

RISING STAR

# Kate Berlant: centre stage

THE CULT COMEDIAN IS MAKING WAVES WITH HER SMART ONE-WOMAN SHOW. **JESSICA PRUPAS** RAISES THE CURTAIN ON KATE

**KATE BERLANT SPENDS** a lot of her time considering the nature of performance. In last year's Hulu special *Would It Kill You to Laugh?* – which she wrote and starred in with frequent collaborator John Early – she looks at the performative nature of celebrity. On her popular podcast *Poog*, she considers how the wellness industry encourages us to perform our most optimal selves. Now, in her hit one-woman show *Kate* (at New York's Connelly Theatre until 10 February), she deconstructs all of life's everyday performances in an absurd, uproariously funny hour. We asked the comedian – who also has a supporting role in the blockbuster *Don't Worry Darling* and released a stand-up special, *Cinnamon in the Wind*, last year – why she treats all of life like a stage.

*Would It Kill You to Laugh?* deals a lot with the absurdity of celebrity culture – what interests you about that world?

That's a foundational comedic energy for John and myself. There's a YouTube video of Suzanne Somers and Joyce DeWitt reuniting on Suzanne Somers' YouTube show after they haven't seen each other for, like, a million years and had this very public falling out after *Three's Company*. They're just forced into this social performance, which is kind of the centre of mine and John's work. It's about letting how you feel never come to the surface and compensating in the opposite direction. Famous people are deranged – >



From above:  
At the *Don't Worry Darling* photocall in New York (centre) and with John Early

unfortunately almost no one gets out alive – so watching people who are so extremely famous and who rose to these levels behave as people is really funny.

**You have a really unique, largely improvisational stand-up style, which you can see in your new Hulu special, *Cinnamon in the Wind*.**

I wouldn't know how to compromise what I want to do and what is natural to me for fear of being misunderstood. I think if you make people laugh, they're kind of there with you. Trying to give people what you think they want never works.

**You're currently performing your one-woman show, *Kate*, in New York. The reviews and feedback have been amazing, how does that feel?**

It's like a dream for me to be performing like that. I've never had that experience of making something for a specific site – the theatre I'm doing it at is really beautiful and historical. This is something I wrote, so it's a completely different approach to relying more on improvisation. This is a completely different animal, but it's been really rewarding.

**You've done a lot of characters who are either performance artists or who work in the art space. Did you become attuned to that world because of your dad [artist Tony Berlant]?**

Yeah, I think being around artists and being in New York, and having friends who were in art school and hearing about that experience...

I never set out to make a satire of contemporary art because contemporary art is already a satire, there's no real joke there because it's already a joke. But I am perpetually drawn to characters who are attempting to make something, because I myself am attempting to make something. The inevitable failure of trying to make something, how hard it is, what inevitably gets lost in translation – it turns it into something unexpected.

**Your podcast, *Poog*, with co-host Jacqueline Novak, deals with wellness culture in a funny way.**

We genuinely are obsessed with these issues with the industry. The existential horror of being alive right now and continuing to focus on ourselves as individuals continues to be an embarrassing and upsetting project, but we cling to it regardless.

There are a lot of existential questions embedded in the quest for wellness or beauty or health. We are earnestly fascinated, but we're unself-conscious in our attachment to something we feel is complicated.

## “THE EXISTENTIAL HORROR OF BEING ALIVE RIGHT NOW CONTINUES TO BE AN EMBARRASSING AND UPSETTING PROJECT”

**What was a product or wellness trend you were sceptical of at first, but turned out to be amazing?**

I've been gua sha-ing for, like, 10 days. It's a practice of facial massage popular in South Korea. I've been doing it for 10 days and I swear to God there's more circulation [in my skin]. This is a *Poog* thing – if you're constantly trying new things, you don't know which thing is actually improving [your skin]. I'm on a couple of new skin products so I'm like, “Is it the skin products? Is it the gua sha?”

I don't know, but as we always say on the podcast, placebo works. Maybe it's not doing anything, but if it feels like it is, that's good enough.

**What was a product or trend you were disappointed with?**

Working out. I don't think people have to do it that much.

📺 Watch *Don't Worry Darling*

