

AGENDA

By Mary Murray

Q&A

COMIC Relief

Comedian Paula Poundstone might operate under the belief that nobody listens to her, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Perhaps best known for her frequent appearances on the NPR quiz show *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me*, she also was the first woman to perform stand-up at the White House Correspondents' Dinner, has penned two books, voiced a character in the film *Inside Out*, and hosts her own podcast, *Nobody Listens to Paula Poundstone*. When not at home with her two dogs and 13 cats, Poundstone maintains a busy touring schedule. Ahead of her upcoming stop at the **Southwest Florida Event Center** in Bonita Springs on November 22, *NI* caught up with her to discuss comedy and the secret to winning a public radio game show. (swflectentcenter.com)



MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

WHAT'S THE MOST DIFFICULT ROOM POUNDSTONE HAS EVER PLAYED? FIND OUT AT NAPLESILLUSTRATED.COM/PAULAPOUNDSTONE

NI: Who were your biggest comedic influences when you were evolving your craft?

Poundstone: I think I wanted to be Lily Tomlin since the day I first saw her on *Laugh-In* when I was in the fifth grade. But I missed that by a country mile. In terms of how I work, I was much more influenced by comics that weren't very good. Starting out as an open mic-er, you spend a lot of time watching other people go onstage while you wait your turn. Like myself, they were not very good at all. [I remember] one comic who would go on, and if he didn't get the response he wanted, he would blame the audience. ... I used to watch that happen over and over again, and it's how I established very clearly in my head that the job of entertaining the audience is up to me and not the other way around.

Care to share any behind-the-scenes *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me* secrets?

Well, there is a doping problem. People say to me all the time, "You guys sound like you're having so much fun." That's 'cause we are. The aired show

is shorter than the live show, and there's stuff we say that we already know they won't air, and that part's fun. I think the audience likes it when they know we've said stuff that's just for them. That NPR would not, with a gun to its head, air. And there's a fair amount of that, I might add.

Do you study up on the news before you're on an episode?

Yes, and it apparently doesn't come through at all! Yes, I'm trying to win—I'm just not very good at it. The truth is, I pay attention to the news because I think I'm supposed to. Looking back over my life, has me paying attention to the news really helped the world in any way? Probably not. But I do have this idea that it's what I'm supposed to be doing as a citizen, so I do. But the part where I'm studying up for *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me* has much more to do with the news of the weird. I am really trying to win. If you just take three answers—Trump, Afghanistan, and lemurs down his pants—you might win.