



MAKE US LAUGH, FUNNY BOY! MICHAEL GELBART

By Libby Molyneaux

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"We're living in a world where only one Oprah matters. Bad news for me. I'm Oprah Goldstein." So

claims the first of four Oprahs in Michael Gelbart's book *The Other Oprahs*. Gelbart, a standup comic, reads at Book Soup and performs later this week at the Improv.

L.A. WEEKLY: Have you ever met an Oprah?

GELBART: No, but damn it, I'd love to. The only circumstances in which you wouldn't want to meet Oprah are when you've cheated on someone or gotten caught in an enormous lie. I'm not doing either, so the time is right.

Has the real Oprah gotten wind about your book?

Not yet, but with every new word that's written, the day gets closer. If it gets mentioned in Oprah magazine, I'd say by then she will have heard something.

Do you think she'd like it?

I do. It's a book designed to make people laugh, feel good and the universal need we all have for love, friendship and self-respect. This isn't four women named Oprah on a killing spree. It celebrates the idea of moving forward.

While writing the book, how did you make yourself relate to having the name Oprah?

I maintained it as a thought with every page. Each character has a different relationship to the name. For one it's an excuse to not try, one is in a one-sided competition with the famous Oprah, one uses the name as a hook and one thinks having the name is awesome because she's such a big fan. Although the name isn't focused on throughout, each of their relationships to it is a choice they've made. Without the name, they would all have some other reason for behaving the way they do. Despite any perceived limitations, obstacles or advantages we decide we have, our choices are ultimately up to us.

Which of your fictitious Oprahs do you most relate to?



I took various things that have happened to me and gave them to each character, and little things from women I've known. Before I lived in L.A., I dated more Oprah Goldsteins. Since moving here, there have been a-few-years-older versions of Oprah Star. But if there were one character like me at one point in my life, it was Goldstein's fling Scam, an amiable guy who through adolescent choices isn't perceived as a serious option. An adult Zak Morris from Saved By the Bell, if you will. The book is a bit of a distancing from that, since the character could never have written this book.

What would you tell a friend thinking of naming his daughter Oprah?

I'd tell them it's a great idea. Then when their daughter is old enough to read, I'd tell them there's a book with their name in the title that they should make their parents buy. With all the other Oprahs that are being born now, I'm really looking forward to the next 20 years.

Gelbart reads with performers Brooke Nevin, Melissa Elias and Lindsay Ames. Book Soup, 8818 Sunset Blvd., W. Hlywd.; Mon., Feb. 28, 7 p.m.; free, book is \$17.95. (310) 659-3110. He'll also perform standup at the Improv Wed., March 2.

Mon., Feb. 28, 2011