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Battles the Homophobes, One Facebook

Like at a Time

Ahead of Tel Aviv Pride, Ruth Selwyn, creator of dirty-mouthed animated lesbian comic Lizzy the Lezzy, talks to Haaretz about lesbian life in Israel and her seven years of Lizzy.

Alona Ferber |

Jun 08, 2014 12:46 PM



Zen

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Lizzy the Lezzy Credit:

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From a small
Israeli town only
a short train-ride
from Tel Aviv, a
cartoon lesbian
spends her days
reassuring
people around
the world about
their sexuality
and fighting back
against those
who call her the
Antichrist — and
worse.



Ruth Selwyn, left, with her girlfriend Dani. She made up Lizzy originally to “get a girlfriend.” Credit: Ran Erez

For those haven't
been introduced,
Lizzy the Lezzy,
an animated
stand-up comic
with a high-
pitched voice,
has starred in
around 100

YouTube videos since 2006, poking fun and singing about the trials and tribulations of gay life with friends including Gary the Gay.

After her initial success and media attention, including opening the 2008 Tel Aviv LGBT film festival with “Lizzy the Lezzy Does Gay Israel,” she fell off the radar, says her creator, web designer and filmmaker Ruth Selwyn. But in the six months since she has dedicated herself to Lizzy pretty much full-time, the cartoon lesbian has

undergone a transformation.

First of all, Lizzy's online presence has "gone mental," the 45-year-old British immigrant told Haaretz at a café in Binyamina, to which she recently moved with her girlfriend of two years. With more than half a million Facebook fans – mostly women, mostly in the United States, — Lizzy reaches between 30 million and 60 million people a week. "In private, I joke that I'm the biggest lesbian in the Middle East," Selwyn says.

She says her exposure to the anti-gay wrath that Lizzy attracts on Facebook – mostly from people who identify themselves as Christians – has made her “more extreme” in her atheism, and more politicized.

“Now this is a bit of a problem,” admits Selwyn, who grew up in a traditional Jewish family.

“There are a lot of gay Christians on my page. How can I post anti-religious stuff without offending half my audience? Over the last six months, I’ve got braver, I feel like

I need to be true
to myself. If I
believe strongly
that the bible is
bullshit, then I
need to put that
out there.”

Lizzy’s fans
include “haters,”
“fantastically
supportive”
straight allies
and people who
are struggling to
come out as gay.
One fan recently
wrote her,
“Sometimes I
wonder if it
would just be
better to end it ...
But when I read
your posts, they
inspire me to
keep loving [my
girlfriend] and
keep fighting to
the end so that
I’d get to be with
her someday.”

With the daily

grind of satisfying her Facebook audience, Selwyn has less time for writing blog posts or making the videos that first introduced Lizzy to the world. Recently she brought out the catchy “Sex with your ex,” and is currently working on a song comprised of homophobic messages she has received.

HOM...  

‘A nice Jewish girl’

SEX ...  

Selwyn moved to

Israel partly
because she
wanted to meet a
nice, Jewish girl,
and she made up
Lizzy originally
to “get a
girlfriend.”

Although Lizzy
isn't exactly
Jewish or Israeli,
she is based on
Selwyn's
experiences, and
it was in Israel
that Selwyn first
began living
openly as a
lesbian.

She still thinks
Israel is the best
place in the
world to be gay,
says Selwyn, who
describes herself,
and Lizzy, as a
bit of a
"celesbian" in
the local
community.
Over the years,
she says she “has

seen the gay
community grow
and flourish.”

I'M A ...  

“It was a great
feeling yesterday
to scroll through
my Facebook
newsfeed and see
a picture of the
Tel Aviv
Municipality
building in
rainbow colors
ahead of Tel Aviv
Pride. Look we
have it good
here, we really
do.”

When it comes to
issues like
marriage
equality, she
doesn't think
Israel is far from
achieving it, even
though, she
acknowledges

that there is no
civil marriage for
anyone in Israel,
gay or straight.
“The government
loves to show
how liberal they
are toward the
gays. And if they
are going to ride
off the back of
how nice they
are to us, they
should really
follow through,
which means
civil marriage for
gays.”

Selwyn mostly
refrains from
addressing gay
rights issues
specific to Israel,
or drawing
attention to the
fact that she is in
Israel, although
she doesn't hide
it. This is
because she
believes that
Israel-centered

content is less interesting to her mostly-American audience. It is also because she wants to keep her message universal. “It’s not about Israel,” she says.

But, she wonders aloud, does she also refrain from calling out homophobia in Israel, such as Ramat Gan’s Chief Rabbi Yaakov Ariel recently declaring that renting to lesbian couples who plan to “live in sin” is forbidden, because part of her doesn’t want to show the Jews “as being as ignorant and stupid?”

GAYS ...  

“Maybe I am a little biased,” she says, “I need to address that, I need to think about that.”

It's not that she has never criticized homophobia from Jews. In 2011, she made "Gays cause earthquakes!" after New York Rabbi Yehuda Levin claimed gay marriage had caused a quake in Washington D.C.

She does recall a fan with a pro-Israel boycott profile picture commenting on Lizzy's page, and

that she replied
"If you want to
boycott Israel,
you better get off
this page, since I
live there." The
reply got a few
likes, she says.

Has she received
criticism for not
speaking up for
Palestinian
rights, or
accusations of
"pink-washing"?

"It's happened a
bit, but I haven't
done much
about promoting
the fact that I'm
in Israel, there
was a tiny
reaction, but my
audience is very
American and a
lot of them are
quite supportive
of Israel
anyway."

"You have to go

with the audience,” says Selwyn, and what the audience is responding to right now is gay rights messages. Still, politics doesn’t seem to come naturally to her, and she appears slightly less comfortable when her strong opinions on religion and prejudice are coming out of her own mouth, and not out of Lizzy’s. Despite this discomfort, however, Selwyn is very clear about why she sustains her “Lizzy habit.”

“I’m doing it because I get so many messages from people

telling me how much it helped them come to terms with their sexuality, and how it helped them to come out.” Even before the struggle for rights, she says, there is a much more basic struggle — for acceptance.



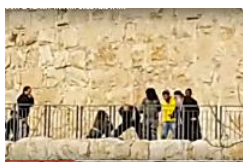
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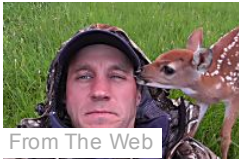
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