



Our Hen House

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Interviews with Myq Kaplan and Ella Nemcova

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of interviews with **MYQ KAPLAN** and **ELLA NEMCOVA** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 226.*

JASMIN: I can't believe how lucky we were to have Myq Kaplan who might be the funniest vegan -- is that an oxymoron? -- in the world on our very first show. What a guy. Prepare to laugh.

Myq, you are so wonderful. Welcome to Our Hen House.

MYQ: Thank you for having me and loving it.

JASMIN: I love it, and thank you for making us laugh! We actually told our stories before about how we kind of got turned onto animal issues. What's yours?

MYQ: Oh. I was in high school and I remember thinking that it would be great to not eat animals, like if I could live life without doing it. But then I was also like, but I only eat them, so oh well. I guess I can't live the way I want to. I mean, it was just like, eight burgers. Like, most people are just like...

JASMIN: I totally did that too.

MYQ: Yeah. You're like, "oh, it'd be great. Uh, I can't. Too bad. I don't know what I'm doing." But then I got to college, and there was a few more options available. Like, there was a vegetarian station and I learned about different kinds of foods that existed, and I was just like, "oh maybe I can. Maybe I don't have to use this voice anymore. Maybe I can use *this--*" No. When you stop eating meat, your voice goes a little higher pitched.

JASMIN: Okay. No, that's true, I guess, maybe. But it's so interesting to me that you're bringing these issues into your comedy because you're reaching the mainstream. You're reaching people who have maybe never thought about this. So are you like only doing vegan humor?

MYQ: Yes. All of my humor does not harm any animals. I definitely talk about other things, like anything that happens in my life or in the world, anything that I see or think about. But obviously eating is something that I do on a daily basis. And so it's something that I think about, and obviously it's a different -- I eat differently and I live differently in this way and some other ways than a lot of people. So it's something that I talk about from a perspective that people might be unfamiliar with or might judge, and especially with the idea of vegans as this humorless lot lording our superiority over people.

JASMIN: Try being a vegan lesbian.

MYQ: Oh, sure. I'd love to!

JASMIN: But you know, it's amazing.

MYQ: Is that possible? Where do I sign up?

JASMIN: Yeah, we'll go over that during our segment.

MYQ: I love women, so I'm all.

MARIANN: Yeah, you'd fit right in.

MYQ: I've got a couple of the prerequisites covered. People do conflate gay and vegan issues a lot, but I do like to be able to bring -- I just talk about what I think is funny and what I think is reasonable. And if people can then say, "oh I never thought about it like that. Maybe I'll do it too," that's not the number one reason that I want to do comedy, but if I can demonstrate that vegans, number one, you don't have to be an annoying jerk. You know, I can be like, I get it. I get that there are the loud, obnoxious vegans that, not -- you know, I think they're doing great work other than giving that -- because there are so many vegans out there, these stealth vegans, that are living life fine that aren't getting in your face. People are like, "every vegan I know tells me they're a vegan within seconds." Well that's only the ones that tell you. There's probably dozens, hundreds, thousands of others that you're like, "well those are not vegans." Well, they're the "I'm a vegan, I'm just not telling you." "You just told me!" Now you just got me.

JASMIN: It's true. Oh, my gosh.

MARIANN: So how do you know something's gonna work, especially when it's about one of these touchy issues, like that people might feel a little defensive about, like being vegan?

JASMIN: Are you implying that people feel defensive about veganism?

MYQ: "What are you talking about? You're taking away my meat! Don't take away my meat." I don't. Number one, I don't know what's gonna work. I just know what I think is funny. And there's varying stages of trying out material. Like, when you start out, you go to open mics. And at every stage, you always have to be willing to risk rejection and fail. And for me, high school was horrible, so anything that happens in comedy is nothing. So what's the worst that happens, a room full of people hates me? That happened every day, but it was the same people. Like, at least, an audience doesn't like you, you're like, "I'm not gonna hang out with you guys anymore." But with school, it was like, every day.

JASMIN: Yeah, well, I had that same experience, I'm just saying. But I have to say that one of the most fascinating things that has happened to you recently, according to me, is that you had some of your jokes stolen by a butcher shop?!

