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'24,' 'Dropout' star Mary Lynn Rajskub performs stand up at Aurora's Comedy Shrine

By JEFF BANOWETZ
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Comedian Mary Lynn Rajskub, best known for her role as Chloe O'Brian on the TV show "24," will be performing at The Comedy Shrine in Aurora April 15 and 16. (Troy Conrads)



While her name may not be immediately familiar — let alone pronounceable — chances are you recognize her face.

Comedian Mary Lynn Rajskub, who will be performing at The Comedy Shrine in Aurora April 15 and 16, has spent the last 20-plus years as a busy working actor, appearing in memorable roles in sitcoms like "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," "Modern Family" and "Brooklyn Nine-Nine." She's appeared in big-budget action films like "The Tomorrow War" and indie productions like "Little Miss Sunshine." Recently she was in Hulu's "The Dropout."

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But most people remember her for the action series “24,” where she played Chloe O’Brian, the behind-the-scenes tech support for Kiefer Sutherland’s always-in-a-hurry Special Agent Jack Bauer.

“I’ve been very lucky in my career,” said Rajskub, which, for the record, is pronounced RICE-cub. “I just try to take things as they come, and it’s led to a lot of interesting work with a lot of great people.”

But it wasn’t acting that first brought the Michigan native to California. Rajskub initially moved to San Francisco to study painting, although once there, she found herself drawn to performance art.

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“I was getting laughs in performance art, and I really liked it,” she said. “Through trial and error, I found out that comedy was what I was good at.”

She appeared in 10 episodes of the sketch comedy program “Mr. Show” in 1995 and 1996, following that with mostly comedic roles before joining the cast of “24” when it launched in 2001.

“It’s funny, at the time, the producers (of “24”) were worried that I’d only done comedy. ‘Can you really do a drama?’” she said. “Now that people see I’m a comedian, they think of Chloe and wonder, ‘can she really do comedy?’”

Rajskub was increasing her focus on stand-up when the pandemic shut down the country in spring 2020.

“All my jobs were geared toward live comedy shows,” she said. “And it all got canceled. But the hustle never ends; you just need to figure out what to do next.”

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That included a sitcom pitch sold to Comedy Central, but it eventually died before reaching the air. She then pivoted to producing her own stand-up special filmed in her garage, “Live from the Pandemic,” which received wide acclaim, particularly from other stand-up comedians struggling to work without an audience.

This time also inspired her to write a book, “Fame-ish: My Life at the Edge of Stardom,” which will be released next month.

“I tried to write a book about 10 years ago and got bogged down,” Rajskub said. “A good friend was listening to one of my routines, and she said, ‘This sounds like the chapter of a book’ ... I thought maybe now was a good time to try it again.”

The book features 28 essays containing observations about a career “in proximity to people who were in proximity to huge success” along with personal reflections on her life and family.

“The process of writing the book is finding things underneath the jokes,” she said. “It’s a gratifying process. Jokes have weight to them, even if there’s a lot of silly stuff, but I couldn’t have written it if it wasn’t very real. You get the jokes, but there’s a lot more that comes with it.”

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Writing the book also helped her focus on her stand-up routine, leading to her current run that brings her to Aurora. While she's performed consistently over the last 20 years, including some shows recently with comedian Fred Armisen, this is her first large-scale touring show.

"I don't know if it was on purpose," she said with a laugh. "I just kept accepting dates and accepting dates, and next thing you know I'm on tour."

Her show, like her book, includes some insider tales of a working actor behind the scenes, like making out with Tom Cruise in a movie (the scene, however, was left on the cutting room floor) and having Sean Combs ask her to fix his computer at an awards show, although Rajskub isn't the tech savant she played in "24." During those scenes where she's furiously tapping away on a computer, she usually typed herself positive affirmations — "You're doing such a good job!"

But the majority of her stand-up show is about things that appeal to everyone.

"It's very connective with the audience," Rajskub said. "It's about relationships, marriage, divorce, kids, sex. The things we all get into, but we can all laugh about."

### The Comedy Shrine presents Mary Lynn Rajskub

**When:** 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. April 15 and 16

**Where:** The Comedy Shrine, 2228 Fox Valley Center Drive, Aurora

**Tickets:** \$20-\$40

**Information:** 630-585-0300; [comedyshrine.com](http://comedyshrine.com)

*Jeff Banowetz is a freelance reporter for the Beacon-News.*



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