

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Iconic Victoria Looseleaf

John Fleck · Wednesday, March 16th, 2016

Let's get it out of the way now, this full disclosure thing. I've known Victoria Looseleaf, fellow Clevelander, since the late 1980's. She was introduced to me after my show, "Psycho Opera," and immediately declared herself my number one fan.

I must admit that I'm a fan of hers, as well. Looseleaf is, to put it bluntly, an LA icon. Part whirling dervish, part smart dance/theater/music/art critic and total connoisseur, she's an award-winning arts journalist who has been covering the scene since beginning her cable access TV show, *The Looseleaf Report*.

And, yes, I was on that show numerous times, as myself, and as her mother, the late Mrs. Looseleaf. The show had a 22-year run, airing in L.A. and New York, until L.A. killed Public Access in December, 2008, with Looseleaf having taped more than 400 shows. She began by covering the underground art scene (she once interviewed me in my bathtub), and also played the harp and sang original songs, with *I Turned Gay in Acapulco (For a Day in Acapulco)*, eventually becoming the cable access show's closing tune.

Looseleaf's archive eventually grew to include big names, such as George Carlin, Ray Bradbury, Timothy Leary and Leonardo DiCaprio. In fact, the then-nascent superstar and now Oscar-winning actor made his first talk-show appearance on *The Looseleaf Report*. Looseleaf then went on to pen *Leonardo: Up Close and Personal*, a bio for Ballantine Books, which was in the Top 50 Amazon titles a month after its release in 1998.

[embedvideo id="zOjxvxhn4qE" website="youtube"]

As for the Looseleaf moniker, "We shortened it from Looseleafkowitz!", it may fit her style, but it's her serious journalistic cred and internet chops that have allowed her to stay relevant in today's tumultuous times.

As a noted dance critic, Victoria Looseleaf was once asked if she ever danced. She replied glibly, "Of course. I studied at Florence Shapiro School of the Dance, a charm school in Shaker Heights, Ohio."

It's this trenchant humor – what comic thespian Julie Halston calls 'deadpan rococo' – that, when coursing through her thousands of profiles, interviews, reviews and feature stories, makes Looseleaf's writing unique. She is old school professional, and as one of the last of the great freelancers, Looseleaf has been a regular contributor to the *Los Angeles Times* for two decades. She also writes for KCET Artbound, *Dance Magazine*, *Artillery*, *Performances Magazine*, the *New York Times* and other outlets, including her blog, *The Looseleaf Report*.

Okay, I confess, Looseleaf has even written about me on numerous occasions. I am particularly fond of this line she wrote to describe my 2011 solo show, *Mad Women*: "...a towering Fleckfest of accelerated vocal patterns, mirror-muggings and a movement vocabulary that can best be described as Martha Graham being put through a Cuisinart..."

But I digress: I'm writing this article to shamelessly plug Looseleaf's latest endeavor, her new book, *Isn't It Rich? A Novella In Verse*, published by Gordy Grundy. As my fellow actor/drag legend Charles Busch put it on the website *Towleroad*, "Victoria Looseleaf is decidedly worthy of worship. Dazzling and flamboyant, La Bella Looseleaf has written a memoir-in-verse that offers an intimate and very funny insight into the mind of the martini-swilling, love-hungry, barefoot doyenne."



And Busch isn't alone in his praise. Sandra Tsing Loh, also a pal of mine and a brilliant writer/performer (*The Madwoman In The Volvo*), called the book: "A hilarious, sparkling and rowdy Looseleaves of Grass!" Larry Karaszewski, whose latest hit, with writing partner Scott Alexander, *The People V. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story*, wrote: "Victoria Looseleaf's poems are beautiful autobiographical short stories full of wit and grace. Isn't It Rich? Indeed it is." Not surprisingly, Looseleaf even has an OJ connection, which predates her journalism career, but says a lot about the woman as multi-hyphenate: She's got a bachelor's degree in psychology with a criminology minor from UC Berkeley and a Master's of Fine Arts in the Performance and Literature of the Harp from Mills College. Combining those fields, Looseleaf performed solo harp concerts in prisons.

"I decided I didn't want to be Clarice Starling," she recalled, "so I toured Europe and Japan, and then released two albums – *Harpnosis*® and *Beyond Harpnosis*®."

Used for de-stressing purposes, Looseleaf said the albums have been endorsed by medical professionals, an Oscar-winning actress and athletes.

"When I lived in Laguna Beach, I gave a copy of *Harpnosis*® to my neighbor, O.J. Simpson," said Looseleaf. "Obviously, it didn't take."

What is taking, though, is her book, as Looseleaf is doing readings around town and getting a tremendous response. Coming up are Kim Ohanneson's Whisky & Poetry Salon on March 24 and on April 2, Looseleaf (and other readers) will be at Susan Hayden's popular Library Girl series in Santa Monica. She will also be reading an original monologue, *How I Lost My Public Access Virginity To A Fabulous Flying Russian*, at Sit 'N Spin on March 17 at the Comedy Central Stage in Hollywood.

Looseleaf is, perhaps, most excited about the staged performance of *Isn't It Rich?*, with three actresses, a musician and, no surprise here, a choreographic element, in this case, Jasmine Albuquerque of the dance trio, WIFE. The actors will be in their 20's, 40's and well, an older actor, respectively. Looseleaf is currently looking at possible venues, including one of my favorites, the Bootleg Theater, and has been told by a number of folks that *Isn't It Rich?* could become a kind of *Vagina Monologues* for the 21st century.

"As much as I like reading my own work – which isn't that much," said Looseleaf, who once produced staged readings of her second tome, *Whorehouse of the Mind: A Novel of Sex, Drugs and the Space Program*, with different actors reading different chapters each week (and yes, I was one of those performers), "it's a thrill to have real actors assuming the voice of this character that I would have to say is wild, self-mocking, deep, sad, funny and, yes, still relevant."

Painter/writer/actor Mary Woronov has described Looseleaf as, "a tall, thin, female Bukowski with good skin who is bent on bedding all in her cultural path," adding, "*Isn't It Rich?* is her confession."

The question people have for Looseleaf, is it?

And while she won't say definitively whether or not the book is autobiographical, Looseleaf continues to be a truth-teller in journalism. In a recent critique for Toronto-based *Fjord Review*, the self-anointed "Deadline Queen" likened American Ballet Theatre's production of *The Sleeping Beauty* to an episode of *Hoarders*, one that "might best be experienced after downing a couple of

NoDoz.”

As a friend for many years, I can honestly say that Victoria Looseleaf could very well be the human equivalent of NoDoz, but a lot prettier. Joking aside, she’s a comet, a force to be reckoned with. After receiving a Lester Horton Award for Furthering the Visibility of Dance in 2006, Looseleaf began filing datelines from countries ranging from Abu Dhabi, Argentina, Greece, Spain, Cuba and France, to Italy, Poland, Israel, Austria, Holland and Germany.

Ah, well, with Looseleaf, who considers herself a “major minor celebrity,” anything’s possible, which is why producer/actor Kenneth Hughes is producing a documentary on Looseleaf, her catalytic career and her erstwhile cable show.

And these days – when she’s not going to and writing about dance performances, symphonies, operas, theater or art, or plugging her book – she’s working on the sequel to *Isn’t It Rich?*

As she herself likes to say, “Sometimes I feel like I’m living my life on Tesla’s Insane Monde. I go from 0 to 70 in less than three seconds.” Looseleaf paused for a beat before adding, “Doesn’t everybody?”

*Photo of Victoria Looseleaf by Mark Hanauer.*

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