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Spit take two

Sister Spit's queer girls tell it like it is.



SUH-WEET Michelle Tea is back on the road with Sister Spit: The Next Generation.

The last time Sister Spit did a cross-country tour, Bill Clinton was president, Rosie O'Donnell was in the closet and Jennifer Beals was still known as “the one from *Flashdance*.” But now the traveling spoken-word show is back, proving that the idea of fierce, queer writer grrrls rambling from San Francisco to New York and various points in between is as timeless as a Clinton.

“I was surprised at how many people were asking about Sister Spit when I was on a book tour this past year,” says Michelle Tea, 36, the San Francisco indie-lit heroine known for works including *Valencia* and, most recently, *Rose of No Man's Land*. She served as the original ringleader of the Sister Spit Ramblin' Road Show from 1997 to 1999, and is at the helm once again for this tour, dubbed Sister Spit: The Next Generation. It's been inspired, according to Tea, by all the women who seemed to remember the original crew (which included Tea, Eileen Myles, Ali Liebegott and Sini Anderson), whether they were old enough to have actually seen the shows back then or not. “It was so cool to realize the kind of cultural impact it made,” she says.

Tea, who also edited the recent anthology *Baby Remember My Name: New Queer Girl Writings* (Carroll & Graf), had planned on taking some of the twentysomething contributors on the road anyway. And she thought it would be the perfect opportunity to revive the spoken-word tour. “I just realized, this is so in the spirit of Sister Spit, so let's get them a wider audience,” Tea says of the young writers.

And so she gathered together a handful of them—Rhiannon Argo, Tamara Llosa-Sandor, Christy C. Road, Nicole J. Georges and Robin Akimbo—and brought on two vets, Liebegott and Myles, for some dates. The van of women set off in early April and is in the process of visiting 31 cities and towns—more college campuses than bookstores and bars this time around—where they will each read from their work and then sell it in the form of books, chapbooks and zines. The tour hits Brooklyn's Cattyshack this week.

Tea says that while much of this traveling show is reminiscent of those in the '90s, it feels a lot different, too. "We can tour at a kind of higher level now—like, we actually stay in hotels," she says, reminiscing about when Sister Spit participants would ask from the microphone if anyone would like to put them up for the night. The women also sold hand-distressed, silk-screened tour T-shirts, she recalls, explaining, "We would basically sit down and say, 'What's the hardest way to do everything?' Now our shirts are American Apparel." Tea credits tour organizer Annie Oakley (of the Sex Workers' Art Show) for setting up a more professional situation this time around. And Tea herself is more grown up, too. "I was in my twenties then, and I was winging everything," she says. "Now I feel responsible, and that's something new. I'm not the one who's out getting wasted and lost at night after the readings!"

Liebegott—whose latest novel is *The IHOP Papers* (Carroll & Graf), about a young, heartsick lesbian who waits tables at the pancake chain—has been having a similar experience. "I'm totally Grandpa now," the 35-year-old says from the road. "I'm traveling with a box of Sleepytime tea! In earlier tours, it was about getting drunk and having sex." But she's noticed more exciting differences, too. "These young women feel much more established now, as far as being artists and writers," Liebegott says, explaining that the early tours signaled the first feeling of confidence about their own writing for many of the participants. "Now, most have already been published, and they're more driven with their writing."

Llosa-Sandor, 26, whose contribution to *Baby Remember My Name* addresses her Filipina identity, has participated in frequent readings and worked as a newspaper reporter in western Massachusetts. "My only context for [this type of tour] was *Road Rules*, people driving around in an SUV, who's-going-to-be-voted-off-the-island type of shows!" she says. "But this is awesome. It's really empowering and fun, and I feel really free and inspired. Not many people get to do this kind of thing."

Sister Spit: The Next Generation is at Cattyshack Mon 30.