MYQ: It was a weird thing. This one joke that I told on Conan, which was about how, sort of the idea that vegans are perceived as weak because, look, but that I would fight anybody, basically in 50 years when I'm still alive and they're not probably because the statistic I read said that vegetarians live an average of 7 years longer than non-vegetarians. Vegans live

up to 15 years longer because we're not invited anywhere fun or dangerous. We're just sitting at home.

MARIANN: It's so funny when you say it.

MYQ: I appreciate it.

JASMIN: We actually have an image of this. What happened?

MYQ: So this image popped up online and sort of went viral. Like, as of my last checking, over 700,000 people had seen it, probably more. And so it's just -- my name wasn't on it, but friends of mine and fans knew that it was my joke, and they were like, "oh hey, isn't this your joke?" And I just -- initially this was around Christmastime. I was like, oh yeah, that's my joke I guess, not a big -- Like, a few years ago, before the internet was the powerhouse that it is, this wouldn't have happened. I would never have found out about it. It would have been fine. They would have just done it and gotten away with it! Like, not that they're -- I don't think this is making anybody necessarily eat more meat. It's not even so much a vegan issue as an art ethics issue.

MARIANN: Absolutely.

MYQ: Like, as far as, can they do this? I mean, certainly this sort of thing happens all the time. Things go on the internet. Memes are created. And who owns what? And certainly some lawyers that I've -- I mean, like, I didn't consult lawyers, like, "what can we do?" But I just went on my website and I put up, "hey, I wrote a joke and now butchers took it. And sort of, when it's coming from a vegan perspective out of like, "hey guys, we can be kinda sad, right?" it has a different set of context than if a butcher shop's like, "hey guys, vegans are sad. Come eat our meat. You don't want to be a sad vegan." And to their credit, when I put it up there and then my response sort of went around a little bit and a lot of people were really supportive. Like, some people were like, "Well, suck it up, pussy!" And then a lot of other people were like, oh...

MARIANN: Really? People were saying nasty things on the internet?

MYQ: And then yeah, but there were a lot of people that were supportive too. They were like, "we're on your side, pussy!" You know, everybody agreed on that. But definitely a lot of people felt -- people on the internet feel strongly in every direction, but most of the voices that you hear are negative. But there was a ton of support, and in fact the butcher shop themselves did apologize and sort of added my name, not to the -- I mean, eventually this thing went crazy, and so they couldn't track down every person who had seen -- "And I want you to make 700,000 phone calls please, and let them know." But they apologized to me. They sent me an email, and they said, "This is just a thing we do. We just put jokes on our sign, and I liked the joke, so..." But they didn't understand at the time that it would come across -- like, people were seeing this thing and being like, "look at that, take that vegans! Vegans can't take a joke!" And I'm like, well a butcher shop *can* take a joke and did take a joke, so...

JASMIN: Apparently, yeah.

MYQ: Give me my joke back!

MARIANN: Well, that's good. It's unfortunate that they're still selling the meat, but at least they stepped up to the plate on the joke front.

MYQ: Yeah. To be fair, I do not think that they're selling necessarily more meat than they would.

MARIANN: I doubt it.

MYQ: But yeah, I would rather them not do it with my joke.

MARIANN: So you must get asked a lot of questions about being vegan 'cause you're going out there being clear about the fact that you are. You're out there in a world where a lot of people aren't. And so what are some of the questions that you get asked, and how do you respond?

MYQ: Well, it's interesting timing that you asked me this now. I actually just wrote a thing for thrillist.com that was basically eight or nine or ten questions that vegans or vegetarians get asked and my answers, which are generally: "Where do you get your protein?" and like "Where do you get your manners?"

JASMIN: Seriously!

MYQ: I mean, or basically, aside from the fact that there are tons of vegetables and beans, legumes, nuts, and things that do have protein, obviously you want to be careful about getting the vitamins that you have to. But I think that most vegans and vegetarians that I know are more likely to be conscious and healthier of getting those, whereas the person that's asking me this is like, you've never heard of vegetables? Like, where do you get your non-protein? Like, are you only eating a meat?

