friends rented this semi-illegal, semi-abandoned bodega in Brooklyn and we shot a little seven minute demo reel for what the show would be, and we shopped it around all the networks.

HollywoodChicago.com: What kind of open mind would you recommend having to connect with 'The Eric Andre Show'?





Andre in a Catalog Pose – In Case Comedy Doesn't Work Out
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Andre: What kind of open minds are there? What are my options? That's an amazing question. You blew my mind on that one. Psychedelic open mind? I don't know. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: You dabbled in sitcoms recently. How does being a stand up inform you in regards to being an actor?

Andre: I guess comedic timing, but comedic timing comes even before doing stand up. I have done some formal acting training, because I sucked at acting when I first got to Los Angeles. I'm still one of the worst actors and auditions out there. [laughs]

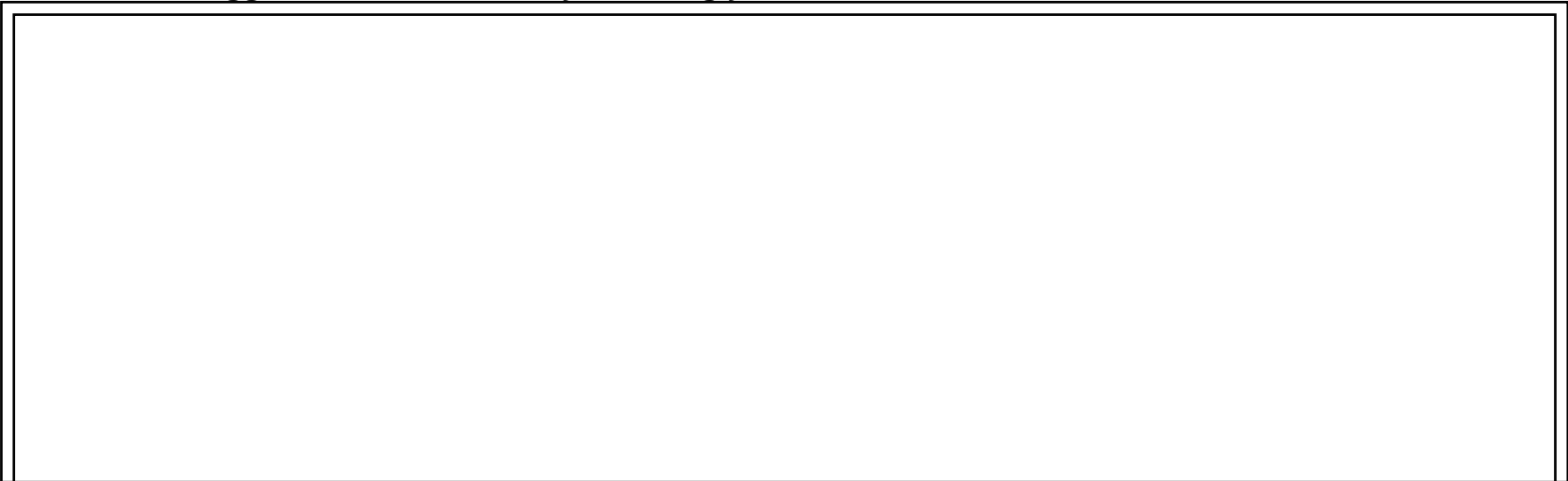
HollywoodChicago.com: How does where you grew up and how your family was define your comedy?

Andre: I grew up in Boca Raton, Florida, which is the most boring place on planet earth. It was a boring, sterile, homogenized, bland, flaccid city. Absolutely no culture, everything was built in the 1990s for cheap, and I think I was always just itching to get out and move to New York City. The Boca experience is what keeps me p*ssed off and motivated. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the first joke you told in front of a microphone, and what was the root of the subject.

Andre: It was so offensive and gross. I walked up to the mike and said, 'so anyway, my Dad's d*ck is huge.' After everyone reacted, I said, 'Yeah, it looks like a Quiznos sub.' That was my first joke, and I was 18 years old. It was awful, I admit it. One time this comedian came up to me and said, 'you've got to stop opening with that joke.' I thought he was probably right. My first piece of good advice. [laughs]

★ **Natasha Leggero of “Chelsea Lately” and “Ugly Americans”**





Natasha Leggero at 'Just for Laughs Chicago,' June 15, 2012
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: What is strange about the sitcom experience, especially since you were basically participating in a series based on a friend's life?

Natasha Leggero: The strangest thing about the type of sitcom that the Chelsea show was, is that it was a multi-camera show, shot live in front of a studio audience. So you'd be acting and then all of a sudden it's like [makes buzzing noise] and we'd break, but you look up at the audience and during that period they are literally spinning plates, throwing taffy at them and making them sing 'Y-M-C-A' to keep their attention. It's like acting at a parade. That was very weird.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was significant about your New York City acting training, specifically the classes you took at the Stella Adler school? How's that stuck with you?

Leggero: I feel the acting conservatory taught me how to be a working actor in the 1700s. [laughs] We learned stuff like 'to the back of the auditorium, to the back of the auditorium' and the liquid "u." 'The payment is duuuue on Tuuuesday.' I also learned how to fence. If anything, when I moved to Los Angeles, I didn't fit in, in any way. [laughs] I had to do comedy, because I was talking so pretentiously.

