

# Morgan Brayton

## The Press Kit

### The Full Bio

Morgan Brayton was born and raised in the satanic capital of Victoria, BC. She now makes her home in Vancouver where she has been a writer and producer for more than nine years and a performer for the past 17.

Morgan is a familiar face on Vancouver stages and other places in the world where there are film and television screens. She spent six years as a performer, writer and producer with Vancouver's all-female sketch comedy group 30 Helens attaining critical acclaim and a loyal fan following. When the Helens disbanded in 2002, Morgan was chosen as the new Artistic Director of the Vancouver International Comedy Festival where she created *SketchFest Vancouver* (Canada's first and only festival of sketch comedy) and produced Vancouver's comedy festival in 2003.

Morgan's film and television acting credits include roles in *The L-Word*, *Scooby Doo Two: Monsters Unleashed*, *Hard Core Logo*, *The Division*, *My Life Without Me* and a veritable unpaid cornucopia of indie films.

In 2004 Morgan became a columnist with *Xtra West*, Vancouver's GLBT paper ([www.xtra.ca](http://www.xtra.ca)). Her monthly column, *Siren*, is a frank and funny look at queer life through the eyes of a fierce, fat, feminist femme.

Taking the knowledge and experience gained through her past decade in comedy, Morgan formed her own production company in 2004. The mission of Pink Vixen Comedy Arts ([www.pinkvixencomedyarts.com](http://www.pinkvixencomedyarts.com)) is to present events that are artistically and culturally diverse, socially provocative and massively entertaining. With hits ranging from *Tickled Pink: An evening of queer comedy* (a standing-room-only live show as part of the *2004 Vancouver Queer Film + Video Festival*) and the overwhelmingly successful *SketchFest Vancouver 2005* ([www.sketchfestvancouver.com](http://www.sketchfestvancouver.com)), Pink Vixen is proving to be a comedy force to be reckoned with.

Morgan can currently be seen in her one-woman show *Girls Like Me* coming soon to a city near you.

Critics have called Morgan "profoundly silly" and "reminiscent of a young Catherine O'Hara". Her dad used to call her "Basketball Head".

## The Short Bio

Morgan Brayton is a familiar face on Vancouver stages and other places in the world where there are film and television screens. She spent six years as a performer, writer and producer with the all-female sketch comedy group 30 Helens and is the former Artistic Director of the Vancouver International Comedy Festival. She is currently a columnist with Xtra West, a writing instructor at Vancouver Film School, Executive Artistic Director of Pink Vixen Comedy Arts Society and producer of SketchFest Vancouver, Canada's only festival of sketch comedy. Her film and television credits include roles in *The L-Word*, *Scooby Doo Two: Monsters Unleashed*, *Hard Core Logo*, *My Life Without Me* and a veritable unpaid cornucopia of indie films. She can currently be seen in *You Fake*, a film by Maureen Bradley that asks the question—do lesbians ever fake it in bed? Critics have called Morgan "profoundly silly" and "reminiscent of a young Catherine O'Hara". Her dad used to call her "Basketball Head".

## The Show

### Morgan Brayton in *Girls Like Me*

Featuring a collection of her favourite female characters, *Girls Like Me* is Morgan's first full solo show. Combining storytelling and sketch comedy, Morgan introduces the audience to the world of women who live inside her head but frequently escape to make people laugh.

Meet middle-aged mom Button Bradley on the occasion of her first Women's Studies class. Root for nervous neophyte exotic dancer Cherry Lipsmacker as she takes to the stage for the first time. Have your license and registration ready because when Sgt. Tibble pulls you over, you'll know you've been pulled over. And get a lesson in becoming a woman from Lizzie who learned about her fallopian tubes today at school.

You'll also find out which Charlie's Angel Morgan never wanted to be and what makes her write haiku. Yes. There will be haiku.

You're bound to recognize some girls like you in Morgan Brayton's *Girls Like Me*.

## The Acting Resume

Height: 5'3" Weight: 170 lbs Hair: Brown Eyes: Hazel Unions: UBCP, SAG  
Agent: Jamie Levitt, Lauren Levitt & Associates Inc., 604.739.8611

### Film & Television

Fetching Cody	Actor	David Ray/Fetching Cody Prods.
The L Word	Recurring	Various/ Showtime
The Division	Series Regular	Various/Viacom
Scooby Doo 2	Actor	Raja Gosnell/Warner Bros.
You Fake	Lead	Maureen Bradley/Firehorse Films
My Life Without Me	Actor	Isabelle Croixet/Independent
Sight Unseen	Principal	Donald Wrye/CBC
Get Carter	Principal	Stephen Kay/Warner Bros.
The Chosen Family	Lead	Maureen Bradley/Girl World Prods.
Cold Feet	Principal	Joe Napolitano/NBC
Strange World	Principal	Peter Markel/Strange World Prods.
Babette's Feet	Principal	Harry Killas/Greenroom Film Co.
Spag	Lead	Lynne Kamm/Saucy Productions
Millenium	Principal	Thomas J. Wright/Fox Television
Hard Core Logo	Principal	Bruce McDonald/Ed Festus Prods.
The Surrogate	Principal	Jan Egleson/New World
Jacks	Principal	J. McPherson/Pacific Motion Pictures
The Commish	Actor	Jeff Kibbee/Cannell Films
Ronnie and Julie	Actor	Phil Spinks/Showtime
No Child of Mine	Principal	M. Katelman/Green Epstein
Sirens	Principal	Robert Butler/ABC
This Boy's Life	Actor	M. Cayton-Jones/This Boy's Life
North of Pittsburgh	Principal	Richard Martin/Acme
Nancy Drew	Principal	Tim Bond/Nelvana
21 Jump Street	Principal	Don McBreatty/Cannell Films
Glory Days	Principal	Marc Laub/Hasburgh Films
Neon Rider	Recurring	Various/AVR Productions
21 Jump Street	Principal	Jorge Montesi/Cannell Films

