

Going inside the filthy, funny mind of singing stand-up Shirley Gnome

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BeatRoute: You sing like an angel. Has your voice always been tuned towards comedy?

Shirley Gnome: Gee thanks. The only time I ever get compared to anything religious is with angels. Naw. I don't even see what I do as comedy. I'm just singing songs as truthfully as I can. The truth can be really hilarious to most people, certainly to me, and I welcome the opportunities that come to me for that fairly common response. Some people find it upsetting, sad, scary, or boring. I welcome all those reactions. I think they are the truest truth to the person experiencing them, and that's what music is all about man. I wanna hold up a mirror.



BR: Where do you hail from? Where do you now reside?

SG: I grew up in Surrey B.C., known for its loose women and for being the car theft capital of North America. I spent the last eight years in Vancouver, probably because I ate a lot of pot brownies and forgot how many years were passing. I put all my stuff in storage in January and hit the road, so now I live in Suitcaseville, World.

BR: What kind of a kid were you? Are you an adult now? What's the most grown-up aspect of Shirley Gnome?

SG: I was always humping furniture and trying to take my clothes off. I sang a lot of songs out in the middle of the woods at the top of my lungs, and dressed up in fancy lady clothes. I'm an adult, but I'm not a grown-up. Grown-ups to me are people who lost the magic. They sold their dreams, did what society told them to do because society told them to do it, not because they wanted to. I live in the moment and I don't feel trapped. I'm still doing everything I did as a kid, but with the wisdom of an adult woman. So I think I am winning life. I've learned a lot, I've listened a lot, and I've loved a lot, and I always make time to play. I still hump the furniture on occasion.

BR: How often are you performing?

SG: So often. I go from festival to festival, and show to show, travelling, working. I think I'll take a break in September to write some new songs. I've been going non-stop for a while now. I can't even remember. I'm still drunk from last night I think.

BR: What is your favourite place in the world to perform?

SG: The Victoria Events Centre I think. I love Victoria. Edmonton, Calgary, Nelson and Montreal are also up there. Robson Valley Music Festival is amazing. New York City, Melbourne. There are many good places with good humans. I can't wait to explore more and add them to the list.

BR: What's the worst gig you've ever had?

SG: I had to really think this over, but the worst one was probably in Revelstoke when some men in the audience were heckling me by telling each other that they wanted to rape me at the top of their lungs. I stopped the show and yelled at them, saying things like, "What would your mother think of you if she heard you talking like that?" One guy got up and left right away. The other two stayed. I felt very vulnerable and unprotected. The guys were really angry. I got offstage to take a break between my sets, and one of them started to come up to me. The manager (a lovely person) stood between us and told the guys they had to pay up and leave. They tried to leave without paying and were chased down, and then kicked out again. I got onstage and finished the show. The rest of the audience felt terrible about what had happened and apologized, which was unnecessary. But there're good humans in Revelstoke.

BR: How do you handle a heckler?

SG: Most of the time, people are drunk and they don't realize what they are doing is disruptive, annoying, and/or making themselves look stupid. I point that out to them with a joke, and they usually shut up. If they don't, I will ignore them and they will shut up. If none of that works, I get security to remove them. I care more about the audience when the hecklers start up. I want them to get their money's worth and enjoy the show and not have it ruined by some asshat.



BR: What do you think motivates a heckler to share belligerent thoughts at full volume, rather than just listening and laughing?

SG: I would assume their parents didn't love them enough. Maybe they feel insecure and small for another reason. Perhaps because they are shitty people, they don't get the satisfaction of connection in their lives. Instead of taking a look in the mirror to have more fulfilled lives, they ruin my show (and my friends' shows) to get validation. Generally, as I mentioned before, this is spurred on by too much booze. Some people are just dirtbags, and I feel bad for their folks.

BR: How long have you been pursuing comedy?