JASMIN: Yeah, it's a really good point. And I think a lot of what you're talking about, including the butcher shop, brings up rising anxieties. That's actually the name of a segment on our podcast because we root around in the garbage that's out there and we think that this is just them feeling anxious. Like, something's going on here.

MYQ: Oh yeah. And people always assume that -- I mean, everybody doesn't have to be the exact same way. Like, I'm not saying that everybody has to be vegan. I'm just saying that, know that factory farming is a thing and that it's a bad thing and that it doesn't have to be a thing. Animals used to -- in some places, are treated kindly, even in the -- I'm saying, if somebody's like, "I will never be a vegan, but I would absolutely like animals to be suffering-free," then I'm for that person doing everything that they can. Like, it doesn't have to be like, oh if you can't do everything, then you have to do nothing.

MARIANN: Well, I think that people just don't hear when you say that sort of thing. So it's good for people to feel that they have choices and options. Everybody wants that.

MYQ: Yeah, and some people -- you know, meat free Mondays or vegan up to 6 pm or after 6 pm or whatever. As long as you can do -- "I could never give up cheese!" Well, then, give it up one day a week. Give it a couple days. There's so many different things that can be done as opposed to nothing. Some people have -- obviously there's cultural differences that make people -- like, people who are like, "oh you don't know what you're missing, I could never do without..." I'm like, I kinda do know. For 20 years I did eat meat, so *you* don't know

what you're -- *you* should try 20 years of not eating meat, and then we'll be fair. We'll be even.

JASMIN: So I hear that you have a Netflix special coming up. I want to hear about this.

MYQ: Yeah. I recorded it last year in Boston. It's an hour special coming out in May. I think May 15 is when it starts being available, and then May 20 you can download it on iTunes as well, just the audio. But the video, it's called *Small, Dork, and Handsome*.

JASMIN: That's amazing that you got cast for that.

MYQ: Oh yeah.

JASMIN: I mean it's just like, yeah.

MYQ: It was kinda perfect. And in fact the joke that I told on Conan that the butcher shop put on their window or their sign, that joke is on there. And then in the audio download, there's gonna be a bonus track, me telling a story about a friend of mine who responded to it, and this sort of weird kind of amazing story that resulted from it that I'm not glad that it happened. Given that it happened, I'm glad that I had this experience and this story arise. So watch it on Netflix and/or buy it, download it. Or just send me money. Like, I'm happy, whatever you want to do. Like, live your lives.

JASMIN: Live your lives! I know that you live your life here in Brooklyn, New York. Do you have any go-to restaurants that you particularly love?

MYQ: Right near here is one of my favorites, MOB. I love MOB.

JASMIN: Oh yeah!

MARIANN: We love it.

MYQ: Later tonight, I'm going out with my girlfriend for a birthday week dinner at Pure Food and Wine.

MARIANN: Happy birthday!

MYQ: Thank you from her. And I guess my favorites are like the Blossoms mainly, their little enterprise.

JASMIN: Yeah. I love the Blossoms too. There's so much vegan food everywhere, it's really --

MYQ: Yeah, it's hard to -- the V Spot, 'sNice, the Candles, Caravan of Dreams, Beyond Sushi, Soy and Sake, where we last saw each other.

JASMIN: Right! That's right, we ran into each other there. I just want to know, Myq. I find it interesting, when I watch stand-up, a lot of people are very self-deprecating, and yet there's people like you who make you think. Is that something that you --

MYQ: Oh, not me. I never make people think. Please.

JASMIN: I mean, you're not going up there and being like -- even though the name of your special is *Small, Dork, and Handsome*, you're not going up there and just poking fun at yourself. You're causing people to think outside of their comfort zones a little bit. I think this is a very interesting, unique kind of change making. Is that how you see it a little?

