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SPEAKERS

JD Doyle



JD Doyle 00:01

This is JD Doyle for lesbian and gay voices. I recently interviewed Robin Tyler. Now many of you may know of her as one of our most outspoken activists, especially with her involvement with the last March on Washington. But she has a long list of accomplishments I can mention. She was the first openly gay or lesbian comic in America. She was a member of the steering committees of the national marches on Washington, and 1979 1987 and 1993 and was the original executive producer of the millennium march in 2000. She has produced 25 Women's music and comedy festivals, drawing hundreds of 1000s of lesbians to festivals in California and in the south. She was a keynote speaker at the National Organization for women's pro choice rally in Washington DC, which was the largest women's rights rally in history. She's emceed the Gay Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, and has received numerous awards and honors, including the Harvey Milk Humanitarian Award. And most recently, she was one of the main forces behind the stop Dr. Laura movement. I want to start the interview by asking her about something most people probably have not heard about. Her early days has a comic. To give you an example. Here's a short clip from her 1978 album, Always a Bridesmaid never a groom, the first openly gay comedy album.



01:22

Last summer I spoke at the gay liberation parade in San Francisco. Now I am not gay. I'm not I'm a lesbian, but I'm bested. Come on, let's face it. Guys. We are two different sets of cultures, right? We got to realize the differences. Gay Liberation prayed in San Francisco. 250,000 people marched in that parade. Now a lot of folks said, hey, they're flaunting. Flaunting. Isn't that a funny word? When a heterosexual shows us a picture of their family. It's called sharing. When we show them a picture of our lovers. It's called flaunting. So I felt it was time to share. I stood on the platform, and I was actually able to see 100,000 people in front of me. And I thought about the woman who was responsible for my being there. No, not my mother, Anita Bryant.



07:12

11 02:10

Anita Bryant. Anita Bryant who is to Christianity with paint by numbers is to arch.

J JD Doyle 02:28

In this interview, you hear Robin Tyler talk about such subjects as comedy being out. Women's music festivals, transgender, Dr. Laura, rap singer, Eminem, and the Millennium March. I started out by asking her about her first album. Robin, I've read that the album always a bridesmaid, never a groom was the first openly gay comedy album. How did that album come about?

02:54

In the 70s, Pat Harrison and I Harrison and Tyler were female comedy team, we were assigned to ABC, we had come out of being a feminist comedy team. So we played all over colleges and so forth and so on. And the network picked us up and decided we'd be great replacement for you ready for this? Danny, where we asked what they were looking for variety show people. So we did four pilots. And we ended up starting on the craft Comedy Hour. And at the same time, I was political, you know, this gay liberation was was happening again has been the aberration and at the time it was gay. Then we added lesbian, bisexual, now transgender and now Queer. So I had to gain 30 pounds just to put everybody's rights on my T shirt. Anyway, yeah. What happened was it was interesting. And it's actually if you look at the history of comedy, and the civil rights movements, it's happened to most of the comics that came out during the era of civil rights. We were just beginning to as a movement emerge as reemerge again as we movement. And so here I was doing a television and all these pilots being very, you know, generically cute. And offstage, I was beginning to talk all over. And I got a call from a guidance. He said, we're having a gay pride, celebration. Go say some gay jokes. And I said, I'm not doing any anti gay jokes. He said, No, no, do some pro gay jokes. And I thought, Well, what a pro gay jokes. I couldn't find it. You know? It was interesting. So I went to the celebration and he said, Get up there, get up there and do something pro gay, just make it up. So I got up and I did this joke about running into a right wing guy. And he said, I think they should take all of your quiz and put you on an island someplace. And I said they did Dunning and they call it Manhattan. And that was my first gay joke. And they laughed, and it was an entirely gay audience. And so I just started to make up jokes where we weren't the object of the humor, where we were the subject of the humor. You know, humor is the razor sharp edge of the truth. humor is anger. And truth made funny. There's no such thing as just kidding. So when people used to do faggot chokes, comics or they still do faggot jokes, or even Eminem, you know, tries to make it funny to kill the faggots. There's no such thing as just kidding. For an audience to laugh at something, they have to believe that the premise is true. And so what happened in the 70s, is I began to go on stage and turn the tables, and do jokes that were pro us. In order to combat all the jokes were anteus. And out of trying to do those jokes and beginning to do those jokes. I was beginning to formulate material. And then you need to Bryant came along, and I'm so grateful for Anita Bryant, I am. I'll tell you something, Anita Bryant and Laura Schlessinger have done more for comedy than you know, no, really, these are great women. I know a lot of people look at them. And they say, Oh, well, they're not. These are very important women, because all of this was like a wealth of material, you know, so I came out against the need to Brian, I was doing jokes on her. And