### Selected Theatre

Good Morning, Gaytown!	Lead	Vancouver Fringe
30 Helens	Various	Sketch Comedy
After the Beep	Lead	Vancouver Fringe
Girl Parts	Various	Sketch Comedy
Daughter of God	Lead	Vancouver Fringe
Lipstuck	Lead	Gastown Theatre
Beyond Therapy	Actor	Belfry Theatre

## The Press Articles

**UrbanTrendz**

**February 11, 2005**

**By Caroline MacGillvray**

### Spotlight on Morgan Brayton

After six years as performer, writer and producer with the all-female sketch comedy group 30 Helens, former Artistic Director of the Vancouver International Comedy Fest Morgan Brayton is Executive A.D. of Pink Vixen Comedy Arts Society and producer of SketchFest, our only festival of sketch comedy. Critics have called Morgan "profoundly silly" and "reminiscent of a young Catherine O'Hara". Her dad calls her "Basketball Head".

*When did you start acting?*

I first graced the stage as a ladybug at the age of three. I moved to Vancouver when I was 18 to pursue a career as a film and TV actress.

*What made you decide to focus on comedy and creating your own work?*

Because people kept laughing when I tried to play serious dramatic roles. It was so annoying. I've always been addicted to comedy but it wasn't until I joined an all-female sketch comedy group in 1996 that everything clicked. I ended up writing and performing with Girl Parts and later 30 Helens for almost 6 years. Those groups came out of our frustration with waiting for the phone to ring with an acting job on the other end of the line. We decided to make our own work. I've been doing that in one capacity or another ever since.

*What would you recommend to someone wanting to get into comedy and/or acting?*

Watch as much comedy as you can. Comedy today is different from what it was 20 years ago and it'll be different again in another 20 years. Knowing a vast array of comedy can open up your understanding of what's possible. And don't be afraid to suck. There are a lot of bad comedians out there and you might as well be one of them for a while. It's only through doing it, and doing it lots, that you'll find your comedic voice and, hopefully, you'll get better. Comedy is a gift you give the audience; their response is their gift back to you. If you're doing it for some other reason, like money or fame, you should quit now.

*Where did you grow up?*

In the dark, satanic city of Victoria. I moved to Vancouver 16 years ago and haven't been to a good virgin sacrifice since.

*When/why did you start Pink Vixen?*

I started Pink Vixen in 2004 after leaving as Artistic Director of the Vancouver International Comedy Festival. Our mandate is to create comedy events that are artistically and culturally diverse, socially provocative and massively entertaining.

*What's up for you and Pink Vixen in 2005?*

SketchFest Vancouver is our next big event. From February 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>, six of the funniest sketch comedy groups from Canada and the US will make Vancouver laugh for four nights straight—a few minutes at a time. They're getting ready to blow the doors off the Waterfront Theatre with their talents and I can't wait. After the festival I'm planning to sleep for the rest of February.

Next we are co-presenting a workshop called Everybody's a Comedian taught by Daniel Packard as part of the Chutzpah! Festival. As for me, March is allergy season so I plan on spending the month in agony. After that I'll be hitting some film festivals to promote a film I was in, working on a new feature film that shoots this spring and a really hilarious TV pilot that my genius friend Lisa G is writing. I'm blessed to have a lot of talented friends who keep involving me in their projects.

*What do you do in your down time?*

I'm real crafty and stitchy. I hang out with my cats and do a lot of that. Oh, man, I'm so boring...

*What wisdom words do you live by?*

"It is the role of the artist to enrage, enlighten and inspire."--Michael Franti. Also "Never put salt in your eye." I think that's from the Bible. Or maybe Kids in the Hall.

**Vancouver Province  
February 9, 2005  
By Stuart Derdeyn**

### **Sketchy at their Best**

What do most all of today's top comics have in common? They started in sketch theatre.

From *Monty Python* and *In Living Color* to *Mad* and *SNL* – all troupes specializing in humour that runs the gamut from topical to, let's be fair, terrible – sketch troupes have launched many greats.

**A 10-year vet with Van's 30 Helens, Morgan Brayton says sketch is her "first love."** So she's brought performers from across North America together for Canada's inaugural sketch fest.

Why is it that a form embraced in nearly every community hasn't been feted yet?

"Given similar events in Seattle, New York and San Fran, and with the longstanding tradition of sketch in Canada, it's surprising there hasn't been a festival before now," says Brayton. "It happened in Vancouver because we're sketchier."

Truth is, it's difficult to put sketch groups on the road.

"From a producer's perspective, you hire a stand-up, you need a mic, a light; you're done. Sketch groups are large and need a venue, so it's expensive. You rarely see them programmed."

Brayton's showcasing six acts for SketchFest: Calgary's Obscene But Not Heard, San Francisco's Kasper Hauser, New York City's Meat and locals Urban Improv and Pan Asian-Canadian unit Assaulted Fish.

Nelson Wong is pumped about appearing in the festival. The Assaulted Fish player figures his company is a fine example of sketch's wide-ranging content.

"We're a group of five who want to tell comedic stories from the point of view of our community," says Wong. "This area hasn't been explored and we're trying to change that."

"Entertainment wasn't really an accepted career goal for many first-generation immigrants who worked hard to get financially successful jobs. We're that sophomore jinx, pursuing showbiz instead of real careers."

Touche. That's exactly the kind of funny-yet-political barb that underlies many of the best sketch gags.

"You capitalize on opportunities when they arise, whether in rehearsal or on stage," says Wong.

"The group dynamic is what makes it so exciting."

See for yourself about getting your laugh on until Saturday.

