

Commentary

Why Can't Jay Leno Get Any Respect At NBC?

BY VERNE GAY

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So here's how the Jay Leno game at NBC works: A new entertainment president arrives and longingly looks at CBS or Comedy Central or ABC or E! or (now) FX and wonders: Why can't we have a "Tonight Show" host as cool, hip, "relevant," and especially as young as name-a-host on the other network?

Instead, we have "Jay." This president's secret affirmation of the innate un-hipness of Jay is confirmed in the press, which barely notices him, and at cocktail parties, whose guests don't mention him. He sees the tectonic plates of late night shift — Jimmy Kimmel goes to 11:30 ET! — and wonders why the tectonic plates can't shift at NBC too?

He sees the numbers and grimaces: Sure, Jay is popular out there ... in places like Missouri or Kansas or Texas, those gun-totin' red states he wouldn't be caught dead in.

Sure, Jay's sensibility and humor seem to be in step with a certain part of the country and its political sensibilities — the Republican ones. The thought reels him. He wants cool. He wants hip. He wants young. He wants blue state. He does not want Jay Leno.

He then begins to plot. How do we get rid of this guy? (As an aside, he says to his secretary, "Do we have the phone number of the *New York Times*?")

And so it goes: The tectonic plates are on the move again and Jay is about to be pushed aside, this time for Jimmy Fallon, who is affable, funny, hip — for chrissakes, he's got Justin Timberlake as a partner and he's the protege of Mr. Cool himself, Lorne Michaels.

This will all happen within the next year, when Jimmy is appointed the new "Tonight Show" host, and Jay is once again appointed doormat. Goodbye, Jay! Now you can spend all of your

time fixing motorcycles.

Is any of this fair? TV isn't fair. But this is worse than "not fair": The dismissal of Jay Leno is just plain foolish.

Though no one ever seems to want to say this, Jay Leno has been one of the great success stories in NBC history. He pounds out shows — popular, populist, flyover country shows — night after night after night. There's no drama here, no star mishegas, no financial hold-ups. Just a steady professional production of late-night talk, late night after late night after late night.

He's an industrial human marvel — the man who never sleeps, who never NOT thinks of jokes, who can get up there and go through the motions of hosting with all the assurance of someone who was born to do this, which he was.

Jay is comfort food for the masses, and since NBC seems to have a complete disdain for the masses of late — if the primetime performance is any indication — then that makes him out of step here.

Jay is late night's last redoubt of mass-market, anti-hip, Every-

man (and woman) talk. He's not "cool." But they're not "cool." They just want their jokes. They just want to hear what Venessa Hudgens (or whomever) has to say about the movie they are in. Then they want to turn out the light.

Jay gives them that. Jay has always given them that.

Jay deserves respect. Jay gets none.

A report somewhere Wednesday said Leno was "on board" with this transition. Do not believe that report. He was also "on

board" with the transition Jeff Zucker pitched to him a decade ago (we're going to move you aside for Conan in '09 — aren't you just thrilled!) Jay took the company line then. He's taking it now.

But secretly he is not. He is seething. He is furious that once again, another NBC president, another owner, another regime, wants to drop kick him to the curb.

Jay is not ready for the glue factory. Jay will never be. He has

the job he's always wanted and he does it unsurprisingly well. He wants to keep doing it. I can promise you that.

By the way, Fallon's terrific and there are other reasons why this transition is taking place too (I'll get to those later). But this post isn't about Jimmy. It's about a guy who deserves better from his employer and who never gets it.

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Magic

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magic before I began working with the show," she said. "However, I had traveled with Reza and seen his show numerous times, so filling the role of his assistant wasn't hard because I was already familiar with the show."

Reza has toured the United States and been featured on television and radio stations in dozens of countries. However, his warehouse is located in Brookings, and that's where Kemnitz calls home.

"(Working with Reza is) a full-time job," she said. "Even when we are not on the road doing shows, we are working at the warehouse evolving ideas and working on new illusions."

"The most fun part of the job is traveling, but it can also be the most difficult," Kemnitz added. "While I enjoy meeting new people and seeing new sights from coast to coast, traveling can become exhausting with the early mornings and late nights after a performance."

Kemnitz lived in Yankton briefly as a child and still has good friends in the area. It's part of the reason she and Reza are returning to Yankton for a second consecutive year to raise money for the Yankton Homeless Shelter and the Yankton County Contact Center/Food Pantry.

"It's nice to come back and help out these organizations that are run by people with such giving hearts," Kemnitz said. "It feels good to know we are helping people out in tough times by doing something as simple as giving back to the community."

For those who saw Reza last year, Kemnitz said there will be some surprises.

"Reza plans to bring some new illusions to Yankton this year, along with his signature illusions," she stated.

Tonight's show gets under way at 7:30 p.m. in the Yankton High School/Summit Activities Center theatre. Tickets will be available at the door. For more information, call (605) 661-5153, or (605) 260-4413.

Also, Reza will be performing at 8 p.m. April 8 in Mount Marty College's Marian Auditorium. Tickets for the event will go on sale to the public March 25.

Tickets can be purchased in the MMC Box Office located in the upper Roncalli Center. Box office hours for ticket sales to this event will be March 25-26 from 5-7 p.m., March 27 from noon-1 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., and April 2-5 from noon-1 p.m. and 5-7 p.m.

Tickets can be purchased by cash or check only.

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