J JD Doyle 06:01

there's a great quote on the bridesmaid album that Anita Bryant is to Christianity. What paint by numbers is to art.

06:07

Right, right. But I switched it to sleisenger Loris testers to Judaism, what paint by numbers is to art. So you know what's great if you're hanging on to jokes, and nobody hears them for 20 years? Well, a new bigot, a new bigot comes along you just have to switch it on my Nixon jokes on Bush, you know, you know Bush who makes Dan Quayle look like an intellect. But so everything gets recycled. So is it interesting prejudice never dies? I guess neither does comedy. So I came up with an album called them Always a Bridesmaid never groom. And the hardest thing about that first album was revealing myself. I had the same problem that Richard Pryor had when he started coming out. And instead of doing establishment comedy, which he did for many, many years, he started coming out and talking about being black and being raised in the ghetto, and so forth and so on. And the hardest thing when he came on and started revealing himself was that he was attacked by other blacks. They didn't want this they wanted Bill Cosby and they wanted to Flip Wilson who, you know, find comics, but both of them. But when I started coming out and doing humor that was pro gay and lesbian people said to me, gays and lesbian, you're gonna kill your career, even though they were laughing. You're gonna kill your career, you're gonna kill yourself on television, you know, you won't be a star. And I said, Well, you know, I may never be a star but unless you can tell the truth as a comic, you can never really be funny. And so I didn't care. I just came out and the day I was on the craft Comedy Hour, it was petty and I was starring ABC television you know, Ellen DeGeneres is network we were the stars at at the news carried us and it said, avowed lesbian, you couldn't just be a lesbian had to say I vowed I'm about lesbians and about lesbian eyebrow, it would they were probably trying to say is out of the closet lesbian. So a valid lesbian Robin Tyler doesn't need a Brian jokes. And this was on the national news right after the national broadcast. I'm so glad I came out. Because when I came out, I got happy and free and funny. You know, and I didn't know I'd get all the bookings. And I didn't know I'd make a whole bunch of out. But I didn't know I'd make history. I just knew that I couldn't lie anymore. You know, when people say Don't Ask, Don't Tell what they're really saying is be a liar. And how can you be an artist and be a liar? I mean, how can you win art when the basis of art is supposed to be your truth? How can you be a liar? So comedy is a very serious business. How

J JD Doyle 08:27

did that album end up on the Olivia label?

08:30

I was dating someone at the time booth price. We were dating custom nice word. We were lovers and just for a while. Boo at the time was she later became one of the owners of the Michigan Women's Music Festival and she was the one that submitted it to Olivia. And Olivia didn't want to do it. They said no, no, we've put out a poetry album. It didn't sell. So a comedy album is talking. It's not going to sell. It sold. It sold a lot of albums. And they were



JD Doyle 08:59

to Harrison entire albums with your early partner Pat Harrison.