## **THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT**

**July 22, 2004**

**By Janet Smith**

### **A Laughing Matter**

The former artistic director of the Vancouver International Comedy Festival has resurfaced to launch her own arts company. The Pink Vixen Comedy Arts Society stages its first event at the Vancouver Queer Film and Video Festival on August 10 with Tickled Pink, a variety show of everything from standup and sketch to drag, modern dance, and spoken word. All acts will incorporate humour, executive artistic director Morgan Brayton told the *Straight*, and its wide definition of the form is what Pink Vixen is all about: promoting culturally and artistically diverse laughs. "Our mandate is to expand notions of what comedy is and can do. Comedy shouldn't be an alienating art form or exclusionary, yet so much of it is," she said. Brayton has also booked the Waterfront Theatre for the return of SketchFest from February 10 to 13, 2005. She had launched the first one with success under the comedy-fest flag in 2003 but was unable to stage it this year due to funding shortfalls. "Sketch is such an isolated form of comedy," she

said. "It's expensive to tour and for that reason comedy fests don't bring in a lot of troupes."

## **WESTENDER**

**August 1 – 7, 2002**

**By Randy Gaudreau**

### **One final night out for comedy troupe 30 Helens**

For more than five years, Vancouver's lippiest, grittiest all-girl sketch-comedy troupe has been treating audiences with outlandish displays of in-your-face comedy. But it's all coming to an end for the 30 Helens.

During Pride week, the girls will take the stage together one last time as part of the Vancouver International Comedy Festival with the Girls Night Out production.

And what a way to go for the 30 Helens, sharing the Stanley Theatre stage Sunday, Aug. 4 with the comic genius of Elvira Kurt, downright crazy Toronto physical comic Lex Vaughn, and New York's rising star Mary C. Matthews as host.

"I can't think of a better way to put 30 Helens to bed other than this show," says Morgan Brayton of 30 Helens. "To have this great big show with outgoing and supportive producers Marg and Wayne (Specht) leaving the festival. It really is the perfect way to end all this."

The 30 Helens were spawned from a 14-member female sketch group named Girl Parts in 1997. The members—Victoria Deschanel, Morgan Brayton, Kathryn Kirkpatrick and Jacqueline Korb—borrowed ideas from their previous group, added a little more of an edge and gave it their all. Almost immediately, they were playing standing-room-only shows. They hit the road in 1999 with the Highway to Helens tour, which won honours at the Victoria Fringe Festival, and sold-out shows in San Francisco. But now, after it's all said and done, the Helens are tired and ready to move on.

"Not to be too new-agey about it, but it's time," says Brayton. "I was absolutely devastated for about a day and a half, then I got really, really exhausted, and was like, 'I'm exhausted.' Five and a half years of just eating, breathing and sleeping 30 Helens just takes its toll."

So it's one more time for the Helens. This show will also bring back original member Farrell Spence, who left the group about a year ago, to ensure that fans get the full 30 Helens experience. Brayton describes what that is for anyone who has missed out up until the show.

"The attack we take on comedy isn't what most people are used to seeing women in comedy do. We don't do stereotypes, we don't do period jokes. Our shows are about outlandish humour, in-your-face comedy. It's definitely envelope-bursting."

And maybe more so in the last show. The last sketch they plan depicts a first night out for a couple of amateur strippers. And it's surprising how far they'll go for laughs, and to sneak in a message.

"Sometimes the best way to get a point across is to sneak in the back door. In that sketch, I end up naked and covered in whipped cream, and it's really important for me to be naked and fat on stage," laughs Brayton. "Because you don't often see naked fat women on stage. It's silly and funny, but you get that fat-positive agenda in there as well."

Brayton says the Pride Week crowd is a perfect example of the diverse crowds that the Helens have drawn in their years, and hopes to draw some folks in from that evening's Pride Parade.

"There's no typical profile. We have straight audiences, queer audiences, a young hip crowd and we have an older straight-laced demographic as well. We're hoping to shake up the Stanley Theatre a little."

Brayton says that the festival belongs as part of Pride Week, because of the support that it continually gives the community.

"I am so proud of the comedy festival. So much of mainstream comedy relies on queers and others being outsiders and subjects of ridicule. So often, it's about misogyny or homophobia, but for the comedy festival to be as supportive as they are of queer comedians is so great, and it's something I'm really so proud to be part of."

## **THE VANCOUVER COURIER**

**May 17, 2001**

**By Shawn Conner**

### **Success keeps comics working but apart**

Morgan Brayton is clearly dumbfounded. Having grown up in a household barren of television for a good part of her childhood, Brayton can only listen and wonder as Farrell Spence, one of her six partners-in-comedy in the Vancouver troupe 30 Helens, sings the praises of such groundbreaking Canadian television programming as *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein*.

For those who don't recall the early '70s show, well, let's just say not even the brilliant minds behind SCTV could have conceived of such a weird, ostensibly child-oriented program as *Frightenstein*, in which green-skinned ogres cavorted against backdrops sprung from a bad LSD trip. But her enthusiasm gives some insight into where Spence's comedic heart lies—in the weird, bizarre and occasionally original world of pop culture. Brayton's comedy, on the other hand, extends more towards rants against what's pissing her off—what you'd expect from someone who's answering machine basically

tells anyone phoning on behalf of the Liberal party to save their breath (the message was actually recorded by her roommate, but Brayton agreed to it.)

The Helens brought their disparate senses of humour together about three years ago. Tired of auditioning for underwritten roles, the actresses poured their energies into characters and skits of their own devising. The then-septet took up residence at the West End hangout the Jupiter Café, where the group performed once a month. "I can vaguely remember those days," says Spence over a soft drink at a downtown restaurant. Tall, thin and dark-haired, the former Winnipegger is a contrast to the shorter, rounder Brayton. We were going so fast and so hard. We were also working full-time, auditioning, writing, and producing the show. I don't think I ever slept more than five hours a night for those nine months. It was great, we pumped out tons of great material, but at the end of it we were like..." Spence gasps for breath.

