

C o m e d y

BILL MAHER Gets The Last Laugh

By Iris Wiener

A man who truly embodies the Fifth Amendment, Bill Maher says it how it is—much to the chagrin of a nation that has proven itself to be afraid of the displeasing truth. Many know him for his blatant remarks, but be that as it may, America's more intelligent inhabitants know him as a man not afraid to verbalize what most people are thinking. A gallant spokesperson to this effect, Maher mixes humor with poignant political satire on his HBO series *Real Time With Bill Maher*, and brings his stand-up act to the stage on July 7 at Westbury Music Fair.

On hiatus from *Real Time* until the new season begins on July 30, Maher uses his "down time" to vent on this unfailingly eventful world. "So much has happened! I don't remember having a hiatus where so much has happened," Maher marvels. "I've been anxious to be able to give my take on it. I've had more fun doing stand up than I ever did with anything else."

Maher returns to the stage this year with an entirely new act, including his take on everything from Janet Jackson's boob and Rush Limbaugh's drug addiction, to the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and gay marriage. "And of course, it wouldn't be a Bill Maher show if I didn't make a few shots about religion, and maybe just one, or maybe two comments about George Bush," says Maher with a twinkle in his eye. "I was doing a show the other night in Denver or Phoenix, and I said 'Now, I'm not just going to rag on George Bush all night,



and the audience began to boo, and were like, 'You better rag on George Bush!'"

Never a shy one when it comes to politics (or anything for that matter), the liberal will surely bring his vote for John Kerry into his routine as well. "John Kerry is a completely viable candidate, there's nothing wrong with him, except that this is a very spoiled nation and we want our leaders to be somebody that we feel we could have pot roast with—no. John Kerry is not overly burdened with charisma, that's true, he's

not perhaps as warm as we would like, or as likeable as we would like, or as human. But you know what, he's the president, we're not voting for first buddy. People are such pussies, the voters say, 'I'm not comfortable with John Kerry,' who gives a fuck if you're comfortable with him, you don't have to fuck him, just vote for him! The most important thing isn't likeability, it should be competence. Even if you like George Bush and you think he's a great guy, and you think he was well meaning in Iraq, how about just firing his team cause they fucked it up so badly, just on a competence level?"

The logistics of society never cease to amaze Maher especially when it comes to the issue of censorship. His hit television show *Politically Incorrect* was cancelled due to a public outcry accusing him of saying "inappropriate" things. A personal subject for him, he blames the ignorant powers that be for the show's demise. "Basically, because people who never watched it to begin with complained, it was cancelled. People who watched the show, the fans, never had any problem with my supposedly *Outrageous* comments," he sneers with a surprisingly mellow sort of bitterness. "It was the people

who heard about it second or third hand who didn't like me for a million other things I said over the years. And my point always is, if you don't watch the show, you really shouldn't have a vote if it stays on or not."

The media seems to be another strong victim of Maher's attacks, however well-deserved they may be. The images that come across the average viewer's screen on a daily basis disgustingly aggravate Maher to no end. "It's so sickening," he says of

the Iraqi prisoner images that are commonplace nowadays. "I never thought I would see the day when we got so low that we would be bragging that our torture is not as bad as Saddam's torture. That's what I see right-wingers do. 'Hey, Saddam was a lot worse with the way HE tortured people!' Hey, you know what, you're right, Saddam WAS a lot worse than us at torture, how about another big pat on the back for America?" The Reagan coverage got to him as well. "Not enough of it!" Maher laughs. "Oh, please. A two week funeral? It wasn't until the fourth day that I was really sure that he was dead! The media only knows two speeds: not anything or way too much."

But one thing is for sure—Maher will bring the perfect balance of comedy and thought stimulation when he arrives at WMF. "It is thought provoking, I think the subjects that I choose to talk about, and the areas that I choose to make jokes about are intellectually nourishing and cathartic. That's what I find when I go around the country, there's sort of a cathartic sense that, 'Hey here's somebody who's saying what I was thinking, and I haven't heard anybody else saying that.' And that's all very satisfying, but it all means nothing if they're not laughing their ass off. I want people leaving that building with no ass." The Cornell graduate already knows that he will enjoy himself immensely at this particular venue, as it hits close to home. "I've always had a good time with L.I. people. They got me through college. I'll be happy to come there and make them laugh their asses off!" ■