09:02

Yeah. And to solo solo albums. Did you ever hit the second one? Just kidding. That is the best album The second one. And the reason it was so controversial and it got so written about is because they attacked? You know, it's interesting. Everybody thinks Lenny Bruce got attacked for saying the word. I don't think said on the air. But you know, the four letter words. Well, he was really prosecuted because the Catholic Church didn't like what he was saying. And in essence, he came up against the Catholic Church. And because people had made duty party albums, it's got to do with this. My second album, people have made duty party album, Redd Foxx, who for years and years and years, all of a sudden this Lenny Bruce get prosecuted because he did two things. One is he put out an album with a black with two women of color, one black woman and one Asian woman and him and it was an integrated album cover. And that had never happened before. And this made people very angry. And the second thing is he took on the Catholic Church in my second album, just kidding. My best routine is the birth of the baby Jesus and I do Jesus as a Jewish family, you know, and a sense I take on the church. And I think that possibly that's the most daring, daring kind of comedy is to take on the most powerful thing you can possibly take on and then reveal it as a lie. So great comedy isn't just coming out as gay or lesbian. I don't consider you know, there's a lot of gay and lesbian comics now. And some of them are very, very good. But great comedy is having the guts to tell the truth. And then knowing how to make it funny.



JD Doyle 10:31

You can evolve with a large number of women's music festivals. Tell us about the first one.



10:36

The first one I went to was the Michigan Women's music festival with the why.



JD Doyle 10:43

Right, Michigan with why



10:45

Michigan with a why? Yeah, a woman born woman, you know, I wasn't sure I sent for my birth certificate. And I think I am but I'm not sure. Anyway. I have to I want to say one thing about transgender. Okay. Everybody is knocking, changing like transgender. Meanwhile, I live in Hollywood where we all get facelifts, tummy tucks and everything else, you know, we all go to,

and we say, you know, the desire to look young or the desire to look younger, they say rested. They don't say young anymore in Hollywood, they say rested, like by 30 years. And yet, you know, if you're transgender, and you want it, like, you know, I don't care, cut off your breasts, but whatever it is, all of a sudden, it's like, because it's got a gender thing attached to it. It's wrong. Yet if it's an age thing, it's right. Isn't that hypocritical? I mean, think about it. I you know, I just had breast reduction surgery. I had it, you know, and how to edit a penis, I would have like, you know, been out of the game movement. I mean, I don't know, you know, I didn't because why add one when you have 12 in a drawer, but and you know what, you know what I'm saying? Anyway, he was talking about festivals, festivals, okay. I went to the Michigan Women's music festival. I was obvious with blue at the time. They made me the emcee. But actually boo beg them and I got up there. And I did very slick material. I was from Hollywood. So I did very, but I walked and said, I'm a butcher, you know, and so forth and so on. I lied. No, I am I try. I've tried. I've never seen under a trunk. You know, I don't understand mechanics or athletics. But I said I was a butcher. I looked like a bunch of CAD shorthair and I had I rolled and dirt and had dirty blue jeans. And to me, I was booked enough. And I will and I said all these things, and I got a lot of laughs and I knocked eating tofu and asked how many of the audience were ate meat and 80% of them put their hand up? And I said them? Why is it vegetarian? And I challenged you know, because I'm a comic. And so afterward the, the producer, the owner of the festival, even though it was like, supposed to be a women's collective it was owned all of them were I on to was a women's business came over and said, You know, I really liked you. But people were really offended. You said you were a butcher, because it wasn't politically correct, then this is 78 or nine really way back there. Maybe earlier, the fifth women's music, Michigan Women's music festival. And they started to critique my act politically. Now I'm an artist. And the worst thing you can do, you know, to a child of Hollywood and to an artist is to try to like politically correct the I hate politically correct, I really do. Politically Correct means I'm, you know, the one one person in the room that's going to tell the rest of the people how to think it's so fascist, I can't stand it. So all of a sudden, you said you were Butch and you shouldn't have and you were too slick. I said, Well, I'm not really slick. I'm really Jewish. And, you know, and all this other stuff. And I couldn't stand the critique. And I thought, you know, and the next year, they had me come back to produce the stage. And I came back another year and again, but they didn't want me on the stage in case I would say something wrong. Does this sound like McCarthyism in reverse? You know, this is this is it's like McCarthyism. It was the same thing. So I, I produced and then I thought, no, no, I have to start a festival where the artists can say what they want, even if they're wrong, it's okay to be wrong. You know, it's okay to be politically different. It's okay to have different opinions. You know, everybody doesn't have to agree. So I started the West Coast women's music festival. And an interesting thing happened about there was an artist at that festival. The 34th year that was singing a song called Meet me in the woods and a group of women thought she was singing beat me in the woods. And they came up and they wanted to see her and they asked why I didn't censor her and everything and I said I'm not censoring this artist. Now I knew she had saying meet me in the woods, but they had heard beat me in the woods. Isn't that funny when you're looking for to hear it? Anyway, I'll tell you who the artist was that I wouldn't let them attack. Melissa Etheridge and I'm sure those same women were in her audience paying 100 bucks a show or something like that. So I think I think purism you know, is really, it makes me nauseous. And and when I went to Michigan, although I loved there was a lot of stuff so good. The I love blue price. And I think when bluestamp was on Michigan and her field was she's the mother of women's music as well. as I'm concerned, she used to manage Moghaddam, they were lovers and but she essentially, her vision really created it. And she was the one that took Michigan from a very small little festival to a major festival. And she's a very, very dear friend of mine. And so I think the Michigan festival was wonderful, but I wanted to start a festival where, you know, if you enter Sam, I'm not going to stop. But if you you know, transgender showed up at