These days, the schedules of the two comedic actresses prevent them from performing as often in the troupe as perhaps they'd like. Brayton lives part-time in Los Angeles where she is shooting a TV series about five female cops called *The Division* for the Lifetime Channel. Spence, meanwhile, has been getting parts in such movies as the locally shot David Arquette-and-a-dog flick *See Spot Run* (according to Spence, she plays "the driver of a petting zoo wagon full of farting zebras").

Performing and writing with 30 Helens has helped them prepare for such roles, and more. "A few of the auditions I've done have been almost 30 Helens characters," says Spence. "A lot of parts I've gotten have been for a guy but the casting director has said, 'Bring Farrell in and see what she can do with this character.' And I'll end up doing something I've done onstage with 30 Helens and sell it. So 30 Helens has definitely opened some doors."

"We've been waiting our whole careers to play the parts we have not been getting to play until we started creating them ourselves with 30 Helens," adds Brayton. "Now, parts are coming up and it's a piece of cake. Four years ago I'd walk into an audition and it meant the world to me; now I walk into an audition to say, 'Would you like some fries with that?' or whatever the hell it is, and it's just an audition. I'd like to get the part so I could pay off some more student loans, but what I want to do is play those great characters we get to play in 30 Helens."

These days the six members are far too busy with their respective careers to get together more than every few months, if that. "I wouldn't say it's hard to keep the group together, but we're definitely in a huge transition period right now," says Brayton. The troupe's next performance is May 20 at the Arts Club Granville Island Stage, where the Helens participate in *A Sketch in Time*. The annual benefit for ALS features a number of local performers (Roman Danylo, Cass King) and groups (Full Figure Theatre Company, Gut-Wrench, Sucker Punch) and is hosted by Nicola Cavendish. Each gets seven minutes, which doesn't sound like much, but Brayton and Spence figure they can fit three skits in, including two TV commercials and a parody of a German talk show inspired by Spence's late night television viewing habits. The 30 Helens hopes to have a new full-length show ready by the end of summer. "We need to write a new show," says Brayton. "We haven't written any new material in a long time. We didn't want to miss

this benefit, but at the same time we don't want to come back with a whimper, we want to come back with a bang."

## **XTRA WEST**

**November 30, 2000**

**Michael Venus**

### **Talking it Out**

#### **Morgan Brayton's life as a 30 Helen**

*Morgan Brayton is an up and coming actor who is rocking the world of comedy. Morgan is part of the totally hilarious comedy group 30 Helens. She gives me all the juice on what it's like to be a Helen and life on the set of a new TV show with Jo Polniaczek.*

Michael Venus: So how long has 30 Helens been around?

Morgan Brayton: It's going to be four years in January. We started as a 14-member group called Girl Parts which happened for about a year and a half. A group of us left that and formed 30 Helens.

MV: What's the main difference between the two?

MB: Well, now it's a lot smaller...so things get done a tiny bit faster. When we started Girl Parts we didn't really know what we wanted to do. It was a bunch of women who wanted to work, wanted to create, wanted to do stuff with other women. After the first year or so, it was kinda like...ya know, when you throw together a group of people, obviously things are going to evolve over time. We weren't all into this for the same reasons, we're not all on the same page. We didn't all have the same drive, interests, and priorities. So the group now that is 30 Helens is more on the same page as far as what we wanted to do and where we wanted to go. For me as far as my writing and taking chances, doing other things like spoken word it's been huge. So, fate was stepping in there for sure.

So now we've this thing. We've built this hype and now we've sort of caught up to that. People know who we are; we've done some tours, some really great opportunities. We caught up to all that and it's like...now what are we going to do? We're just taking a break right now. We really put the brakes on, and really just work out our internal stuff. Things are not falling apart. We're not breaking up! (That's been a rumour going around.) It's totally out of care for the group. We have to be strong and ready to do something that we're proud of, rather than just putting stuff out there.

MV: So what were you just doing in LA?

I was hanging around my hotel room, watching really bad American television. MTV is the strangest thing I've ever seen. I'm working there on a show called *The Division*, for the Lifetime Network, which is like WTN in the States. We shot the pilot here last June. It's a cop show and the chief of police, well, I'm her daughter. So it's sort of an incidental role, which ended up being a recurring role when it went to series. I'm very

blessed to be taken down there to be on the show. It stars Bonnie Bedelia who is amazing. Nancy McKeon from the Facts of Life, Jo. When I found out and met her I was just like, "My God you're Jo Polniaczek!" Who didn't want to be Jo? I met Nancy and Joan Jett both in the same day, within like two hours. That was a really great day! (After the show all of us went out for dinner and I had to leave to go to the Def Leopard and Joan Jett concert.) Anyhow, I play Bonnie's wayward, rebellious, headstrong daughter.

MV: How do you sort out conflicts within 30 Helens?

MB: Let's see...it's really hard to explain how we do things to an outsider. Some of us come from a feminist background and wanted to do things collectively. So all kinds of meetings and talk everything out and try to make sure everyone's voices are heard. In any group where you have a bunch of creative people together, everybody trying to put their ideas forward, there is going to be conflict and emotions are going to run high. We talk through everything ad nauseum.

MV: Where do you see yourself and the group in the future?

MB: Ideally, we all agree that we want our own TV show. It's a matter of when and how and so on. We're so determined that we don't want to do a shitty job of it. We want to be ready. For myself I'm realizing I can do anything. I want to continue with all the things I'm doing...do it all...which I am!

**CITY VIEW**  
**September 2000**  
**Chris Boughton**

How pleasant it is to sit between two charmingly middle-aged married WASPy couples in the gymnasium of an Anglican private school and watch two women in drag discuss how good Winston Churchill is at giving head.

Genuinely funny, original and smart, *30 Helens* will rejuvenate anyone's depleted faith in live comedy. The Helens in question are a young feminist comedy troupe from Vancouver who mix their subtle politics with shrewd observations. Favorites of the fringe scene, the women drew a big appreciative crowd, and even those that were initially shocked (everyone) by some of the skits were won over by the self-deprecating tone to the show.

