

Introducing 20Q(-ish). A new feature in which Sketchcenter, and it's intrepid [Staff](#), interview the best and the brightest in the sketch comedy community.

In this edition of 20Q(-ish) Sketchcenter Staff member Alexander Zalben, member of New York sketch groups *Elephant Larry* and *Madame Funnypants* (among other projects too!), sits down with Heather Simms, member of Chicago's hit sketch comedy group *Triplette*.

#### Q1

*Alexander Zalben; Staff, Sketchcenter: Tell us a little bit of background about Triplette... How'd you guys meet?*

Heather Simms; Triplette: We all met while we were students at Northwestern University. We were cast in a long-form improv group in 1998 called The Titanic Players. I graduated in 2000 and Laura and Rebecca graduated in 2002...so in late 2002 we started getting together and rehearsing improv. Our whole first year we improvised one-act plays essentially. Then we started writing and now all we do is sketch...but we still use a lot of improv to formulate and flesh out our ideas.

#### Q2

*Alex: How would you describe a Triplette show to someone who hasn't seen one?*

Heather: Triplette shows are fast-paced and character-driven. We walk the line sometimes between sketch comedy and performance art. We write and perform from a character and relationship point of view and rarely from a premise, although you will find some of that with us. We also like to use other aspects of theater in our shows, like masks, puppets, mime and such.

#### Q3

*Alex: What do you think sets Triplette apart from other groups?*

Heather: Oh, I don't know... Hard question. Well, the fact that we've been working together in some capacity for nearly 8 years now is nice – I think our camaraderie shows on and off-stage. We also all come from an acting background, which could set us apart from some groups. Content-wise, I think we strive to walk the line on some of the touchier issues ( i.e., race, sexuality, religion, etc.). We take a lot of risks in that way.

#### Q4

*Alex: What makes you the same? Are their particular styles or groups you try to emulate?*

Heather: We love Karla and Meat. We would love to emulate them but I'm not sure that we "try" to do that. We see groups we love and I think that probably inspires us to grow a little in some direction we'd never thought about...but overall, I think we keep trying to emulate ourselves and improve on that.

#### Q5

*Alex: Describe your writing process... Do you guys collaborate on everything, or do you work separately?*

Heather: We do it all. We write alone, we collaborate, we improvise and transcribe... We rewrite each other's scenes. Some scenes never veer much from the page and others change entirely once we start rehearsing them.

#### Q6

*Alex: One issue that's been discussed lately is creating sketches directly from writing, versus creating sketch from improv. Obviously it's a pretty fluid line, but how do you approach your writing, and why?*

Heather: See last question. We do it both ways. Improv is great at creating dialogue that is natural and relationships that are multi-faceted Writing is great to get out a singular idea and heighten it. You can do both with both. We use improv because our roots are improv and sometimes we get writers block. The best way to keep producing material if you're stuck is to get on your feet and just improvise. It's way more productive than sitting in front of a blank computer screen judging yourself. As I said before, we also use improv when someone has an idea but doesn't know how to execute it It's great for experimenting.

#### Q7

*Alex: More and more, groups are integrating video into their performance. You guys have been doing video elements here and there for a while...How integral do you see video being to a show, and is it something you'd like to be doing more/less?*

Heather: We have used video here and there, but I would never say it was integral to what we were doing at the time. It's a nice bonus if we can pull it off technically...None of us are all that savvy with it yet, so it's really not the best way to show off what we can really do. Because there are only three of us, we're already spread so thin when we're putting up these shows...and video is a long process, especially if you're a novice with high hopes like we are. So, we don't make it a priority but we're always interested in learning more, incorporating more, etc.

#### Q8

*Alex: You've recorded a few of your songs in a studio... How has this been helpful to you? Are you planning on recording more in the future, and why?*

Heather: Laura is the musician of the group and does just about all our sound design with our sound producer Tim. It's great to have that resource of a music studio because we can create a lot of custom tracks for our shows, making them feel like they have our signature on them. We'd always love to record more music...we'd also love to write more music. In time...a good song takes some time :)

#### Q9

*Alex: Let's talk a little about staging... You use a director for your shows. When did you start using a director, and why do you like having a director as part of the process? What do you feel they bring to the table?*

Heather: We have always used a director in some capacity, even when we were just improvising. Some of our directors have played larger roles than others and sometimes we do a lot of self-directing throughout the process. We're at the point now where we can self-direct 2-person scenes pretty well but still rely on a director to direct our 3-person scenes. I think we will always work with a director, though. It's so important to have another point of view for us. And for there to be someone who can look at the show as a whole piece and give us objective criticism...something we can't always give ourselves or each other. Plus they can see the show from a technical point of view, correct staging issues, communicate with our lights and sound person. It's super helpful.

