



October 1: *The History of Ha!*

Ripped from the pages of his award-eligible “Funny: The Book / Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Comedy,” David Misch presents a some-holds-barred survey of absolutely everything funny that’s ever happened, in an hour. (FDA advisory: Some funny things not included.)

Beginning in pre-history with the mythological Trickster, this multimedia presentation looks at comedy from Ancient Greece to yesterday morning, from court jesters to Groucho, from Plato & Aristotle to Abbott & Costello. With stops along the way for commedia dell’arte, a French fartist, and how comedy killed Abraham Lincoln, David uses clips and commentary to look at what comedy is, where it comes from and where it’s going (oddly enough, Philadelphia).



October 8: *The Shame of Satire*

Comedy has been mocking society’s foibles since the poets of ancient Rome but right now may be the Golden Age of satire, with “The Daily Show,” Bill Maher, John Oliver, Stephen Colbert and The Onion shaming the shameless by taking pungent, potent pokes at society’s hypocrisies.

But does shaming have any effect? Even many satirists don’t think so, yet pushback’s been harsh, from the “Charlie Hebdo” massacre in Paris to imprisonment of Chinese bloggers to a comedian on trial in Germany.

Satirists are always being accused of being offensive; generally, they don't care. George Carlin: "It's the duty of a comedian to find out where the line is... then step over it."

One thing is sure; wherever you draw it, your line will be different than mine. So how do we decide when satire goes too far?

This multimedia talk explores how satire challenges society's taboos from forbidden farts in Afghanistan to the silencing of a South African puppet, along with Groucho Marx, Richard Pryor, Monty Python, "South Park," Key & Peele, the Russian Orthodox Church, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, Janet Jackson's right breast, and two outrageous "Saturday Night Live" sketches written by former U.S. Senator Al Franken.

And Mel Brooks' "The Producers," a touchstone for controversy from the moment it appeared. To some a hilarious put-down of Hitler, to others a horrifying diminution of the Holocaust, the nature of "The Producers" is still hotly debated.

Most of all, we'll see how satire gets people to examine their assumptions. Because, ultimately, satire is less about changing your mind than getting you to think.

Contains mature content.



October 15: *Buster Keaton: Existential Slapstick*

Silent film star Buster Keaton is recognized as one of the most daring, inventive and hilarious comedians ever. (And the subject of two biographies last year.) Using copious clips, we'll look at how Keaton's art springs from the beginnings of comedy – the mythical Trickster – and how, without dialogue, he employs almost every other element of cinema.

While Keaton's physical courage, astonishing conceptual innovations and technical breakthroughs remain unequalled, maybe the most remarkable aspect of his work is his acting; how the Great Stone Face is able to communicate a panoply of emotions without speaking... or even changing expression! His ability to get us to intuit and then feel feelings which are never actually shown is one of the great examples of screen performance, and the reason he became the inspiration for countless contemporary actors and filmmakers, including Jackie Chan, Johnny Depp and Tom Cruise.

Join us for an overview of Keaton's amazing career, from his first (and pretty much last) onscreen smile at age 22 to doing pratfalls at 70, scenes that show both his cinematic ingenuity and almost unbelievable physicality, including both the most expensive and the most dangerous stunts in Hollywood history. See why Orson Welles called Keaton "a supreme artist"... and, not incidentally, really really funny.