

Saturday, November 3, 2012, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Strictly Speaking

An Evening with Dan Savage



Christopher Satton

Cal Performances' 2012–2013 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

DAN SAVAGE grew up in “a loud, argumentative, and very Catholic” family, and came out as gay as fruit cocktail.

Originally known as a gay-sex columnist, he is now a household name thanks to his “It Gets Better” video project on YouTube. The project, which has gained immense popularity since its creation in mid September 2010, asks people to make and upload short positive videos about their experiences about the LGBT community. Millions have viewed the videos and participated so far, including President Barack Obama and entertainer Janet Jackson. *Advertising Age* has called “It Gets Better” one of the top social media campaigns of 2010. In March 2011, he released the book, *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying and Creating a Life Worth Living*. In February 2012, Mr. Savage hosted a television special, *It Gets Better*, on MTV and Logo.

In June 2011, Mr. Savage won a Webby Special Achievement Award from the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences for the project. A month later, Mr. Savage was named one of the 2011 “Power 50” as well as the “Out 100” by *Out* magazine for the campaign’s tremendous impact on the LGBT community and was also selected for *O, The Oprah Magazine’s* 2011 O Wow! list of breakthrough achievers.

In 1991, he was the night manager at an independent video store in Madison, Wisconsin, when a co-worker told him he was planning to move to Seattle and start a new alternative newspaper. Mr. Savage, a self-described “pushy busybody,” replied, “You have to have an advice column. Everybody hates them, but everybody reads them.” And suddenly, Mr. Savage, who’d never considered himself a writer before, was a snarky “Dear Abby” for the sexually active.

Mr. Savage’s column, “Savage Love,” first appeared in 1991, in the first issue of *The Stranger*. Readers of any sexual persuasion were invited to seek Mr. Savage’s pithy advice with the salutation “Hey faggot,” an attempt by Mr. Savage to make the word more socially acceptable. In 1999, Mr. Savage announced he’d grown weary of “Hey faggot,” possibly because a lot of readers thought “Hey faggot” not “Savage Love” was the name of the column.

The once-a-week column is funny, informative, outrageous, nonjudgmental (about consenting sex acts), and very judgmental (about moronic letter-writers). “Savage Love” is now syndicated to better alternative weeklies across America. In his new MTV series, *Savage U*, which premiered on April 3, 2012, he travels the country, dispensing sex advice to college students.

Mr. Savage is the author of *The Commitment: Love, Sex, Marriage, and My Family*, *Skipping Towards Gomorrah: The Seven Deadly Sins and the Pursuit of Happiness in America*, *Savage Love: Straight Answers from America’s Most Popular Sex Columnist*, and *The Kid: What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant*. The latter book tells how Mr. Savage and his boyfriend adopted their son from his willing mother, a “spare-changing gutter punk.” It is also the inspiration for a musical from the producers of *Avenue Q*, which debuted in the 2009–2010 season of the New York-based New Group theater company.

“If the religious right really wanted to stop gay sex,” says Mr. Savage, “they should get behind gay people adopting, because nothing puts a stop to gay sex faster.”

In addition to writing his column, Mr. Savage is now the editor of *The Stranger*. He’s also active in theater, directing queer plays under the name Keenan Hollahan. Keenan is Mr. Savage’s middle name, and Hollahan is his grandmother’s maiden name.

“Dying is easy,” Mr. Savage says. “Coming out is hard.”