

Comic release

Bill Maher wants to teach Jon Stewart some manners

By MICHAEL GILTZ

LOS Angeles may be a particularly blue state the day after the election — “it’s like a funeral home out here,” jokes Bill Maher.

He winds up the latest season of “Real Time With Bill Maher” on HBO tonight at 11 p.m. and then is off to New York for a one-night stand at Carnegie Hall, Dec. 3.

Maher, who believed that John Kerry was going to win, said he was just about to rewrite his act to replace all the Bush jokes.

Then he starts laughing. “Well, I guess I don’t now. There’s the bright lining in my cloud.”

Now that the election is over, Maher’s HBO show is going on hiatus. And just in time for the news business.

Like Jon Stewart, he’s a fierce critic of the media, though Stewart does “fake” news while Maher does substantive interviews that hold major figures accountable.

“I have to say, one reason that the candidates don’t have to talk to the news media is they can go on shows like his,” says Maher, who quickly adds that Stewart’s show is very funny and he’s appreciative of nice comments Stewart has about his work.

“I thought what he said to Tucker Carlson... well, I didn’t totally disagree with his message. I disagreed with how he delivered it because I thought it was ill-mannered.

“But I also thought he’s not the right messenger for that message. I’m sorry — this isn’t just with Jon Stewart; I’ve said this for years — when candidates can go on fluff shows and get fluff questions, of course they’re going to avoid harder question shows.

“The broader question Jon is talking about there — he’s criticizing CNN, and CNN does deserve criticism for being too fluffy. CNN to me is like what happened to MTV. I used to turn it on to see videos, and now I can’t. I used to be able to turn on CNN and make sure I saw hard news and now sometimes I see some town hall meeting? That’s not what I used to watch CNN for.”

Switching last year to HBO and getting to revitalize what even he admits was a stale formula on ABC has given Maher the biggest creative boost in his career.

“We used to have meetings [at ABC], and I’d say I want to talk tonight about the wall in Israel,” says Maher. “But we have on Carrot Top and Pam Anderson. She can only talk about animal rights and he can only talk about pop culture.

“One time — I think Carson Daly was on the show — we were talking about Bosnia and he just listened and finally said, ‘What are you guys talking about?’ Well, at least that’s real. That’s a very honest response. But at that mo-

ment, I should have quit.”

And now Maher has to quit the interview. His stand-up routine may be intact — thanks to Bush’s re-election — but tonight’s HBO finale needs a lot of work.

“We wrote all this stuff yesterday and Monday because we thought Kerry was going to win,” says Maher. “I’ve got a whole new show to do!”

Bill Maher closes another season of “Real Time” as the “other” political funny guy.



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