

# CHELSEA



Words by NICOLE MOOREFIELD Photos by CATHERINE POWELL Glam by JULIANNE KANE

# FREI

COMEDY HAS ALWAYS RUN THROUGH Chelsea Frei's veins, but it took her some time to realize it. The actor-writer-comedian from Andover, Massachusetts fell in love with acting in elementary school. "[Theater camp] was always the thing that I was constantly looking forward to," she remembers. After high school, Chelsea decided to pursue acting professionally and enrolled in classical theater at NYU.

While studying Shakespeare in college, Chelsea found herself "constantly trying to play a clown", despite those roles being traditionally male. Her senior year, Chelsea secured internships at *Saturday Night Live* and *Late Night with Seth Meyers*. Observing those writers' rooms, even as a coffee gofer, was incredibly valuable. "I was just in awe that you could create something from scratch and it be yours and then you could act in it," she says.

After graduating, she and writing partner Noam Tomaschoff created a production company, The Focus Group. Their first sketch, "Fuckboy Mountain", follows bad ex-boyfriends who literally "take a hike" up a mountain. It was filmed in Central Park, which came with its challenges and lessons. "Fuckboy Mountain" was featured on *Funny or Die*, where Chelsea began posting sketches. For a few years, that was her sole focus. "I learned so much about myself as a writer and an actor," she recalls.

Next, Chelsea wrote and starred in *Hostess*, a series about her experience as a "terrible" hostess in New York. "It was a culmination of what I felt I'd been learning through sketch comedy writing for the past couple years and writing something long-form that was truthful," she shares.

In addition to sketches, Chelsea wrote hundreds of jokes for Fuckjerry's *What Do You Meme?* card game

when the company wanted a female voice in the writers' room.

Her newest project, YouTube Premium's comedy original *Side-swiped*, premiered July 25. Written, produced, and created by star Carly Craig, it follows Olivia, a chronically single 35-year-old whose younger sister, Jayne, signs her up for Tinder. Olivia decides to date all 252 matches, inviting a procession of off-beat men into her life.

Chelsea plays Jayne, a young mom experiencing a 7-year-itch in her seemingly "perfect" marriage. "Not only am I living vicariously through [Olivia] and her dates, but I'm also living through our mom, played by Rosanna Arquette, who is also on the online dating scene," Chelsea explains. "They both go on these hilarious and relatable dates with so many different guys."

When Chelsea was still single and living in New York, she had plenty of bad dating app experiences. "There's this horrible thing with ghosting in our generation where men just think it's okay — men and women, but my experience is with men — to just stop texting you back or calling you back," she relates. Chelsea was ghosted twice, which almost turned her off from online dating, and had one Bumble date so paranoid that she's convinced someone was after him.

Although they are living very different lives, Chelsea sees a lot of herself in Jayne. "I feel for her in the way that she worries if she's always making the right decision. I think she's somebody who tries to play it off like everything's okay. She definitely struggles with anxiety and [comparing herself to others]," Chelsea notes. Like Jayne, family is important to Chelsea and she values the opinions of her parents and sister highly. There is also a

parallel "in the way that we talk about our problems — and sometimes don't talk about our problems," she admits.

Auditioning for the producers "was the most insane day of my life," she reveals. While Chelsea remembers leaving past auditions feeling dejected, she was optimistic after reading for Jayne. "When I read the script, it was so easy to say the lines," she remarks, as they even talk similarly. Chelsea got the part and moved to L.A. three weeks later.

Chelsea isn't shy about her admiration for Carly Craig. "Being able to be on set with her every day and not only act in what she created but see her creating it was such an eye-opening experience to me," she gushes. "[Writing for myself is] really special to me, but then being able to act in somebody else's writing that's so smart ... is also such a dream," she explains.

Because Carly "always knew what she wanted on set," filming flowed smoothly, Chelsea adds. "Everybody really got along," and the revolving door of guest stars like Tyler Posey, Jason Sudeikis, and Rick Springfield made every day exciting. She learned true professionalism from the guests, noting that she hopes to be as fun to work with as her co-stars. Chelsea's favorite guest was Peter Gallagher; she is a big fan, and working with him "was one of those dreamlike experiences," she says.

Chelsea prefers comedy that is genuine and honest. Although many of her sketches are unrealistic and exaggerated, "they come from an experience that I've dealt with," she shares. For Chelsea, the most rewarding feeling is hearing from someone who related to a sketch and felt less isolated in their own experience. "I love when [comedy] can bring people together," she concludes. <sup>10</sup>