

OUT LINES

Oak Park MCC Gets Support After Threat

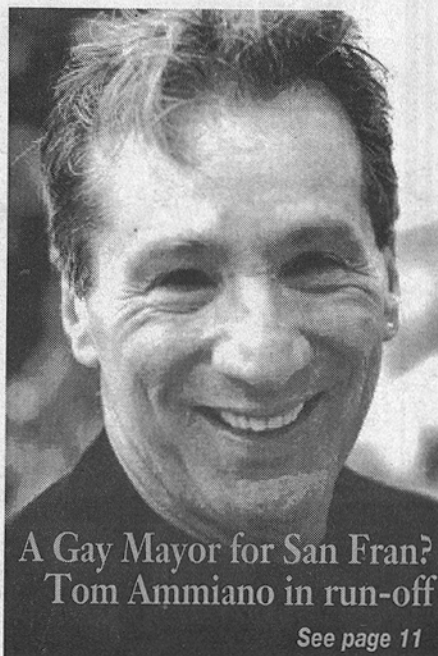
Oak Park's Metropolitan Church of the Incarnation was threatened with violence via e-mail messages. The police traced the hateful words to Oak Park-River Forest High School—next door to Pilgrim Church, where the MCC meets.

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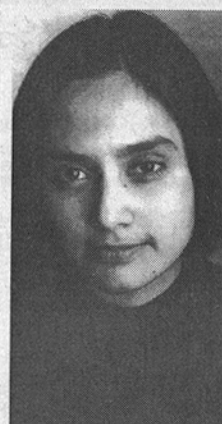
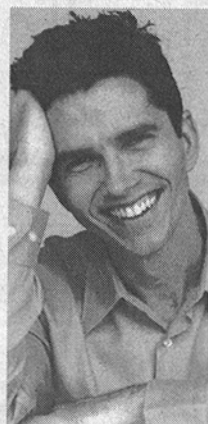
**Gay Man
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**McKinney
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**A Gay Mayor for San Fran?
Tom Ammiano in run-off**

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THE JOKE'S ON THEM
**Comics Bob Smith
and Sapna Kumar**

Sapna Kumar Performs

by **sukie de la croix**

"I was born in India, and raised in Indiana," said Sapna Kumar, as she settled into the hot seat in my office. "I was born in Bombay, and came to the States when I was about 2 years old."

Anyone who has seen Kumar on stage knows how funny she is, and if you haven't seen her, then ... well, she's REALLY funny! Like most other comics bridging two cultures—Margaret Cho to Woody Allen—Kumar views her life through a pair of "giggle goggles."

"Dad went to college here," she explains, "Like many immigrants he decided to stay. My parents are Hindu. I don't practice the religion, but I do respect it."

Kumar's father worked in the steel industry, but now teaches. Her mother owns a franchise; first a Baskin-Robbins, now a Subway. "Here's the condiments," said Kumar, "Oil, pepper, salt, vinegar, oregano and tandoori masala ... She doesn't offer that, but I think she should."

Kumar grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in Indianapolis, and went to public school there, but when she got older she wanted to escape. She made a career choice at a young age. "I was just seven years old and I knew I wanted to be a comedienne. I was a shy kid at school, but I was the clown in the family. In junior high, I was already getting cast as the funny characters in school plays. I just wanted to be on *Saturday Night Live*, then the show started to suck, so I thought ... forget that!"

What makes someone funny, or not funny, is up for debate, but Kumar vamps on feedback. "I want to be in front of people. I want that energy. Even when I'm not on stage, if I can

can be confusing. We can't always understand our parents, how are we going to understand the universe?

GS: You were on a panel at the OUTWRITE conference in 1998. Will you be on a panel at the 2000 OUTWRITE conference?

BS: It's funny, I've just been thinking about that. I definitely do want to attend it. I wasn't able to this year because I was so immersed in finishing the book. I really enjoyed it. It was one of the best things I've ever done. I would definitely like to be on a panel, it's interesting. The good thing is that you meet readers and other writers and people in publishing. It's an interesting group.

