

Telling secrets for laughs

True confessions are the name of the game at Bang Comedy's storytelling series. Audiences can relate.

BY JAMIE WETHERBE

With stories that include forbidden crushes on Freddy Krueger, scheduling your first casual hookup and hiding in a bathtub with 72 slices of American cheese, Thursday night's show at the Bang Comedy Theatre is not your mother's idea of a comedy performance.

Now celebrating its ninth installment, the monthly storytelling series "Don't Tell My Mother" pulls from a variety of corners of the entertainment industry, including actors, artists, screenwriters and, for good measure, a lawyer and a drag queen to spin true 10-minute confessions they'd never want their moms to know.

"It's not a stand-up comedy show or a stand-up comedy crowd," said co-creator and Fox executive Nikki Levy, who will perform a story about — who else? — her mother on Thursday night. "A lot of the laughter in the show comes from people relating to the [performer's] honesty and authenticity."

In an era when oversharing on social networks is the norm, storytelling has become a hit on both coasts. Perhaps the genre's most famous example, the nonprofit series called the Moth began in 1997 and won a Peabody Award in 2010 for its public radio broadcast. The show recently teamed up with the USA Network on a bicoastal storytelling campaign to combat bias with contributions from such folks as Academy Award-winners Dustin Lance Black and Octavia Spencer.

Another show, "Risk!," founded by Kevin Allison from the comedy troupe the State, invites comics such as Kevin Nealon and Sarah Silverman to air their disastrous delicacies during live shows and podcasts in New



SUSAN SERICE



MEGAN SWORMSTEDT AND LOWELL HILE

JEN KOBER, top, has a doozie ready for Thursday's edition of "Don't Tell My Mother." Co-creator Nikki Levy, above, will perform a story about her mother.

'Don't Tell My Mother'

Where: Bang Comedy Theatre, 457 N. Fairfax Ave., L.A.

When: 8 p.m. Thu.

Price: \$15

Info: donttellmy.com

York and Los Angeles.

"There's this wackiness that comes out in people when they feel connected to you," comic Jen Kober said of the medium's growing popularity. "You seem like more of a real person and a friend than a person on TV telling jokes."

Thursday's lineup at

on a makeshift riser (think grade-school choir concert), sometimes with notes in hand, inches from front-row patrons seated knee-to-knee on the stage.

"There's no microphone, so it's really cool that I'm so very loud," said Kober, who landed an agent at a recent show after telling a story about taking a weeping Christian cousin struggling with a bad psychedelic trip to Wal-Mart to "walk it off."

This time, Kober will talk about a tandem sky-diving experience gone wrong. "My first parachute didn't open," said Kober, who also acts out her mother filming — and providing commentary — from the ground.

Kober's story about secretly eating cheese slices as a child is a fan favorite. "People come up to me all the time and tell me they did the same thing with graham crackers, or that they ate other kids' lunches in kindergarten," she said. "All this shame eating we all did as children in the dark draws us together now — as friends."

The show rotates storytellers and subjects every month, and Thursday's theme, "The Big Gay Show," is particularly potent for Frances Callier and Angela Shelton, better known as "Frangela" from appearances on VH1's "Best Week Ever" and the reality show "I'm a Celebrity... Get Me out of Here!" The duo are self-proclaimed "queer-minded" heterosexuals and often incorporate marriage equality into their political satire.

"When we were growing up, being gay wasn't strange or weird," said Callier, who will share a story about her great uncle. "[He] was a drag queen and he took care of me during the day. We called him 'Uncle Charlene' and spent the afternoon sewing sequins on his cape."

"It's very important to us to talk about what we support, and that's everybody being able to get married," added Shelton. "The laughter allows us to get the idea across and change people's minds. And that means we're doing our job."

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"Don't Tell My Mother" features actors David Dean Bottrell ("Boston Legal") and Jack Plotnick ("Buffy the Vampire Slayer"), Kober ("Curb Your Enthusiasm") and twins Gary and Larry Lane, the producers behind the documentary "Hollywood to Dollywood."

Since its October debut, the show has packed a crowd into Bang Theatre's small, 1950s-style lobby, complete with a cigarette girl weaving through the folding chairs with classic candies. The more intimate confines outside of Bang's usual performance space are a conscious choice on Levy's part. "Bang is a theater, but I didn't want to do it in the theater, because the whole point of this is that you're telling secrets to strangers." Instead, performers stand