

## **Anonymous 1**

The skit writing groups are very boys club-y, which is probably where a large part of the problem starts.

There is a lack of conversation about gender inequity. Like many people at university, those in Law Revue, believe they are in a little bubble devoid of sexism and racism, and other social problems. Just because there are female directors and assistant directors doesn't mean that the dynamics behind the creation of the show are perfectly fine.

The executive needs to start a discussion about gender issues and other forms of discrimination, to make it a 'thing' so that when people want to complain about something they don't feel like uncomfortable losers that are supposedly pulling issues from nowhere.

It's not just gender issues, Law Revue does little to encourage diversity on all fronts. In my opinion, very few types of people thrive in the show, and the acting is incredibly homogeneous.

Given the timeline there isn't really room for personal development, for extensive coaching in writing or acting, everyone is at peak stress all the time and takes the slightest bit of criticism as an all out personal attack.

The executive are concerned with equity on an individual level, which is great, but this is always a secondary consideration to the quality of the skit. At the end of the process equity is often sacrificed in last minute casting changes.

## **Callie Henderson**

1. I was overseas on exchange when auditions were held but I knew Damiya from SUDS (The Da Vinci Code: The Musical) production and she asked me to get involved

when I got back. I liked the idea of getting involved in some lady comedy, and I knew there would be some good songs based on working with Damiya on the Da Vinci Code so I said yes.

2. There was both positive and negative in reactions - and it was a while ago so it's hard to pinpoint any one thing except for the night the Engineering Revue were in the audience. That was to be blunt a fairly shit experience - there was a lot of heckling, and yes, it was very gendered. I know everyone gets heckled at Revues but I guess as such a small cast, we weren't really prepared for it. From memory no other Revue made such a specific outing to come see us, so it was a bit of a shock to get out on stage one night and have around 20 guys yelling obscenities. I think one of my castmates couldn't even finish a scene. It definitely rattled us, and there were some tears backstage. After the first few catcalls I sort of feel like, yeah we get it, you think we suck, can you get out or shut up please? I remember the comments verbatim but from memory it was the usual "sluts/idiots/women aren't funny" bullshit - none of it was clever or funny which is what you should aim to be if you're gonna heckle comedians.

3. In terms of writing I found it much more collaborative, and that my voice was more likely to be heard. Casting was interesting because with a small cast we tried to make it pretty even all around. There were no 'dumb blonde' scenes which was refreshing for me!

4. I think Women's Revue is a great opportunity for female comedians on campus, and it has been done really well in the past. But it needs strong support from the Union, and it needs a strong director/president to ensure it is promoted well. I sort of feel like there is a reputation that Women's revue is not a cool thing to be in, or its not a funny revue, But that's not true, its just that because of its rep, it gets fewer auditionees. I know there are tons of hilarious women at Sydney Uni, and it could be great and successful as others have been in the past (NOTE: I believe one year it was based on Disney Princesses and went to comedy festivals? Alice Workman was involved).

5. Just because it's a show run by women doesn't mean it's a show just for women. Women are funny, and women are great organisers, designers, writers, actors, singers, dancers - they could craft something amazing with the right support. I'm not sure how it is now, but when I was at Sydney Uni I was very apprehensive to get involved in campus comedy which I (perhaps wrongfully) perceived as a boys club. Women's Revue was a safe space for me!

### **Emma Balfour**

Laying down the TRUTH [guitar solo]

1. What revue were you part of and what was your role?

2013 – Science Revue actor

2014 – Sydney University Revue actor

2014 – Science Revue actor and executive member

2. Did you write comedy for the show? Did you notice a gender disparity in who wrote the content? If so, what impact do you think this had on the show/your experience?

I co-wrote one sketch for last year's SciRev show, where two genderless, emotionless Siris got into an argument. Last year everyone in the acting cast was encouraged – nay, mandated – to write sketches. There was no real disparity in content creation, and this really meant that everyone had an input as an actor rather than as a gendered human.

3. Did you ever feel like people in the show (or broader community) thought that men were funnier than women?

What both SciRev and the USyd Revue did very well was value their castmembers as performers, rather than as males or females. In my spheres, actors are considered

funnier because of their comedic stage presence rather than the genitals between their legs or the gender identity in their head.

