

SO YOU THINK YOU CAN ROAST!?

BY BARRY DOUGHERTY

OK, I'm about to "blog!" It's all the rage from presidential hopefuls to burnt out tween stars so what's to stop me from just tossing out random thoughts and heartfelt commentaries? Or, I could just stick to the topic of the Friars contest, So You Think You Can Roast!? (SYTYCR).



Friars Becky Donohue, Reese Waters, Bryan Kennedy, John Pizzi, Dan Shaki, Geno Bisconte, Sam Morril, Christina Galston, Prior Stewie Stone

What's this got to do with blogging? I will tell you—SYTYCR has its very own website: www.friarsroast.com. A very kinky concept for our 105-year institution. The premise of SYTYCR is to find the world's next roast master among new comedians and even among the general public. The winner had the opportunity of a lifetime—roasting Friar Matt Lauer.

Produced by Friars Mark Krantz and Rick Newman SYTYCR kept the Friars laughing all summer long through a variety of mini-roasts geared toward testing the roasting mettle of the contestants. Eighteen funny people were chosen among countless comedians at auditions held at both Gotham and Carolines comedy clubs, in Manhattan. Some were very funny—others, not so much. You can view some of these auditions on the website along with a host of other fun videos, roast clips, and yes, blogs!

A nineteenth "wild card" contestant could also be chosen from those who submitted a video to the SYTYCR website—another reason to check it out—as well as from the auditions at Carolines. Friar Christina Galston was the standout and was able to join the other more seasoned-yet-not-that-seasoned roasters in the contest. Talk about kismet—she's the receptionist at Carolines and decided after the last person auditioned to try her own hand at doing what she'd seen countless pros doing—perform standup. She killed with an impromptu roast of Christine Aguilera singing "rock-a-bye baby" to her newborn.

At the auditions Friars Michele Balan, Richard Belzer, Scott Blakeman, Eddie Brill, Cory Kahaney, Jeff Pirrami, Frank Santopadre, and Alan Zweibel took turns judging the contestants. They spoke their minds with comments such as Belzer's, "You get points for the suit although who ironed it, Captain Hook?" to Zweibel's, "A Lincoln Douglas reference, that's really torn out of the headlines. Some of the Friars were probably there at the Lincoln Douglas debate" to Cory Kahaney's comment when a pretty blond complained about America's top model, "When you look like you and you're saying Tyra Banks has a fat ass, I'm like, fuck her! That's where my mind is going."

The nineteen contestants were broken up into three groups and through a series of in-house roasts were whittled down to a final six. The first Guest of Honor was Friar Vincent Pastore—*The Sopranos'* Big Pussy with Friar Judy Gold as Roastmaster. Judy summed up the contest—and set the tone—with her flawless roasting skills, "These people have to roast you to see if they can roast a real celebrity. Look Vinny, they roast you, Big Pussy and then they can roast Matt Lauer who really is a big pussy!"

Beforehand, Vincent said of the whacking, "Ever since the days of Dean Martin and the early roasts at the Friars Club, I have always wanted to be a part of the party. I am ready for

whatever my roasters fish out." Funny he should mention Dean Martin seeing as his daughter Deana was one of the celebrity judges and roasters—not sure if he still feels warm and fuzzy toward the Martins.

Peppered throughout these events were some real roasters who acted as judges and also jumped in with their own laughs: Friars Pat Cooper, Tom Cotter, Tony Darrow, Jim David, Steve Maglio, Maureen Langan, Dean Freddie Roman, Gilbert Gottfried, Drew Nieparent, Rory Rosegarten, Stewie Stone, and Rich Vos.

The contestants handled the roast like pros: "I say he can act better than DeNiro, better than Pacino. The proof is in the pudding: they always ask him to play the rat and he's the size of a fucking elephant!" — Friar John "Goumba Johnny" Sialiano.

"This guy has had more straight to video releases than Osama Bin Laden" — Friar Rich Francese.

"Listen, I was on the radio show with you fucking idiots. The fucking ten of you, all you hear is 'eh, oh, eh, oh,' I thought I was on the wheel of fortune" — Friar Mike DeStefano



Friar John "Goumba Johnny" Sialiano jokes his way toward winning SYTYCR at Friar Vincent Pastore's Roast

"I am impressed how you've taken your role on one the most popular TV shows in history and parlayed that into absolutely nothing" — Friar Mike Morse

The second guest of honor on the chopping block was *Star Trek's* Mr. Sulu—Friar George Takei—who said, "Being roasted by the Friars is the equivalent of being knighted by the Queen of England. I'll be beaming like Scotty never had me beaming." Spoken like a true Starship maiden!

Ugly Betty's Friar Alec Mapa was the Roastmaster and put this question to the audience, "Why the hell is the Friars Club honoring George Takei? Does the Friars Club have a long-standing tradition of honoring bit players from the 60s? Who are you honoring next week? Anyone who played a hooker on *Hawaii Five-0*? Hop Sing from *Bonanza*?" The roasters at Takei's roast showed him no mercy and he loved every minute of it: "George, you are talented, I'll give you that. That crisp, manly voice that makes you sound like the gay maitre d' at a fancy sushi place. That beautiful smile, that makes you look like the gay maitre d' at a fancy sushi place" — Friar Paul "Fitzy" Fitzgerald.

"You should know that we've been watching you on *Star Trek*...ever since they told us we'd be roasting you" — Friars Todd and Adam Stone (yes, they talk in unison!)