#### Q10

*Alex: Groups often talk about bringing their show to "the next level." Is that one of your goals? And if so, what's the next level for Triplette?*

Heather: We want to find a way of breaking out of the scene-blackout-music-scene format that you see in most sketch comedy. We're also interested in making shows that have an overall "feeling" to them..not just a bunch of unrelated scenes and songs, but something that has an idea/concept...something for the audience to take away at the end. We've come close but we're always trying to improve.

Q11

*Alex: You have a new show coming up on March 17; what's different about this show than your previous shows (or what's the same, if that's the case)?*

Heather: We're hitting a theme from a lot of different angles and hopefully achieving one of our goals from question 10. The scenes are also a lot shorter than what we've written in the past. I think it will be a fast-paced show with a lot packed in.

Q12

*Alex: What's your #1 Triplette moment so far (what would you categorize as "the best thing that's happened to me from being in Triplette)? Probably all the money we're making. Kidding!*

Heather: I'm not sure...I'd say for me, it's the progress we've made in such a short amount of time. And that we are constantly producing more material and shows. We've also gotten a lot of great praise from the press in the last six months. It feels really good to be recognized for the work we're doing.

Q13

*Alex: What's your #2 Triplette moment so far (what would you categorize as "the best part about the day-to-day of being in Triplette)?*

Heather: Well, we live together...so the day to day is crazy!!! Kidding. I guess just learning how each other works and finding new and different ways to create. (I sound like a dork and I apologize...none of these are moments.) 14. You've gotten some great press in Chicago... For a younger group starting out, what would you recommend is a good way to go about getting press of their own? A nice press kit. Sending your materials out in advance, doing good shows and consistently getting out there. We get more press the longer we're around I think because it took a while for our name to become a recognizable thing. If you do one show and disappear for 18 months, it will be really hard to build name recognition and a reputation. You gotta do shows, get them reviewed, travel, do more good shows, get them reviewed and so on. PR is the boring part of it, but it's totally necessary. Every time you send out releases for a show, find a few new publications or TV stations that you've never thought to send your stuff to. Add them to your database. Find out the names of the people in charge of the arts departments at the publications...write to them specifically, etc. Be persistent and don't give up.

Q14

*Alex: You've also started to get some attention from industry; same question as above, how do you go about it?*

Heather: It mostly comes from festivals and then keeping in contact with the folks you meet.

Q15

*Alex: Group goals time: What's Triplette's ultimate plan for world entertainment domination, and how are you going to achieve it?*

Heather: Huge question. We battle with that all the time. I think our immediate goal is to keep creating quality shows and see where that takes us. We'd like to find a way for our group to be our job. If someone wanted to give us our own TV show, that would be cool.

Q16

*Alex: If you could be another sketch group, who would it be, and why?*

Heather: Um, The Defiant Thomas Brothers got a nice thing going right now. We'd love to go to Aspen like them and get a development deal out of the whole thing.

Q17

*Alex: Often people tend to lump sketch groups made up of women together, as they were the same group. In the sketch community, we know this is ridiculous, but many people (other comedians included) do see it that way. Do you see this as an issue that affects Triplette? And if so, what can be done to educate people differently?*

Heather: I think we fight that idea by consistently putting out material that appeals to both genders. People have an idea of what they're going to see when they attend an all-female show and that's a shame. I think it has probably affected us in building our fan base in some way — some people might not be interested in what a bunch of "unfunny girls" have to say. It doesn't really bother us anymore though...people that dim wouldn't like our shows anyway. Although we have gotten a bit of feedback from men and women saying things like they couldn't believe how much they enjoyed our show...they'd never seen anything like it — women who could make them laugh and no men in sight! I think having more women on TV like Rachel Dratch, Tina Fey, Stephnie Weir and Amy Poehler could slowly change the way people view comedy and women's place in it. It will take time, though.

Q18

*Alex: Rapid fire question time!*

Favorite color? pink

Favorite food? Whatever Rebecca's cooking for everyone

Season? spring

Seasoning? curry

City? Chicago!

Mac or PC? Heather (mac) Laura/Rebecca (pc)

Boxers or Briefs? Heather: boxer-briefs, Laura: briefs, Rebecca: long-johns

Dogs or Cats? Dogs

Up or Down? up

Sketch or Improv? sketch

First child's name? Megan Kellie

Famous or rich? rich

If you could live forever, would you? Yes.

Your brain would have to be in a robot gorilla body, though. Same answer? Yes, more so. Good or evil? Good.

What's your epitaph? Here lie the women of Triplette; too poor for three gravestones.