4. What did you think of the way women were presented in your show?

With the incomparable Jim Fishwick as our headwriter last year, and a 50/50 split of boys and girls in our core production team, there was a very conscious effort to write gender equality in sketches. It's something that's permeated into how I write – I always use gender neutral names and pronouns. Sketches about couples are never automatically a boy and girl, they're gender neutral names like Jamie and Alex. Writing sketches that pass the Bechdel Test is the goal, and I'm going to WIN.

5. Did you feel comfortable criticising gendered aspects of the show's content?

Absolutely. I'm not a shy person, and if something doesn't sit right with me I speak up about it. My policy is to always give people the benefit of the doubt. Rather than coming out guns blazing and calling the sketchwriter a bigoted sexist – which they aren't – I always say "X was really good about this sketch, but I feel like perhaps the depiction of the woman as Y could be viewed as a drawback because Z." Positive feedback!

6. If your performance used drag, what did you think of it?

There was a sketch in the Sydney Uni Revue that Robert Boddington and I performed called "Mixed Metaphors". Basically, two preposterous ladies have a very silly Fry-and-Laurie-esque conversation ("A bird in the hand is better than a bird with hands!" "Quite right, Joanna."). We had loud falsetto voices with ridiculous British accents and dramatic emotions, and the reason it was so funny was because we both committed to the characters. Bod was cast in the sketch alongside me because with the two of us, it just *worked*. He was in drag not as a gendered performance, but because the drag was so outrageously theatrical. Anything short of that overegged performativity and the sketch would have fallen flat.

7. Did you notice anything gendered about the way acting advice was given/received?

Again, I've been very lucky with directors and writers and fellow actors, and we've all been on fairly equal footing. Part of that might be that I give people shit if they condescend to me, but I've never really felt like acting notes have been gendered.

8. Outside rehearsals, how would you describe the social culture?

Intimidating. There are a lot of very talented performers, and standing out from all of these incredibly funny and musical and attractive people is a challenge.

There's nothing exciting about being a woman comedian on campus when you're alongside performers and writers like Sophia Roberts, Anneli Cole, Emilia Higgs, Shubha Sivasubramanian, Kay Pengelly, Bridie Connell, Bec Wong, and a whole host of other ladies that I'm half in love with. You need to be a good comedian to stand out, not just a female comedian. I think in that respect, we're very lucky at USyd to have a comedy culture that really encourages and makes a space for women, because you don't get that in the Real World so much.

9. Did the exec pay attention to try and achieve gender equity?

Definitely. It's something that, from an exec point of view, SciRev has endeavoured to speak to. Science Revue *always* attempts to cast an equal numbers of boys and girls (and those in between).

10. Do you think that women on the exec have a certain influence on how gender is approached in the revue?

Well I like to think that I do, but that might be more to do with the fact that I don't take shit from anyone more than the fact that I'm a woman. Certainly within the

feel-good vibes of Science Revue, personality and drive seem to be much bigger decisive factors than gender.

11. Any other thoughts?

I think if someone challenges a sketch based on potentially edgy content, you should open a discussion on how to fix that. If you need to be offensive or sexist or racist to make comedy, you're not making comedy.

With sketchwriting, rely on subversion rather than subjugation. Punch upwards – why on earth would you make fun of women or races or queer people when you could make fun of Tony Abbott?

### **Erin Cunio**

This year for Jew revue we had pretty good gender equality I believe. Our core exec/production team was 2 guys and 2 girls (including myself) and the mix was consistent for minor executive roles as well. While we were casting, we kept in mind that we wanted an equal mix of genders - luckily we didn't need to change any casting through to achieve that after looking at our initial decisions. The acting cast of 21 had 10 women in it. Our two head writers were Kay Pengelly (female) and Shahar Merom (male), and we found that almost everyone in our cast had a go at writing.

We encountered some problems with gender equality about midway through production. Some of our female cast members expressed concern over females being cast primary in 'straight' roles, and we reshuffled some of the preliminary casting to address it. This could be part of the 'men funnier than women' idea. Personally, I feel that the reason men are often cast in more absurd roles is sometimes because they fear that the audience will see the absurdity as a comment on women rather than just one silly person - it is safer to mock absurdity in the socially dominant groups.