Tons of local flavour has made it into *30 Helens*, with references to Victoria's gay bathhouse and old people attempting aerobics. The word hilarious doesn't begin to describe it: this group should be the next Kids in the Hall. **Morgan Brayton was a stand-out as the painfully vulnerable Button Bradley, an ageing housewife taking her first Women's Studies class, which was both laugh-out-loud funny and surprisingly touching, reminiscent of a young Catherine O'Hara.**

My only complaint with the show, which mixed an array of sketches of everything from Calvin Klein's ads to culturally-insensitive teens dancing to Britney Spears, is that it was too short. The crowd was literally yelling out for more.

**THE VANCOUVER COURIER**  
**Wednesday, August 2, 2000**  
**Jo Ledingham**

### **Lippy, loud Helens burn bright at comedy festival**

There are only six performers and none is named Helen, but there's enough talent here for at least two companies. This show is slick, lippy and loud, with lots of really big music. The material--funny, acerbic, irreverent--honours no sacred cows and is small 'p' political from "The Becki Show" to the second coming of Christ.

This sextet of non-Helens implicates women in their acceptance of the male perspective: women flogging personal hygiene products that mask feminine odour; talk-show gigs where female guests really just jiggle their boobs; and TV hostesses who encourage beer bellied guys to slag their gal partners for "letting themselves go."

Some of the characters, however, like Mercy on the Pentecostal TV program "Ask Mercy," dispense funky down home advice for the "weddin' night" and a gal's first glimpse of male paraphernalia: "a pork sausage with two poached eggs rolled in lint on the side."

**Although the show is mainly a hoot, character Button Bradley injects a nice bit of underplayed poignancy as she introduces herself to her women's studies classmates. Her pottery class was cancelled, she explains, and besides, her daughter Missy has taken some Women's Studies and even found a really nice "roommate" (Jenny) with whom she now lives. It's sweet, sad and funny and you end up wishing Button well on her better-late-than-never search for self.**

The play finishes with a flourish: Jesus and five acolytes sing up a storm and promise that from this day forth there will be no more fornication, no beer or wine, no karaoke, no *Survivor*, no Macs, no PCs, etc. "Today is/Today is/Today is Judgment Day."

*30 Helens* returns to Richard's on Richards for one night only Aug. 23, at which time you can pass judgment on Morgan Brayton, Victoria Deschanel, Liisa Ingimundson, Madeleine Kipling, Brianna Mason, Farrell Spence and manager Jennifer-Lee Koble.

**WESTENDER**  
**July 20 – 26, 2000**  
**Fraser Black**

## Comics turn the everyday on its head

"Hey, you look familiar to me," says the bartender to Brianna Mason as we look for a table at Barney's on Granville. She tries to hide a smile because she knows what's coming, "...do you work at the Penny Lane?" he asks. Mason lets her face fall in mock disappointment before giving in to laughter.

Apparently it's very common for the 30 Helens to be recognized from the restaurant jobs. They even wrote a skit about it. That's one of the secrets to the success of the all-woman sketch comedy troupe—taking everyday experiences and exaggerating them to hilarious proportions. It's their ability to find the humour in almost any situation that makes them one of the most popular comedy groups in Vancouver. Pretty soon more people will be recognizing them for what they really do—kick some serious comedic ass on stage.

As we sit down to lunch, the wild, rouge-haired Liisa Ingimundson and the health conscious (no *extra* mayo?) Mason, the self-proclaimed "funniest and main" Helens, keep up a running commentary, throwing ideas and jokes back and forth like a game of egg toss—everything is a possible sketch.

"We get material from everywhere," Mason says. "Sometimes you come up with a character and the character writes it for you."

"Yeah, let's write a sketch about some quirky restaurant customer that orders 'no extra mayo,'" Ingimundson suggests.

The 30 Helens are taking their rude 'tudes to the stage at the 14<sup>th</sup> Vancouver International Comedy Festival on Granville Island, July 20 to 30. They kick off the festival's opening gala at Performance Works warming up for Elvira Kurt, July 20. People looking for the entire 30 Helens experience can check them out on the same stage on July 27, at 9:30 p.m., when they do their thang in an hour long show.

### Making it on their own

Coming up with sketches is second nature for the 30 Helens, who've kept themselves busy creating their own work the past three years. Frustration stemming from a lack of work and intelligent roles for women actors in Vancouver prompted Ingimundson to form the comedy troupe Girl Parts in 1997 with 13 like-minded women. A year later Ingimundson and six others broke free and formed 30 Helens. Sketch comedy hasn't been the same since.

"I think we sort of think of ourselves as an alternative band, not really as comedians," says Morgan Brayton. "We have that sort of rawk edge to us. My point is that we are a little different from what's out there on several levels. Aside from being all female, a lot of our stuff is very in-your-face."

The 30 Helens' edge comes from the material they choose to tackle. They're not afraid of the dark side of comedy, mining for humour in unlikely places and finding it more often than not.

"We do stuff that makes us laugh, that's our bottom line," Brayton says. "Sometimes it only makes a couple of us laugh and that's as far as it goes, even when you put it on stage, but that's the criteria. There seems to be this very defined idea of what women find funny or what is amusing for women to talk about, and it's very limited. So, I think from a performer's end of things, it's frustrating because it's so limiting and that's why we do what we do."

What they "do" is serve up heaping portions of intelligent comedy that challenges society's moral structures, stereotypes and hypocrisies while never taking themselves too seriously. It's hard to ignore the truth when it comes disguised as an unstoppable belly laugh.

#### Gender bending

The 30 Helens are often labeled a 'lesbian comedy troupe', but Brayton believes they provide balance in a comedy world that is weighted heavily on the male side. The Helens stand out, not only because they are incredibly funny, but because of the lack of queer content on stage and screen—they provide what is missing.