"At the beginning of the war your family was actually put in one of those awful internment camps. It's a shame you weren't old enough to enlist, because then the war would have been cancelled in three years like everything else you've been a part of" — Friar Geno Bisconte

"What's the difference between George Takei and sushi? One's a spicy Japanese dish that makes you want to throw up and the other is raw fish" — Friar Nasry Malak.

Who better than Omarosa to choose as the third target—I mean, guest of honor. The contestants on this dais were all headed for the Board

Room. "What an honor to be recognized by the prestigious Friars Club. If you want to be a beacon of light—you gotta be able to take the heat," noted *The Apprentice* diva. There were a lot of firings after this one as only two contestants would go on to the finals. Comedian Paul Mooney helmed the proceedings although he's probably still asking himself why?

Wildcard winner/receptionist Friar Christina Galston roasted Omarosa with: "I just got the spelling of your name right. For a while I thought I was coming to roast Obama."

"I'd like to commend the Club for finding the one person even other black people won't defend" — Friar Reese Waters.

"I guess they roasted Vincent Pastore in the first one because he's known as the "Big Pussy" from *The Sopranos*, which is cool because Omarosa is known as the big c--t from *The Apprentice*" — Friar Esther Ku.

"Omarosa is living proof of just how hard it is to get ahead as a black man in America" — Friar Becky Donohue.

The finals took place with Howard Stern Producer, Friar Gary Dell'Abate in the hot seat. "I've been roasted on the Howard Stern Show for twenty-five years so everybody should bring their 'A' game," said Dell'Abate before the roast. Comedian Jim Florentine was the Roastmaster, "People used to tease you that you look like the guy from Hall & Oats. Now you look like something in a stable that actually eats oats."

The six finalists were chosen by how funny they performed at each of the three previous roasts. Friars Geno Bisconte, Paul "Fitzy" Fitzgerald, Christina Galston, Mike Morse, John "Goumba Johnny" Sialiano, and Reese Waters went for the gold.

"Gary's teeth are so big every time he eats black licorice, Stevie Wonder appears out of nowhere and tries to play his mouth" — Friar Paul "Fitzy" Fitzgerald.

"Jesus loves you. He has to do it with his eyes closed but he loves you nonetheless" — Friar Christina Galston.

"The last time I teased something that looked like Gary it threw its own shit at me" — Friar Mike Morse.

And the winner is—John Sialiano! "Your friends call you Gary. Your fans call you Baba Booeey. Darwin calls you evidence," is one of the jokes that helped slide Sialiano into the winners circle and win the opportunity to roast Friar Matt Lauer at his roast at the Hilton Hotel a few weeks later.



Friar Esther Ku roasting Woody Allen during her audition

SYTYCR scored high with the Friars and with the comics, some of whom recently got to know what the Friars Club is all about. It's fun to see them roaming the halls of the Monastery just like the comics gone by in whose footsteps they tread.

I'm not sure how one ends a blog—"that's all folks" seems too corny; "in closing" seems too stuffy—I suppose in homage to Pastore I could give it a *Sopranos* ending and just.....

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Friar George Takei gets the last laugh



Gotham Audition judges Friar Richard Belzer, Gotham owner Chris Mazzili, Friar Alan Zweibel



Friars Vincent Pastore, Judy Gold



The oh so feared Friar judges: Jim David, Cory Kahaney, Dick Capri



Takei Roastmaster Friar Alec Mapa can't understand why the Friars chose Mr. Sulu to roast



Friar Gary Dell'Abate accepts his SYTYCR Award from Roastmaster Jim Florentine



Friar Dave Konig roasting the Friars at the Gotham auditions



Roastmaster Paul Mooney gets off a few good shots at Friar Omarosa



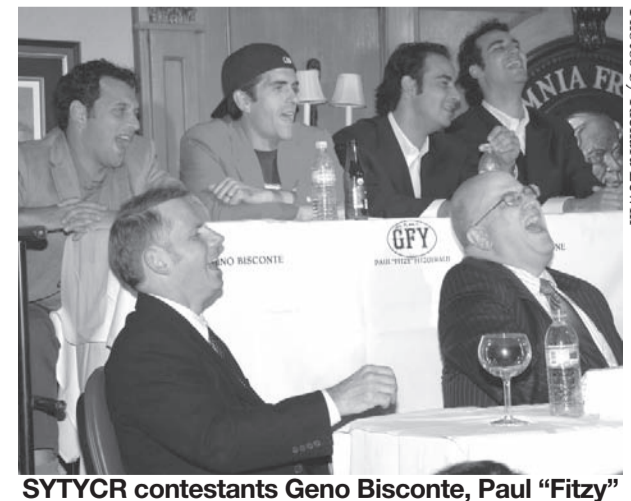
Friar Maureen Langan speaks her mind judging contestants at Omarosa's Roast along with Friar Barry Weintraub



Friar Pat Cooper lets Friar Vincent Pastore have it, "He can't do anything and we're roasting him in the basement!"



Friars Rick Newman, George Takei, Mark Krantz and Brad Altman beaming after George's Roast-whew!



SYTYCR contestants Geno Bisconte, Paul "Fitzzy" Fitzgerald and Todd and Adam Stone along with guest roasters Friar Tom Cotter and Peter David laugh at Friar George Takei's expense

Photos by Richard Lewin