Judaism was an interesting aspect of our revue this year. There was definitely more non-Jewish cast members than Jewish, and no-one was particularly religious. Interestingly, rather than reducing the role of Judaism in the revue, we found many people wanted to learn more about Jewish culture in an environment where it was safe to ask. Gender didn't really factor into this, apart from occasional discussions of old vs new religious generations.

Generally, I felt that we had a very good revue environment; we had many strong female voices in our cast who definitely made themselves heard when they felt there was inequality which is sometimes hard to spot from the top. I myself never once felt that my gender impacted in any way towards my abilities in the eyes of those around me - if anything it was possibly a benefit to have Tali and myself in leadership roles to create a safer feeling environment for the female cast members.

### **Gabi Kelland**

1. What revue were you part of and what was your role?

Science Revue, directed 2013, acting cast 2012

2. How did you find writing comedy? Did you notice a gender disparity in who wrote the content?

I think some of the best content in shows from previous years has come from women, but most of the show content comes from men. However, I don't consider this to be a failing of the Science Revue writing structure, but rather a more far reaching failure to encourage women's ideas generally. There's an old saying that when a man is bad at maths, that man is bad at maths, but when a woman is bad at maths, all women are bad at it. I think the same is true of comedy and that pressure makes women unlikely to voice their ideas for fear that, if the joke doesn't work, it will reaffirm those stereotypes. Writing good sketch comedy means also writing a lot

of terrible sketch comedy, which is a risky course of action when it can feel like one failed joke can mean being lumped into the “another unfunny girl” category. In terms of how writers wrote women, one particularly negative instance stands out. In 2012, one of the main characters was a take on the femme fatale archetype. I was one of roughly eight writers who worked on the central sketches for the 2012 show, and the strongest memory I have of that writing process was watching the character go from a very funny basic concept to a relatively well formed character before being completely eviscerated by the show’s male head writer. Other writers managed to somewhat salvage her character but watching a male authority figure decide that the show’s main female character “had too much stage time” and then seeing to it that her role was diminished was pretty deplorable.

3. What did you think of the way women were presented in your show?

I think we managed a great portrayal of women in the 2013 show. Science Revue had been criticised in the past for their lack of prominent female characters, so it was important to us that leading characters in the show’s central theme were women, which we achieved.

Another thing I’m genuinely proud of with regards to the content that Michael, Maddie and I chose was that we never had a sketch where a woman was cast as “funny character’s girlfriend” (or similar), which remains an unfortunately common archetype fulfilled by women in sketch comedy. One of the ways that we managed to maintain the roundedness of the portrayals was by writing all roles as gender neutral as possible – a Viking; a politician; a terrible wine connoisseur. In largely maintaining the neutrality of the characters up until the point of casting, it prevented the possibility of working ourselves into any unintentional gendered corners. It wasn’t something we managed to do completely consistently – we ended up casting a woman in the role of “Dad” for one sketch and never switched the character’s gender – but the effort made for a much better portrayal of women across the show.



4. Did you feel comfortable criticising gendered aspects of the show's content?

I did. As a director it's very easy – you just change the problematic aspect. As a cast member it's obviously more difficult because there are more people you have to speak to in order to raise an issue, however as a cast member in previous years I was very comfortable making those criticisms.

5. What sort of audience do you think the exec had in mind when they were writing/selecting content?

(exec = production) The production team wrote and selected for an audience of undergraduate students and parents of cast members.

6. How was gender considered in casting?

When it came to choosing who would be in the show, we just cast the best people. We never set out to choose more women than men or vice versa, nor did we have a gender quota. The resulting cast was overwhelmingly female – we cast 54 performers with 33 women and 21 men. In the sketch acting cast, the actor breakdown was 16 women to 11 men.

When it came to determining which actors would play which roles in specific sketches, again, we cast the actor that best fit the role. This did lead to a couple of problematic instances of women being cast in roles that were originally men – one example being the aforementioned casting of Bec Wong as “Dad” in a sketch between a father and a son. The sketch was one of the exceptions to the “write gender neutral” rule – it was uncomfortable sex advice and laboured phallogocentric metaphors between father and son which meant that we struggled to change the character's gender, even after we cast Bec in the role.