GS: Jaffe Cohen, one of your fellow Funny Gay Males, has co-written a movie called *Hit & Runway*. Have you seen it?

BS: Yes, I did. I really enjoyed it.

GS: Do you have plans to do something film-related?

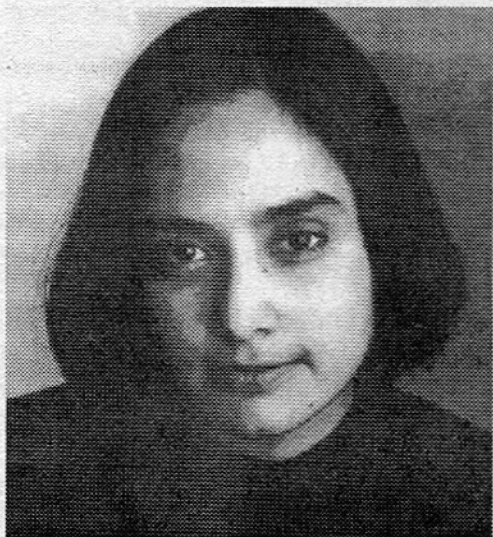
BS: I do have an idea for a film. Two of them, actually. One's a short film. It's kind of a parody of *It's A Wonderful Life*. It's done as a comedy with some sharp moments. I've already written the script for that and I'm doing rewrites. I have another idea for a feature film about a dysfunctional family. It's a black comedy about the adult children of this family and their parents. There will be one gay sibling in the story. He'll be an important component, but it's not a particularly gay movie. I think it will appeal to everyone. Not that gay stuff doesn't appeal to everyone. I feel like I write well about families. That's one thing I want to write about more. How families work. The dynamics.

GS: What about television, the new gay frontier?

BS: I've met with the *Will & Grace* people a couple of times. They called me. I don't think anything's going to happen with that. I mean, they're doing well without me, but I do think I would be an asset to the show. It's funny, because I moved to L.A., theoretically, to work

GS: *Way To Go, Smith!* also gets very serious, especially in the "Our Fathers" piece, where you write about both your relationship with your father and religion. Was that a difficult section to write?

BS: It was hard. All of them were, in a way. Every one went through so many different versions. My take on it is, I usually start with a basic idea and I know what story I'm going to tell. Some things I think are funny. But to be honest in a story, if it's serious, I don't want to underplay it or skip over it or overplay it either. The story dictates if it gets serious, and then hopefully it gets funny again. I try to work it out in the end that it's cohesive. That the demands of the story dictate how serious or how funny it will be in parts. It was a serious thing, with my father, but I wanted it to be very specific. He wasn't a villain in my life, and I hope that comes across. I wanted to write about my father and I realized that I wanted to write something about him from (my) childhood. It just seemed to me that the structure, opening with the hospital room, then childhood reminiscences, with some intermixture of religion, and then the ending, back in the hospital room ... I do like the metaphor of God the father, in the sense that your father is so confusing



Sapna performs Sunday.

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make someone laugh during the day, or at a party, it boosts up my energy. It keeps me happy."

Every culture/country has its clowns, but I think stand-up comedy—don't quote me on this—is purely an Anglo-American phenomenon. Switch on the TV and you have stand-up Jews doing jokes about stereotypical Jewish mothers, stand-up Blacks poking fun at the stereotypical Black culture, but you never see any Indian lesbians doing curry jokes ... until Kumar came along.

Humor is the liberator, because it not only heals cultural wounds, but it's a great way to educate. And Kumar's strange Bombay mix of India/Indiana/Hindu/Baskin-Robbins/Samosa/Subway sandwich makes for an interesting stand-up routine. How does she see the mix?

"I think it's hysterical, and the first time I got a chance to perform in front of an all-Indian audience, then I really saw how funny it was. They knew everything I was talking about. It's like an 'in' joke, and now I'm letting everybody else in on the joke. It's like being gay; we have all these gay 'in' jokes and now everyone gets to hear about it.