"As far as queer stuff, I think people have this very puritanical view of what people want to see," Brayton says. "Our straight audiences are not offended or frightened by our queer stuff because it's funny. We just do what we do, yeah, half of us are queer so that's going to inform what we write and sometimes that means queer characters or queer scenarios."

#### Pushing it to the edge

Their stage show is a fast-paced barrage of sketches surprising in their diversity. The characters that parade through the skits are hilarious distillations of everyone we know or have seen. The Helens know very few limits and are rarely concerned with the bounds of taste—which get stretched to breaking point often—but they all play their roles within the group.

**"I'm getting naked every three minutes," Brayton confesses. "But there are people who wouldn't get naked on stage in a million years. We all have our different boundaries of what we will do—I apparently have none, but I'm working on that in therapy."**

The 30 Helens have recently lost their manager/facilitator of the last three years, Jennifer-Lee Koble who is leaving the group to become trained as a midwife. Far from letting that set them back, the six remaining Helens are re-committed to reaching their ultimate goal—their own TV show, for which they're planning to shoot the pilot this fall. The Helens were doing monthly shows at Jupiter Café, which forced them to write new material all the time. Ingimundson says this helped the Helens realize they could write at the fast rate necessary to keep their own show on the air. The Jupiter shows became so popular the group overflowed the club and was forced to move to a larger venue, Richard's on Richards, where they continue to draw big crowds.

"We always wanted to make sure that we were a hundred per cent ready when we got our TV show," Brayton says. "It's just too important to all of us. We didn't want to get

a show and not be strong enough as a group, or strong enough in our material or performance and blow it."

## **THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT**

**July 20 – 27, 2000**

**Beth McArthur**

### **Humorous Helens Ain't No Hapless Women**

**As a child, Morgan Brayton was dying to be an actor when she grew up. "I used to practice pretending I was dead," says Brayton, one-seventh of Vancouver's all-female sketch troupe 30 Helens. "I practiced all the time at home, lying on the floor in different contorted positions and holding my breath so that the camera couldn't see my stomach moving. That's what I thought I was in for." It was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Almost a decade and a half later, "victim" roles comprise the majority of parts that Brayton is routinely invited to audition for as she pursues an acting career in Vancouver's film and television industry.**

Brayton and 12 similarly disenchanted female performers joined forces with Liisa Ingimundson—with whom Brayton attended a Victoria theatre school when they were nine—as she undertook to launch Girl Parts. Parts was a comedy troupe that provided a creative outlet through which the ambitious hams could cast themselves in roles other than the Blond Hooker, Ex-Girlfriend #7, and Woman Being Beat Up in Alley gigs that were coming their way. That was in January 1997.

In May 1998, seven of the women formed the more easily manageable 30 Helens. While sketch comedy has produced such disparate performers as the Monty Python troupe, the Kids in the Hall, and Carol Burnett—all of whom influenced the 30 Helens—the local comedienne's material has the distinction of being written, produced, directed, performed, and organized entirely by women. The septet—Brayton, Victoria Deschanel, Ingimundson, Madeleine Kipling, Jennifer-Lee Koble (who doubles as the group's manager and will be leaving the troupe soon), Brianna Mason, and Farrell Spence—performs at Performance Works Thursday (July 20) at the Vancouver International Comedy Festival's opening gala, and again next Thursday (July 27).

The Helens, minus Deschanel, huddled in a booth at the rear of a Davie Street coffeehouse recently. Over a cacophony of clattering dishes and a hissing espresso machine, they explained excitedly, loudly, and, occasionally with unexpected seriousness what being a Helen is all about.

Although no member of the troupe limits herself to comedic cinematic roles, they all agree that when it came to choosing a medium for their performance group, there was no question it would be a funny one.

"We didn't choose comedy. Comedy chose us," Brayton says.

All the Helens admit to having been either class clowns or loud, outgoing, and funny—ha-ha, not odd—kids who dominated their family gatherings. They cite a variety of reasons for pursuing comedy as adults.

“What’s really neat is that a lot of us are doing things now that we got suspended for in school,” admits Brayton, a strong-spoken character with a “who, me?” expression probably familiar to the teachers whose classrooms she expropriated as her comedy venue.

Ingimundson says she enjoys the adrenaline rush she gets from making people laugh. Spence embraces the medium as a license to get away with doing “spastic and strange and incredible and bizarre” things that would be unacceptable anywhere else. Spence adds that using comedy also enables 30 Helens to deliver groundbreaking material to audiences. It paid off last year at the Victoria Fringe Festival, where their *Highway to Helens Tour* was voted best in show.

The 30 Helens don’t resort to the “hapless woman” or “men suck” gags that are the crux of many women’s standup routines. Their material is instead a mishmash of observational and political humour, with skits such as “Fem Fresh”, sending up commercials for feminine-hygiene products, played alongside a stylized dance interpretation of Oscar-winning films and a second-coming-of-Jesus disco number.

“Men find it just as refreshing to hear women not joking about their periods as women do,” Ingimundson notes.

The troupe even has male groupies, she adds. For every Vanessa, Tina, and Laila who signs the guest book on the 30 Helens web site there’s an entry from a Jacob, Mark, or Phil who’s been bowled over by the women’s skits.

The Helens agree that they’re using their act for both the group and individual successes it might bring them. They want to incorporate multimedia into their show and have plans to write, direct, and perform their own TV pilot after this year’s Vancouver Fringe Festival in September. But would any of the ambitious women, despite their avowed reluctance to accept victim roles, take a part as Hooker #7 if it weren’t Jo Blow but, say, Anthony Hopkins throttling them in an alley? Here, the Helens’ opinions diverge.

“I’m not interested in playing victim roles,” stresses Kipling, who says her agent knows not to call her for such parts.

Mason, who’s begun writing her own dramatic screenplay to ensure a good role for herself, says she doesn’t see it as selling out. “Would I do it? Yes, I would, because it would lead me to the steps that would take me higher.”