7. Did you ever feel stereotyped or judged on your appearance?

Thankfully, no. As director my appearance was never relevant (I hope), and as a cast member I never felt like my appearance affected the roles I was given.

8. Did you notice anything gendered about the way acting advice was given?

The roles I played in 2012 were never particularly “feminine” or otherwise, so I never received gendered acting advice. My co-directors and I also never gave gendered acting advice.

9. Outside rehearsals, how would you describe the social culture?

With a cast of 54 people and a production team of 17, it’s hard to give a sweeping generalisation of the social culture of the revue. However, from my point of view, Science Revue has always sought to be inclusive, though the size of the cast does tend to result in people forming smaller friendship groups.

10. Did the exec pay attention to ensure gender equity?

(exec = production) With a primarily female cast and a mostly gender neutral array of characters it wasn’t something we had to work hard to pay attention to, fortunately.

11. Do you think that women on the exec have a certain influence on how gender is approached in the revue?

(exec = production) Absolutely. In any creative process, the addition of another person results in the addition of another perspective. The most rounded and comprehensive depictions of any demographic are the result of the influence of members of those demographics that hold positions of power. The men on our production team were fantastic to work with, and they were as committed as the women to having rounded gender representation in the show, but even the best

intentioned all-male production team could not create a balanced depiction of women, purely because they don't have the requisite perspective.

12. Did you notice or experience any instances of sexism that you might not have mentioned?

Honestly, only the 2012 head writer issue stands out

13. Any other thoughts?

I think Science Revue has done well in the past couple of years to circumvent a lot of the problems faced by women in comedy. The environment is typically inclusive and encouraging, and rewards people who work hard and contribute to the show, regardless of gender.

### **Jacinta Gregory**

1. In our show, in my experience the original writing team started out as being majority male - in that we had contributors from previous years that happened to be male. But throughout the writing/workshopping process in the year a lot of the cast ended up contributing in making sketches/writing songs/and in editing what we've worked on - so gender contribution ended up becoming even - which thank God, meant we could avoid some 'boys club' sketches, and a lot of our cast members could pick when something had sexist undertones

2. I think that's generally a trend in comedy/revue seasons, but if that has been the case this year, it's been marginal, a female/male gender director split has helped lessen that mentality I like to think.

3. In our show, we've made sure that women were presented in a way that adequately represents them. An issue I've noticed in revue comedy, is the use of

overt, stereotypical female archetypes and we've made sure to avoid that this year. One particular issue in casting of female characters is that they often get the 'straight', i.e. the Abbott to the Costello in the scene, the one that pulls the scene along, and the interesting, more funny characters going to their male counterparts. That's a generalization but it's something else we've tried to avoid in presenting women.

4. Definitely. And I hope that the rest of the cast felt they could/can too. When we've shown our content/sketches to the cast - we've been critiqued, and had to change lines in the show that could be seen as sexist/unnecessarily offensive and I've been very happy for that.

5. In casting - gender was for the most part, a non-consideration. We have females playing well-known male politicians, and characters that were imagined as male in the script being played and changed by our female cast members. Of course, we acknowledged gender and some roles were better suited to males/females in casting but that's been applicable in the minority and for the majority it depended on how suited they were to the character, and how they could pull off timing in the script. In initial pre-show casting, we considered how many males/females we had so as to have an equal split in the show.

6. Most definitely. For one reason or another, each exec duo had a female/male split – and that helped in how gender was approached in the show. We all had an input in scriptwork and lines that made us feel uncomfortable as well as being able to change characters that were funny for the wrong reasons. Having an equal male/female split in casting decisions also helped us to be gender-blind throughout the process.

7. For me personally, although in the minority, I've been tired of seeing misogynistic tropes and the generalizations of large groups of people in revue humor and that being the punchline. I don't think we've done this in Comrev this year, and having cast critique in rehearsals has helped us be self-analytical and avoid that trope, which I hope to see in other revues this year.

## **Mikaela Bartels**

1) How diverse is queer revue? How many women are in the revue? Are there any trans women in the revue? Is it dominated by cis men?