HollywoodChicago.com: How does where you grew up, in nearby Rockford, Illinois, and how your family was, define your comedic style?

Leggero: You never think your family is funny, until you start talking about them. My Dad's a used car salesman, my brother is a rapper and my other brother lives in a van that he put an address on. It's interesting to be around them, I guess. I'm going to see them this week, so hopefully I'll have some new bits. [laughs] But they're all nice people, with lots of drunk aunts. Whenever I perform here, my aunts will come and just get wasted.

HollywoodChicago.com: How do you wish you were more like the character of Callie Maggotbone in 'Ugly Americans'?

Leggero: I wish I had full C-Cup t*ts. Full natural C's. That would be great.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the first joke you told in front of a microphone, and what was the roots of it?

Leggero: It was like a set. I think at the time I was dating three guys...

HollywoodChicago.com: Who needs natural C's?

Leggero: [Laughs] I don't know why I was doing that. So I think the joke was, 'I used to date older men, but I think I was just hungry.' And then, some other girl I knew started doing that joke. I told her you can't do that joke, that's my joke. She told me another comic had told her the joke, and it was a good joke for women to do. I had just been working with the guy who told her! I had to date a gross man for a year and a half to come up with that joke. That's the problem with me, some people can come up with jokes creatively. I feel I have to live them.



Susan Messing, of Annoyance Theatre's "Messing With a Friend"

HollywoodChicago.com: Chicago seems inundated with improv right now...

Susan Messing: Right now? That's been all my life.

HollywoodChicago.com: How do you separate the pretenders from the real deal, when you're doing instruction?

Messing: Bad is just bad, right? But in improv a great failure can also be a great success. I wouldn't tune out the people who I think would suck, because they might turn out to be f**king great. I try not to judge. When I'm teaching I have all the patience in the world, and I teach for everybody – Annoyance Theatre, Second City, DePaul University, University of Chicago and the iO Theater – but I would have to say that people that may not get it in the beginning can turn out to be great. I try to withhold when I'm teaching.

HollywoodChicago.com: Comedy is often about pain...

Messing: What is this pain thing? [Imitating my voice] 'Yes, comedy is often about pain..'

HollywoodChicago.com: [Laughs] What in that type of emotion do you assess the most when you're doing this type of work?

Messing: For me, it's a sociological study of the human condition. I deal with the depraved, the sick, the pathetic, the disturbing and the profoundly depressed. I will try it all on. I will try on what I am and what I never want to be. And everything I wanted to be, but never can be. I can be a supermodel, or your worst nightmare. Off-stage, I just get to leave it, and nobody thinks I'm like that. This is what prevents me from being a psychopath and a sociopath, my time on stage. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: What comedy film will you revisit, either for a sense of sanity or inspiration for the type of stuff you do?



Susan Messing Appears in 'Messing With a Friend'
Photo credit: TBS

Messing: I really like documentaries and reality TV, but when you said that I thought about a film that I am embarrassed that I cry at, but the acting is really good and you can revisit it again and again, it's so chick – 'Terms of Endearment.' I also love James L. Brook's other film, 'Broadcast News.' I love when the TV executive sarcastically says to Holly Hunter, 'It must be nice to always believe you know better, to always think you're the smartest person in the room.' And Holly Hunter replies, 'No, it's awful.' But she says it sincerely. That's very satisfying.

HollywoodChicago.com: Are you the smartest person in the room?

Messing: No. By far I am not. But if you're dumb enough to make me talk I'm smart enough to speak. I'm the biggest hack here at 'Just for Laughs,' so it's my pleasure to walk around a spew sh*t and have you make sense of it. It's awesome.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you once did a Judy Blume show, why don't you think her so-called 'adult' novels weren't as successful as her pre-pubescent books?

Messing: I love Judy Blume, I think she has an amazing knack for tapping into the confusion of a child and teenager. She has adolescence down to a tee. The kids who read her trust her. I think she just go so used to that writing in that pre-teen and teen time frame, that we got used to her too, and couldn't take her seriously as an adult writer.

I did meet her. She was going to sue us for doing that show. They came to watch it, and they didn't sue us. But we talked later, and she said, "Messing, Messing, what's your Dad's name?" I told her Bob. She said that wasn't it, so she asked me my Dad's best friend's name. I offered, 'Arthur Nelkin?' She said that wasn't it. So I said, 'Mike Bamkis?' And she said yes, she had dated him. That's Jewish Geography 101, and saved us from a huge lawsuit.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally what would be the ideal dinner party gathering, living or dead, of Chicago improvisation legends?

Messing: You've got to start with Del Close. I'd like Mick Napier in there, because he's funny as f**k. T.J.[Jagodowski] and Dave [Pasquesi] make me laugh. For grins, Paul Sills, because I hear he used to throw chairs. If I could serve them, then at least I'll be in the room, I will bring the lemonade. [Pause] Okay, I'm sitting at the goddam table.

For a blog wrap-up of the TBS "Just For Laughs Chicago" 2012 comedy festival, [click here](#). [16] For more information on Annoyance Theatre's "Messing With a Friend," [click here](#). [17]



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [19]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [18]

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