



Event Report: Women in Comedy



By [Matthew Bell](#)

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Stage Award winner in the 2016 Funny Women Awards, Harriet Braine, performs her comedy song 'Pablo Picasso' at the event

“Women aren’t funny,” a male head of comedy once told a panellist at London Centre’s “Women in comedy” event – but things have changed for the better.

Lynne Parker was that panellist, and the attitude represented in that quote was one of the things that inspired her to found the Funny Women Awards in 2003. Seventy women entered in the first year; this year there were more than 500 entries.

Musical comedian Harriet Braine won the 2016 Funny Women Stage Award and she entertained the RTS audience with songs about Matisse and Pablo Picasso.

ITV commissioning editor for comedy Saskia Schuster and BBC Comedy head of production Sophie Taitt completed the panel, chaired by Nadine Dereza, for the late November event at ITV London Studios.

Even when alternative stand-up comedy first found an audience it was something of a boy's club but that has changed, argued the panel. They were in agreement that comedy shouldn't be defined by gender – what is important is whether it's funny or not.

Schuster's advice to women who want to make their way in comedy was to get up and do it. "Write and practise so you learn your craft and grow as a performer. There are many more short-form opportunities now for new writers and performers, which is a great way to start out. How we as broadcasters grow new talent is also crucial – it's all about nurturing and supporting contributors. I'd like to see more women sending in scripts," she said.

Parker said there are more women being funny on TV now, across many genres. The age-old concern that women can build their own glass ceiling by being self-effacing and self-critical is being challenged by successful comedies such as E4's *Chewing Gum* and Sky Arts' *Psycho Bitches*.

"It's important for established producers to encourage new people," said Taitt. "We do some shadowing, bringing people on. Training opportunities are important to us – there can't be a 'pull up the ladder after you' attitude".

Parker's advice was to seek out all potential opportunities: "If you can cut through the noise, the commissioners will look at what you do."

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