



## Clinton, Kate (b. 1947)

by Kelly A. Wacker

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A portrait of Kate Clinton  
by David Rodgers.  
Courtesy Beach Front  
Bookings.

Born in Syracuse, New York in 1947, the self-described "fumerist" (feminist+humorist), "Madame President of Comedy," and "sister of Bill Clinton" (not the President), Kate Clinton first began her career as an English teacher. After teaching for eight years and after having taken a women's writing workshop, Clinton changed careers. She began performing stand-up comedy professionally in 1981.

Although she has described herself as a late-bloomer who had been in the closet with "a foyer, a turnstile, [and] a few locks," Clinton has been comfortably open about her lesbianism from the beginning of her career in the entertainment field. As an out lesbian, however, she could not work in mainstream comedy clubs. Her unwillingness to alter her material for mainstream venues may have initially impeded her career in some ways, but she nevertheless quickly found an appreciative audience among lesbians and gay men.

Drawing on her experiences as a teacher, lesbian, and Catholic, Clinton creates humor that is often satirical and political. However, she also speaks with wit and insight about such issues of specific interest to lesbians and gay men as the coming out process and relationships with lovers, friends, and families. Underlying her humor is the affirming notion that lesbians and gay men are an integral part of all aspects of society. In 1999, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Clinton's performances have evolved from stand-up comedy to one-woman shows centered around monologues. Recent shows include "Y2K8" (2000), "Correct Me If I'm Right" (1999), "All Het Up" (1996), "Impure Thoughts" (1995), and "Out Is In" (1993). Both "Correct Me If I'm Right" and "Out Is In" had significant runs on Broadway.

Several of Clinton's performances have been recorded and produced as audio albums, including *Making Light!* (1982), *Making Waves!* (1984), *Live at the Great American Music Hall* (1985), *Babes in Joyland* (1990), and *Comedy You Can Dance To* (1998), and *The Marrying Kind* (2004). She has also appeared in *Out There 2*, a video compilation of gay and lesbian comics. She has hosted the PBS television series *In the Life* and has made appearances on numerous popular broadcast and cable television programs.

As an actress, Clinton has performed on both stage and film. She appears in Alan Rudolph's *The Secret Lives of Dentists* (2002) and is one of four lesbian comics features in Andrea Meyerson's *Laughing Matters* (2003), an award-winning documentary. She narrates Joan E. Biren's documentary *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyons* (2003). Clinton also made a cameo appearance in Dee Mosbacher's documentary about the Women's Music movement, *Radical Harmonies* (2002), and has performed on Broadway in *The Rocky Horror Show* (2001) and off-Broadway in *The Vagina Monologues* (2002).

In 1998, Clinton published a collection of her material, *Don't Get Me Started*; and she writes regular columns for the gay and lesbian news magazine *The Advocate*, and the left-leaning political journal *The Progressive*. She has also contributed articles to *The New York Times* and *George* magazine, and served as a writer during the start-up period of *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* in 1996.

Undoubtedly influenced by her first career, her writing is characterized by puns and wordplays, including especially those based on her name, such as, for example, "KateChism" (religion), "adjudiKate" (the legal system), "compuKate" (computers), "eduKate" (education), and "forniKate" (sex). Characteristically, she uses her own life experiences to parody and satirize public events, current trends, and political figures.

In addition to publishing her column, "CommuniKate" online, she maintains an interesting website (<http://www.KateClinton.com>) that features her recently founded group The Permanent Standing Committee to Impeach George W. Bush, Inc., which aspires to be a venue for scrutinizing the President.

Clinton's book in progress is tentatively titled, "Kate Clinton: Collected Speeches (I Never Gave)." Filmmaker Catherine Gund is currently working on a documentary about her past and future career.

Clinton and writer and activist Urvashi Vaid have been partners since 1988. Since 1992, they have resided in Provincetown.

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### **About the Author**

**Kelly A. Wacker** is Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Montevallo in Alabama. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of Louisville, where she wrote her dissertation on Land Art and the work of Alice Aycock, Nancy Holt, and Mary Miss. She served as editor-in-chief of *Parnassus: The Allen R. Hite Art Institute Graduate Journal*.