“It might screw you in the long run,” Spence suggests.

“I think you might need to do things you don’t want to do to get where you want to go in the long run,” Mason says pragmatically.

Ingimundson says it would depend on more than what the specific role was. "I'd have to really evaluate where it would get me. Not just the money in my pocket, but who's the director, what connections would I make, what would this do for my resume?"

"I still think we need to question how *many* times [we play a victim]," concludes Brayton, who was recently cast as a cranky waitress opposite Sylvester Stallone in the upcoming film Get Carter. From her tone, it appears she's had her fill of holding her breath.

**San Francisco Chronicle**  
**Sept. 16, 1999**  
**Heather Wisner**

### **An Obvious Hit: Highway to Helen**

Equipped with rubber chickens, crash helmets, whipped cream and other standard comic props, Canadian women's sketch comedy group 30 Helens kick down the door of comedy boys' club and bust in with an exhilarating collection of vignettes crafted from manic physicality, barbed satire, and infectiously gleeful raunch. Over the course of the one action-packed hour, they transform themselves into wide eyed children and dizzy dames, angry poets and manhandling rappers a la Yeasty Girls, skewering pop-culture and social norms with ruthless efficiency. Absurdity reigns supreme and haiku will never sound the same.

**The San Francisco Bay Guardian**  
**Sept. 15th, 1999**

### **Fringe on Top**

On the comedy front I caught Highway to Helen, featuring Vancouver's all-female troupe 30 Helens, whose estrogen-powered satiric blasts frequently hit their marks. **Morgan Brayton was a stand-out as an apoplectic poet and as a geeky cruising lesbian**, and their are hilarious vivisections of everything from feminine hygiene infomercials to Alanis Morissette.

**San Francisco Examiner**  
**Sept. 13, 1999**  
**Robert Hurwitt**

### **San Francisco Fringe Festival: A Wild Ride!**

My day started at The Exit (Theatre) with "Highway to Helen", sketch comedy by an all-

female group from Vancouver called 30 Helens. They number seven, actually: Six performers and a stage manager. But they're all engaging and versatile. And they can be very funny, as in an ensemble modern dance interpretation of "Titanic", or Farrell Spence and Brianna Mason's near-naked song about the uses of nudity.

**Morgan Brayton is fetching as a tomboy pre-adolescent discussing menstruation with Mason's indulgent babysitter, and she's hilarious reciting a cycle of haiku love poems, counting off syllables on her fingers.** Liisa

Ingimundson and Brayton contribute a sweet, funny and sketch of lesbians meeting-cute in a disco, miscommunicating through sign language, and Brayton returns with Victoria Deschanel as comically inept strippers.

There are other good bits as well with Spence, Ingimundson, and Madeleine Kipling delivering deft, quick caricatures. It's good, crisp feminist comedy. Even when predictable, the presentation is deft enough to carry it off.

## **THE MARTLET**

**Thursday, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1999**

**Scott Roberts**

### **Funny Women at the Fringe**

Possibly the most heavily reviewed company in the Fringe this year is the 30 Helens. A group of seven women from Vancouver who were involved with a company called Girl Parts, which they formed out of frustration from the lack of good roles for women in TV and film. After a year of "screaming successes" they moved on and formed a smaller group named 30 Helens.

These seven women are gut-wrenchingly brilliant. The first performance at the Fringe Preview Party that I had the pleasure of seeing was a five-minute piece involving two of the seven members of the group.

**It was spoken/shouted in the form of haikus by Morgan Brayton. Haikus? Yes, and it was definitely the funniest five minutes of the evening.** The other member of the group didn't manage to share in the haikus because she was involved in a car accident and had her jaw wired shut (true story). Even with nothing but a dry erase board and a pen Liisa Ingimundson managed to bring the crowd to its knees.

## **THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT**

**August 5 – 12, 1999**

**Kathleen Oliver**

### **Yukfest Finishes in Fine, Funny Fashion**

The stated mission of the seven-woman sketch troupe 30 Helens is "to destroy the misogynist element of the comedy world". If *Highway to Helen* is any indication, they're set to succeed.

Sexual politics is one part of the Helens' game—they do a rap number that includes the instructions "Wash your testicles... 'cuz your dinky is stinky"—but most of their material simply revels in absurdity. Clad in a puffy ski jacket with the hood pulled up tight, Victoria Deschanel free-associates on everything from cheese in a tube to the possibility of enforcing the death penalty for people with National Hockey League haircuts, and wonders "if we would still have sex with each other if our guts were on the outside". **The hyperkinetic Morgan Brayton plays a fidgety kindergarten student who's just learned about the facts of life; a reluctant first-time stripper; and the Anger Gnome, a grumpy, pointy-eared executive who lives in a toadstool.** There's an interpretive dance tribute to the film *Titanic*, a couple of TV talk shows, and a scene in which the military clad Helens beat themselves with rubber chickens as part of basic training.

The Helens could use a bit more speed and variety in their scene transitions, but there wasn't a predictable sketch in the bunch. The whole ensemble has a sure grasp of the profoundly silly, which keeps them consistently hilarious and reminds us that nonsense can be a powerful weapon.

**DISORDER**  
**May 1st - 1999**  
**Anthony Schrag**

It's probably not the best thing to say that I left a show with a splitting headache. And it's probably not the greatest thing to say that I left with a stomach-ache, too. But when you're talking about 30 Helens, apparently this sort of thing happens all the time - and their shows still sell out, over and over again.

"People keep coming up to us after the show complaining that they hurt something. I guess we should do something about that", Morgan "Helen" Brayton confided to me a few days after their "30 Helens Greatest Hits" show (which played at The Firehall Theatre).

It's not that their show is dangerous, it's just really, really funny. And it's the laughter that has the audience hurting themselves.