In Queer Revue we strive to create an inclusive and safe environment for persons of any sexual orientation or gender identity. Despite this, every year we have trouble getting diversity within our show. This year, we advertised our auditions to non-cis-male pages and actively encouraged people of colour, women and non-cis male identifying individuals to audition in order to combat this trend of white gay cis-male domination. Regardless of our efforts, only 6 of our cast of 15 identify as non-cis male. However, when including the production team, we have a ratio of 12 cis male identifiers of an entirety of 21 people. In regards to the identities of the cast members, it is not my place to publicise them.

2) What impact do you think this diversity has on the show compared to other revues?

I think that diversity is an important component of any revue as it adds different dimensions to the show through nuance and variation of opinion. By nature of being one of the only non-faculty revues, Queer Revue draws a mixture of individuals from different disciplines; this provides us with a variation of talents, strengths and comedic tastes. Although we do struggle to maximise diversity within Queer Revue, by nature we are still one of the most diverse revues, having students from a range of disciplines, people of many different sexual orientations (not just gay and straight!), political opinions and cultural backgrounds. I believe this diversity to be an integral component of our show as it allows Queer Revue to offer its audience a comedic palette that caters to a variety of different tastes.

3) Do you notice a gender disparity in who writes content for the show? The body of the show has been written mainly by myself and Hayden; contributions from other members of the cast have been of relatively equal gender ratio.

4) What do you think of the way gay women are represented in queer revue? Do you worry about perpetuating stereotypes?

This year we were particularly concerned with giving non-cis men a much larger role in the revue (both of our main characters are non-cis male). We are also very conscious of the harmful effects of stereotypes, and have steered away from them unless actively identifying and making fun of them. In this way, we feel that we are not only addressing that stereotypes exist, but also demonstrating (through comedic exaggeration) the ways in which they can be damaging to individuals.

5) Most revues premise jokes on the gender binary and\ gender stereotypes. How do you approach/play on/subvert stereotypes?

Many of our characters this year are gender-neutral. This ensured that when casting the roles, we based our decisions on the caliber of the performance rather than auditionee's gender alignment to the role in question. As mentioned in the prior question, we will often exaggerate the stereotypes of a given gender/sexual orientation in order to poke fun at them, but also to demonstrate the ways in which they can impact individuals. This is a form of subversion in itself, as our mockery of stereotypes that exist to mock and degrade us (in terms of gender/sexual orientation) is deconstructive, empowering and just plain funny.

6) I've sometimes heard the sentiment that Queer revue can make jokes no other revue can. How do you approach potentially sexist or controversial content?

I think that sentiment is derived from the idea that if a heterosexual person were to make the same sort of joke as Queer Revue would, it would be considered homophobic. It stems from the whole 'you can only say the word "faggot" if you are

a gay male' etc (which is not always correct!). This idea displays an attempt to reclaim negative, harmful words by the category of people who have been oppressed by such terminology. When approaching potentially sexist or controversial content we consider what message our sketch is presenting: is it perpetuating this negative stereotype or subverting it? This being said, a large part of queer revue is laughing at both ourselves and the inaccurate stereotypes that pervade the Queer Community. We aim to ensure that our material is enjoyable for both the cast and the audience.

### **Sophia Roberts**

We do workshop out characters and sketches over a period of about three months, and in that time some change quite a lot, some not at all. I'm quite passionate about gender casting. Like any other consideration in a sketch, you have to think about what the repercussions of your choices are, and have a reason for making your decision. So if you cast a woman, what does that say? Because it certainly can say something. Women carry a certain cultural baggage when they perform in comedy. I wish it weren't so, but it certainly is the case that many women are discouraged from being funny at a young age. Boys are fine to be the class clowns, but girls should sit still and look pretty.

The flow on effect is that many young women are worried about trying comedy later on in high school or University. The first time I did stand up I had to sit in a green room with eight other dudes telling dick jokes for half an hour before the show. Surprisingly, they didn't want to hear any jokes about periods. Their loss.

When it comes to revues specifically, Patrick and I both wanted to create not just funny roles for women to play, but roles that were written by women, for women. It makes all the difference in performance, and makes the revue a much more inclusive and comfortable environment for young women to explore comedy.

I don't think having a female director makes a difference. I think having directors who are aware of what they're doing, who appreciate the difficulty for women approaching comedy for the first time makes the difference.

We didn't get it right this year, there's still an imbalance, but we're getting there, and I'm very proud of the steps we've taken to try and encourage more women to try comedy and enjoy revues.