the gate, I had them digging ditches and coming in because they were transgendered. I don't care if you're done your work shift, you know what I'm saying? I mean, you can't have all these rules and regulations for other people. Even though I disagreed with a lot of what happened at the West Coast Festival. In a you know, I'm not necessarily into a lot of things that happen there. But who am I to say, how people should live. And so what happens the festivals are great, you know, the women's music flourished. After I started the west coast and southern women's Music Festival and comedy festival comedy began to flourish. So I think the festivals were the greatest legacy of lesbian history of this of the 70s and 80s and 90s. I also think it's something that we really have to examine, because of the the inbred purism in the ideology that I so much disagreed with in a lot of it. I don't believe because you're a man, you're automatically a sexist, and I don't believe I don't believe in name calling. And I don't believe in using victim politics to destroy other people. And so what you saw on stage was this beauty in this fantastic concerts. And you know, Holly near to me is, is the greatest voice of that generation. She's the greatest writer. She's the greatest talent and I don't mean lesbian, or bisexual or whatever. I'm talking about in general show business. I think nobody came out and wrote as many albums as many songs depicting the struggle of that generation is Holly new did and I think she's one of the greatest talents. You know, that didn't come out of women's music. She came out of showbusiness. But but she was great. So you have these great talents, fantastic talents on stage. And then you also had this this simmering of, in the name of trying to reach some kind of, you know, beautiful women's world, you had the simmering of very dangerous fundamentalism. And so to me, I saw the stage at odds with the politics, the stage where some was supposed to reflect the politics, but I felt it at times at odds with the politics. So So I set up my own festivals and got a tech there.

 JD Doyle 17:33

I understand you have one of the largest collections of women's music. Can you tell us about that?

 17:37

I started to videotape all the festivals, not just the music, the comedy, the speakers, I've got Flo Kennedy, I've got Rita Mae Brown, I've got Melissa, I've got everybody almost every mag, maybe I do have everybody. Maybe not everybody but close to, you know, close to everybody we know and a lot of people we don't. And I started to tape it to show my workers it couldn't show up to the concert wasn't for history and had no idea which was historic. I just started to videotape everything so that people that missed the workshops or the concerts, we would show them to the workers later. And so I have hundreds and hundreds of hours. And I guess it's historically probably the most valuable thing you know, other than the albums but I mean, from a video point of view and, and documentary, people are calling me and want to use them in everything. And I just I wrote a letter to I just found an email to be price. I said, I've got over 300 hours of music. What should we do of all this film? So she's thinking about it, and I just applied for a grant to transfer to digital.