"I have different sets for different venues. Like at Zany's, it's the mainstream comedy club, and I don't tell the Hindu gods joke; it's a bit esoteric and I don't think the audience would understand what I'm referencing. I try to tell jokes that everyone can relate to. I might start talking about movies or current events. But I always start with 'My name is Sapna Kumar, I was born in India and raised in Indiana.' So this is who I am, and I'm going to tell the story from this point of view."

"I am making fun of the Indian stereotype. Like my parents said to me ... 'You can be a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, ... an engineer, a lawyer, a doctor, or you can drive a taxi cab.' Now, naturally that's a stereotype, because these are the things you see Indian people doing. Then I say, 'Oops! I chose comedy, I made the wrong decision.' So I'm already breaking the stereotype."

"When I was 19, I was in college and I went to Louisville, Kentucky, to a little comedy club; I was doing a show with a comedy troupe. I asked the manager if I could do some stand-up. I'd been doing some in a coffeehouse, but never in a club. The manager came up to me afterwards and said 'You did a great job, come back in a couple of weeks.' I went back and he said 'Here's a contract, go out on the road.' So I did. Nowhere exciting: Bloomington, Indiana, Lexington, Kentucky People would come up to me after the show and say 'You speak English so well.'

"Now I've had the good fortune to be here in Chicago, I have to tell you, I don't think I want to go back to Kentucky. A lot of people have told me, 'You opened up in the hardest place to open up.' It's hard to get that audience on your side. But it was a learning experience.

"I moved to Chicago two years ago. I did Comedy Sportz for about a year, doing all the improv things. Then stand-up here and there in the smaller venues. Then I met Hysterical Women, and I got to do some of the bigger venues. I first met them at Star Gaze, when they were just starting out, and the first show we did together was the Midwest Women's Autumn Festival in DeKalb, about a year ago."

Kumar has also appeared at the last two Illinois Federation for Human Rights annual fundraisers at the Park West.

"The first time I did the 'Statement for Freedom' was last year. Alicia Obando is one of the co-chairs and she asked me to perform. Being new to Chicago, I had no idea that the Park West was so huge. I got there on the day and thought 'I'm playing this venue!' So it was the most fantastic night for me, and this year I got to do it again and it was even better. I felt a hundred times more confident. I wish I could have a venue like that every week."

Sapna Kumar is appearing in "It's A She Thang" with Karen Williams, Vickie Shaw and Jessica Halem, at the Ivanhoe Theatre Sunday, Nov. 14 at 7.30 p.m. Tickets are available from Women and Children First, or phone 773-233-1207. This is a benefit for the Lesbian Community Cancer Project.

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of reaching a wider audience since it has an already built-in appeal.

More Music From Austin Powers 2: The Spy Who Shagged Me (Maverick): Just in case you didn't get enough music on the *Austin Powers 2: The Spy Who Shagged Me* soundtrack, you may get your fill with *More Music From 'Austin Powers 2: The Spy Who Shagged Me'*. Highlights include Lords Of Acid's "Am I Sexy?", and new songs by The Bangles ("Get The Girl"), They Might Be Giants ("Dr. Evil"), and Propellorheads ("Crash!"), as well as George S. Clinton's "Austin Powers Shagaphonic Medley."

The Best Of Bond ... James Bond 007 (Capitol): Speaking of spies and music, *The Best Of Bond ... James Bond 007* compiles 19 songs from 18 James Bond movies. Many of the songs, written specifically for the James Bond series, had substantial success on the pop charts, including "Nobody Does It Better" performed by Carly Simon, "Live And Let Die" by Paul McCartney & Wings, "Goldfinger" performed by Shirley Bassey, and "A View To A Kill" by Duran Duran. Can you name the artist who sang the most James Bond theme songs? Can you name all five actors who have had the distinction of playing Bond?

Young Man With A Horn (Columbia/Legacy): A CD reissue, with a bonus track, of the soundtrack to the movie *Young Man With A Horn*, which starred Kirk Douglas and Doris Day. The soundtrack features Ms. Day's vocals on several well-known standards including "The Very Thought Of You," "I Only Have