SG: I haven't started pursuing it yet, it keeps coming to me and I say yes to it. What I look for is people who can get something of value out of what I do, and that guides me around the world. I did my first show in 2009 at a burlesque fundraiser. That was seven years ago!

BR: On a scale from mildly perverted to "Get the kids out of the room, NOW!" where do you fall?

SG: "GET THE KIDS IN THE ROOM, NOW!"

BR: Your website mentions you do parties. What does a Shirley Gnome party entail? Do you get a lot of bookings?

SG: I get lots! I love doing house parties, and private concerts. I started writing songs for that exact environment – sitting in the living room, laughing with friends. I bring that energy to people's homes and we have a blast. Sometimes they have a whole outdoor stage scenario and we put on an intimate concert. There is nothing more rejuvenating to me than these gigs.



BR: Are you earning a living solely through song... kinky, lascivious song?

SG: Yup! I have been doing so for four years this August. I feel like I am grifting the world.

BR: What's the worst job you've ever had?

SG: This guy gave me the most horrendous blow job. He just yarded his fingers up my vag and sort of shook them around and then touched only the very tip of his tongue to the very tip of my clitoris. I felt like a puppet being mangled by a poorly trained puppeteer. We're talking about sex, right?

BR: Who are your heroes?

SG: Dolly Parton and Catherine the Great.

BR: What do you do for fun?

SG: Sex. If I have time for any recreational activities, I like to grab a nice dude (consensually) and pound all day. When that's not readily available, or I am spent, I like finding bedazzled clothes at thrift stores, swimming in the ocean, listening to music, dancing, drinking and smoking weed with my friends and watching dumb videos on the Internet.

BR: Best movie last year?

SG: Big question! I feel like John Oliver's piece on sex education in America was one of the greatest vids I watched last year, but it wasn't a movie. So let's go with... **Montage of Heck.**

BR: Why are you so sexually overt?

SG: I have no shame and I don't see what the fuss is about.

BR: Has anyone ever fallen for you not knowing exactly what you're singing about? Like they spoke another language?

SG: Not that I know of, but I welcome that wholeheartedly.

BR: Worst date experience?

SG: I met a guy on Tinder who showed up to the date high on meth, or maybe speed. He worked for a marketing company, taking photos of First Nations elders to use as propaganda for an oil company wanting to build pipelines through ecologically fragile traditional territories. He spilled his drink on his crotch seven times, when he would laugh. I think it was an attempt to get my attention to his crotch. It is hard to say though – he was pretty high.

BR: What is an inappropriate number of cats living under one roof?

SG: As long as they are fed, safe, neutered and able to go outside, I say pile 'em on.

BR: Anything notable or crazy ever happen on tour (off the top of your head)?

SG: I stayed in a sex dungeon of a dominatrix's house after a gig one night. She was one of the kindest, loving hosts I've ever had on the road.

BR: If not entertaining, what else would you do?

SG: Sex education and advocacy for underprivileged women. Learn how to spell underprivileged.

BR: Have you ever crept yourself out with your own lyrics?

SG: You have no idea what doesn't make it to the stage. NO IDEA.



BR: Any advice for aspiring comedians?

SG: Find people to be your mentors, who have lots of experience, who you trust. Get honest feedback – praise isn't helpful. Record your shows – listen to them as if you're an audience member and ask yourself what you wish that performer did better. Always try to be better, even when you're getting good reviews and lots of laughs. Don't be lazy. Don't think you're special, because you're not. Have a fuck ton of fun. If it's not fun, steal the fun back.

BR: Do potential suitors have a lot of wild expectations?

SG: Yup. It mostly manifests as men who think because I enjoy sex, that I will fuck them. It's entitlement. This idea that women who are unashamed of their sexuality also don't have any standards, or are easy, or will put up with bullshit behavior. I have a special song I have started singing which takes a lot of that imagined sex appeal right out of the equation. It seems to have filtered out the idiots, and left only the good men behind for the pickin'. I'm still working on it though.