



Lady Haha: Ellen DeGeneres set for Chicago festival encore

Curt Wagner on 06.13.10 at 8:54 PM

Comedy takes over Chicago this week, and Ellen DeGeneres will lead the charge. The stand-up comic, talk-host, budding music mogul and "American Idol" judge headlines the Just For Laughs comedy festival Tuesday through Saturday. It's the second year in a row TBS and the Just For Laughs organization have brought the festival to the Windy City. For this year's event, the fest has booked 293 artists in 17 venues in the city and suburbs. Other entertainers include Aziz Ansari, Andy Richter, Cedric The Entertainer, George Wendt, Russell Peters and the "My Boys" team of Jamie Kaler and Michael Bunin, as well as dozens of local acts. [Click here for Metromix's festival roundup.](#)

Although she won't take the Chicago Theatre stage for her variety show until Wednesday, DeGeneres is coming to town Tuesday to tape a special segment that will be presented during the live show.

"I can't reveal where, but I will be breaking into a major building in Chicago after hours and shooting a taped piece," DeGeneres told RedEye, declining to spoil the surprise. "I'm not going to tell you because then they'll be ready for me and they won't let me in."

"Ellen's Somewhat Special Special," which will air as a TBS special at 8 p.m. June 27, will feature live music from Lady Antebellum and DJ Nick Cannon, comedy, and speciality acts such as Japanese troupe Kabuki Expert, Dominic "The Flag Man" Lacasse and Australian magician James Galea. DeGeneres talked to reporters by phone last week about her live show, her past experiences in Chicago and what's going on with Greyson Michael Chance, the Justin Bieber-like Youtube sensation she has signed to her record label.

In the past your variety shows have had a lot of acts, but less Ellen. Will that be the same this year? I think this is the best one so far, as far as interesting acts [go.] There's more comedy than I've done before because I'll just kind of come on in

between each act ... It's hard to keep it fresh but being able to do just one a year, I'm able to really focus and do as many unique things as possible.

When you were coming up in stand-up, what was one of your most memorable gigs in Chicago?

It's not a pleasant one. It wasn't on stage but it was when I was doing a "Women of the Night" ... And the woman doing my hair [with] a curling iron-brush got tangled up against my scalp. The more she tried to undo it, the more my hair tangled in that curling iron. She was burning my scalp and they thought they were going to have cut my hair. I was supposed to be on stage in 45 minutes. I'll never forget that night, waiting to go on stage in Chicago, my big break and my hair almost being singed off.

Is doing this kind of show a nice break and a chance to use a different muscle?

Well, yes, I always like using different muscles--you can take that however you want. But doing something once a year is fantastic; I highly recommended it if you can do it. It's a wonderful thing, it's very freeing and I can put a lot of energy and attention onto it and it's something I love doing. It's sort of why I took on "Idol." ... I like stretching myself. I love Chicago. I don't really get to travel unless I'm working so this is a fun excuse to go to Chicago.

Can you tell us about what goes into preparing for these specials and what your life is like leading up to it?

Well, I'll have a smoothie in the morning and then I'll do some jumping jacks. It's kind of the same as doing my show. I have a group of people that scout--like some people went to Chicago to look at the best place for us to shoot our taped piece ... It's lots of meetings and conversations about what will make it different this time. We start looking at just about every act we can find that seems interesting and we just keep whittling it down until we get to the strongest. And then we're writing material

How is filming in Chicago different than filming your normal show? And why do you like the city so much?

Well what's not to like? I mean, it's a great city. You can't really answer that without alienating other people and other cities, but Chicago really is a very special city and the people are nice. Every time I've done standup there, they're smart and they're polite, and for the most part, sober--which is important to me. And what's different about it is it's windier. It's the Windy City. I love the architecture, I love the art, I love everything. I just really enjoy that city. I've said it before, it's just the winters would get to me. I couldn't live there because of the winters, but I do love the city very much.

What is the possibility that we will see Greyson Michael Chance on the show, and if it's nothing, why or why not?

He's getting ready for whatever's going to happen to him. There's a lot that's about to happen and we're trying to do it the right way. And the most important thing is what's best for him. If it was just what's best for me, yes, you'd see him on the show.

What are the chances of "Idol" winner Lee DeWyze and runner-up Crystal Bowersox appearing on the show, seeing how they have Chicago ties?

Where were you before that you would suggest that now? When we hang up I'm making a phone call to see if Lee and Crystal can come and perform. I bet they're both very, very busy. I bet they already are off doing their own things. But I think it's a really good idea.