 JD Doyle 18:35

What are your feelings about the controversy around rapper Eminem?



18:39

I think Eminem is important to our community because and I wrote an article about him. Because I remember being at the Improv in the 70s. And I was performing and David Brenner was on the bill. And I knew David I liked him. He's a sweet guy. And David made the mistake and the audience's half gay. Lot of gay men had come to see me and David had made the mistake of doing a faggot choke and they stopped the show right there and said you can't do this. So I don't understand why people would make excuses for Eminem in the name of free speech you know in the name of being liberal well, we don't have one civil rights we still don't have we you know, we've mistaken visibility and the music and everything for civil rights. We still do not have one civil rights in this country. And yet we will fight to the death some of our community for Eminem's right to say kill the faggot. And so I think it's really important that we grab our self esteem by the balls and and do something about it. It's not alright for him to say it.



JD Doyle 19:39

What accomplishment of yours are you the most proud?



19:44

I don't know. You know, because I think life isn't about one thing. I think it's about a body of work. I'm proud that I came up as a comic I came out when I was starring on ABC I came out knowing that it would end my establishment career. I wasn't naive about it. And yeah, They came out anyway because they couldn't help it. So that was good. I called for the first march on Washington. And that was good. I started to joke about it. It's in several books. And we should watch on Washington. We know how gay men are camping. And then people are simply should march on Washington, they'll began to cheer. And I said, Yes, we should Bubba and Minneapolis. And that's how the frusemide said, you know, and I love what being a co founder of stop, Dr. Laura, that was great. I like doing that. And getting her off of television and doing it on a budget of \$18,000. You know, I love the women's I've done 26 Women's festivals, but there's no one thing. Because you know, you don't do stuff because you know, it'll make history or even because you're brave, sometimes you just jumping because you stupid. I mean, oh, I think I remember sitting around with a woman. And she said, you know, and we're all trying to decide what we should do in the move to do something. Just you know, I'm gonna write a book, I've written a book, and I'm gonna call it this title. But everybody tells me it's stupid. And I said, you know, call it anything you want. Because what if you never get published again. And you know what the name of that book was? Ruby food jungle. And so I never think about what I've done. I just think about what my challenges are. Like, I just got high off of the Dr. Laura thing, but I don't mean I you know, but I mean, it was pulling, it was invigorating to have a win. But I just don't look back at it all. So I can't single out one thing. And if I had to look back to the single thing, it's probably probably stepping out and being honest in comedy, because it freed me for the rest of my life. And maybe the single greatest act I did when I was 16 years old. Because I came out. I came out of the closet in Canada in 1959, when nobody would talk to me. And I stood on the streets and handed out flyers. And this is in 1959, in Winnipeg. So I think when you're a kid, and you're isolated, and you do it anyway, because I didn't know, people were would be so angry. But after I was 1959, and I was hip. But here's the greatest thing I've

derived out of it all the people I've gotten to know the people of substance that I've gotten to meet because I've been an activist. I have been so fortunate Flo Kennedy and Holly near and Chris, you know, and Boo and activist after activist, the guys I worked with unstopped Dr. Laura, I get to meet people that are dedicated, or creative or creative and dedicated, I get to meet a, you know, they have such passion, that that my life has been full of such passion, that I've been just really fortunate. You know, everybody says, What's it like to, you know, be well known? Well, not you don't take it home with you, you animals don't know, they just want to be fed on time. So all of that doesn't matter. But when you have your memories as you get older, and I'm older, I'm 59 going on 60. When you have the memories, and you have these fine people that have given so much and done so much a lot of whom are not famous, then that may be as the greatest gift back.

 JD Doyle 22:52

You've been involved in all the marches on Washington, how have those events changed and evolved.