During the first act of the Greatest Hits show, I was laughing so hard, it was all I could do to hold my bladder back from bursting through my stomach and hitting one of the Helens in the face. The two girls next to me told me after the show that they wanted to help me, but they were too busy laughing themselves. Anyone could have keeled over with heart problems and no one would have been able to help them - the entire audience was in a fit of paralytic laughter.

The Helens' particular blend of irreverent sketch comedy makes them kind of like a socially conscious, all-female Kids in the Hall - both political and/or absurd. And it's beautiful to see. You never know what's going to hit you next; an eight-year-old screaming "Vaginal Discharge"; the ever graceful Farrell "Helen" Spence beautifully singing her theme song, "Fuck Off and Die"; Sally Struthers asking you to donate to the "Vancouver Actors' Fund"; or Victoria "Helen" Deschanel claiming, "Seals would look better with arms - arms to club the hunters with". It all defies written explanation. All of them are actors by trade and have been involved with the local acting scene - both dramatic and comedic - for many years. They have their humble beginnings in another all-female comedy group: the amazingly funny "Girl Parts", formed by current Helen member Liisa Ingimundson. In April of 1998, seven of the members decided it was time to move on and formed 30 Helens. Along with Liisa, Farrell, Morgan, and Victoria, 30 Helens consists of Brianna Mason, Madeleine Kipling and their manager Jennifer-Lee Koble.

Since their formation they have enjoyed amazing success, gracing covers of Xtra West, and have been reviewed by all of the major Vancouver rags. They've performed at The Anza Club, The W.I.S.E. Hall, The Urban Well, Celebrities Nightclub, and loads of other places, and are planning to tour this summer as far away as San Francisco.

They're fast becoming celebrities, and my advice is to see them as soon as possible, before you have to pay through the nose.

They have a regular gig at The Jupiter every second Wednesday (beginning again June 9th), but their next big thing is a CITR presentation - Grrrrlapalooza on Saturday, May 15th at The Cultch, with Tribe 8, Veda Hille, Che Chapter 127, Loud, and Sara & Tegan. (Call 254-9578 for info).

Watch for a full-length interview with the Helens in an upcoming Discorder issue. But be careful not to hurt yourself. You've been warned.

**KINESIS**  
**May 1999**  
**Kelly Haydon**

### **The H-Team**

As the lights dimmed in Vancouver's Firehall Theatre, the audience was auditorially bombarded by the "humour" of Andrew Dice Clay, an American comedian well-know in the early 1990s for his women-hating drivel. Just when I thought it was time to permanently wax in my ear canals, in came The "H" Team--dressed in full hit-woman attire--to end all such misogyny.

What followed were 26 side splitting sketches by The 30 Helens, a very talented group of women comedic writers and performers.

In response to the lack of strong roles for women in the acting industry, Liisa Ingimundson brought all her "funny, cool, chick friends together and put on a show." From there, Girl Parts was born. A year later, seven members of the group (Morgan Brayton, Farrell Spence, Brianna Mason, Madeleine Kipling, Victoria Deschanel, Jennifer-Lee Koble and Ingimundson) broke off to form The 30 Helens.

**With great difficulty, I managed not to pee my pants during the Helens' first sketch, "It's Not Pee." I did, however, have tears streaming down my face as a pre-adolescent Lizzie (Morgan Brayton) shared her knowledge about the facts of (a woman's) life. The content was hilarious and Brayton's facial and body expressions sent the sketch even further up the warp factor scale of humour. Even her co-star Brianna Mason had a hard time not losing it.**

Farrell Spence exhibited a considerable range of acting throughout the evening's program. She convincingly went from sultry singer in "FOAD," to five-year old hyper kid diving head first off the stage in "Helmet Girl."

While Mason began the evening a bit hesitantly, she hit her stride in "Heather and Paula," where she and Victoria Deschanel spoofed AC/DC head bangers. (The accuracy of their portrayal was confirmed by the three women I went with who grew up with "Heathers" and "Paulas.") Mason's rendition of a male pig in a bar was also outstanding. (I had flashbacks to the years I spent working in a bar in Ottawa. Yuck!)

In "Dance of the Dream Man," Deschanel was arresting. It is beyond me how a simple stroll across the stage could have an entire audience bent over laughing hysterically. I was in the middle of howling uncontrollably when the thought zipped through my head, "She's only walking across the stage." Then I started laughing again.

Another favourite sketch of mine was The 30 Helens' interpretative dance to the movie The Titanic. (I feel relieved that I now won't have to waste \$8 to see the movie itself. The 30 Helens gave me enough of a synopsis to get me through until the sequel, or beyond.) These are only a few of the highlights. Each member of the group is highly creative and their varying talents complement each other.

Given their awesome talents though, I was disappointed that the range of their content was quite limited. In my life, I am surrounded by awesome women writers, artists and thinkers--women who are wonderfully women-centered. This is what I am used to. So for me, the lack of women-centered material in an all-woman comedy troupe is glaringly apparent. Many of the sketches were constructed around the status quo male-female dynamic in our society.

For example, "Amateur Duo Night," featuring two "first-time" strippers in a nightclub, was funny but still revolved around the male gaze. Women stripping in a male strip club is not radical no matter how sharp the commentary on the situation. Are women's lives nothing more than our reactions to the male world?

None of the sketches went outside of--let alone questioned--the fundamental assumptions about women and men in our society that feminism constantly tries to

challenge. Even the name, The 30 Helens, is taken from the male performance realm. Brayton explained that the group chose the name from a skit by Kids in the Hall, an all-male comedy ensemble which had a weekly show on CBC television. In their skit, Kids in the Hall were themselves spoofing a well-known consumer products company's commercial featuring "30 Helens."

I was also surprised by the lack of lesbian content in light of the fact that half the group is queer. Only one skit out of 27 had obvious dyke overtones. Weird. One woman who attended the show with me queried, "With all their talent is that all they can come up with?" Indeed, going to a 30 Helens show is entertaining, but it is like a Twinkie. It tastes great but offers little nutritional value.