 22:58

While this give you the dish about the truth about the last one. I'll take away everything, all the fighting and infighting in the ad hoc committee, which essentially were mostly Native people, although I didn't know it, then the real fight in the last March in Washington, and I called for it the real fight was between the mainstreaming of the gay and lesbian movement. You know, we did a survey of we did a survey, I have the results on my computer and something like what what are the top eight things you're concerned with? The number one was the right to not to get killed the right into violence, the right to work? Number three was marriage. This is 45,000 people answered this. Nobody's ever everybody claims they represent the grassroots. Nobody's ever asked them what they wanted. Number four was the right to keep your children. I mean, so in essence, and this wasn't like just by email people answered by fax and postage and from all over the country and every little podunk town. And so, in essence was here's here's the difference in the first march, we had five simple demands, you know, don't kill us the right to work keep our children was very it was five in the second wage because of AIDS happening. The demands for more AIDS was added on to it and it was slightly more by the third March, it was a laundry list of progressive politics and politics, some politics that I don't agree with, for instance, they eliminated the age of consent, totally eliminated the age of consent. You know, not everybody, not everybody is going to be liberal, not everybody's going to be progressive or to the left. And the 93. March became a laundry list of everybody else's right. And it's interesting, but when now puts on a march that's pro choice. It doesn't add every other laundry list is a pro choice March, when somebody puts out a march that's against violence against women. They like now did they have violence against women? And somehow when the Gay Lesbian GLBT movement puts out would begin to sound like a sandwich now right? What's a Bacon Lettuce, tomato, BLT is a we came close to being a sandwich this movement anyway young. But when we put on a much, we have to have a laundry list of everything. And to me in 93, what I said that I would never be involved with again, is a march that de facto, they slipped in and now they deny it to eliminate the age of consent. And I am not here to say that being a pedophile is okay. And so I didn't want that politic mixed up with what I was fighting for. And I think you had in the march in 2000 Take away all the stuff and how terribly it was mismanaged by the board. And mismanaged is the kindest word I can say. And the fact that the FBI had to

come in and I was what person that expose that to the press that the FBI was called in. If you take away everything, and you look at it historically, in 25 years, and maybe in a decade, it will show the splitting of the movement toward the mainstreaming of the movement, you know, and they went back to wanting the same demands as in the first March, the right to work not to get killed very simple demands. And so I think that all of these sort of people that say they represent the grassroots and what the grassroots really want, didn't want to face the fact that the majority of our community is very mainstream. And by mainstream, I don't mean right wing or anything, but I mean, mainstream, they want what everybody else wants, you know, not to get murdered to have kids if they want to have the right to have the legal rights of the marriage of Fords. And so it was the real split in the movement between a few people controlling the or saying that control and speak to for for this country, and the majority of people speaking for themselves. And so I think that's what happened. And that was the difference. And that's historically how it will be looked at.

 JD Doyle 26:51

One last question, Robin, what are your current projects?

 26:55

Oh, good. What am I doing? I have a toy company, a women's tour company. Women with money. And and I'm taking 50 lesbians to Africa to Kenya. I'm leaving September 1.

 JD Doyle 27:09

How many are you bringing back? And yeah,

 27:11

no, we're only bringing 48 It's like, you know, when people break up, maybe 46. We'll get back and and then next year, we're doing the women's tour to the Gay Games in Australia. And no Gay Games is not when you're breaking up with your lover. And then the next year we're doing the Amazon a cruise and Machu Picchu in Peru. I have a women's tour company. We do all these sort of international tours and cruises. Do you have a website? Yeah, my website has Australia WWW dot Robin Tyler tours.com If you want any information on the tours or cruises, it's Robin pilar@aol.com.

 JD Doyle 27:47

I want to thank Robin Tyler for the interview. And I want to end with one of my favorite of her quotes from it. Umer is the razor sharp edge of the truth. It is anger and truth made funny. This is JD Doyle for lesbian and gay voices.