MYQ: I mean, I definitely -- sometimes I do reach people by -- I feel like vegans are deprecated certainly enough, and I'm sort of laughingly playing along. Like, whenever I'm coming at a topic that is not the mainstream, whether it's relationship structure or sexuality or belief in -- religious belief in God or what have you, or veganism, diet, lifestyle, I always understand -- I get an idea of where most people are. And I don't compromise where I am, but I used to -- on my first album, *Vegan Mind Meld*, I think this joke is on there where, when I introduce it, I said, "I'm a vegetarian. Are there any other douchebags here?" And that sort of hopefully lets people know I understand -- I know what people think when people hear "vegetarian," "vegan," "lesbian," "feminist," "activist," whatever it is. Like, all these things that are -- the rational definition of them -- like, with feminism, there's been a study that said -- basically the same thing happened with Obamacare versus the Affordable Care Act, that people are for the Affordable Care Act more than they're for Obamacare even though they're the exact same thing. People are for the equality of women, but they're not for being called feminists, even though that's what a feminist is. And so the same way -- maybe I should get rid of -- I'm not a vegan anymore. I eat all the same foods as vegans do, but I'm not a vegan. You don't want to be a vegan.

JASMIN: There are people like that.

MARIANN: So do you get a lot of pushback from people, and do you find that things are shifting at all? We just seem to think that people are becoming more aware of what's going on with animals and more sympathetic to people doing something about it. You're really out there confronting people with these issues. Have you seen any shifts?

MYQ: Definitely the number of vegan restaurants that exist in places that you wouldn't expect them. Usually one of the questions that I always get asked is, "how do you eat on the road? I'm just in New York City or LA." But tons of college towns have a burgeoning vegetarian community. And every major city has -- if you google vegan and something, and the town name, something will come up. Most places know what a vegan is at least. They know they don't like them, but they're like, "oh, I know what part of town you have to go to to get this food. I know what co-op, I know what restaurants have it written on it." So there's definitely more and more places compared to when I started doing comedy.

MARIANN: Yeah, absolutely.

JASMIN: It's so exciting. It's an exciting time to be involved. And you can learn more about Myq and stay up to speed on his happenings at myqkaplan.com. And thank you so much for joining us, Myq.

MYQ: Thank you for having me.

JASMIN: Following Myq, we had the fabulous Ella Nemcova, who is the mastermind behind Faux Gras. And it breaks my heart that you can't actually taste what we were having in the studio that day. But you can buy it, and I think that Ella is truly changing the world through lentils. So this was Ella Nemcova, also on Episode 1.

I am so excited that we not only have Ella right here in the studio, which is in Paris suddenly, but we're going to try some of the pate that we just saw. And it's made right here in Brooklyn by the way, by the Regal Vegan.

MARIANN: The Parisian part of Brooklyn.

JASMIN: The Parisian part of Brooklyn. It's new to us too. But the Regal Vegan is here to talk all about it. Welcome, Ella.

ELLA: Thank you.

JASMIN: Ah. What did you bring for us today?

ELLA: Well, I brought a whole basket of treats. Ta-da!

JASMIN: Look at that.

MARIANN: I'm so excited.

ELLA: We've got our famous Faux Gras, our walnut lentil caramelized onion pate. We've got our Basilicotta. This is our basil cashew cheese, ricotta-style, and our brand new, just launching product, our Superfood Pesto.

JASMIN: That's incredible. What's super about it?

ELLA: Well...

JASMIN: I just love this food. It's like not cruel, and it's so good. But what is so super about the pesto?

ELLA: The most exciting thing about this pesto is I was able to get a whole bunch of kale into every one of these containers.

MARIANN: Kale!

ELLA: Kale. All hail kale, people! Not to mention parsley and basil and walnuts and sunflower seeds, and all kinds of really nice extra virgin olive oil from California state that makes beautiful pure olive oil 'cause we really care about ingredients, so...

MARIANN: That is amazing. One of the great things that people just don't realize about vegan food is that you can be so decadent, and yet still be so healthy at the same time.

ELLA: Well, decadence is a really big part of what Regal Vegan brings to the table, because I think, just because you're vegan, it doesn't mean you have to eat straw and grass and a little bit of the carrots that you stole from your rabbit cage.

JASMIN: Right, well, there's those too.

MARIANN: Those are good.

MYQ: I love straw.

JASMIN: Yeah, actually, Myq, have you tried this before?

MYQ: I have had the Faux Gras from right here at the co-op.

JASMIN: Oh, okay, cool. But have you had the pesto or the -- what is this called, Ella?

ELLA: Basilicotta.

JASMIN: Basilicotta?

MARIANN: Basilicotta!

ELLA: Basilicotta!

MYQ: I have not had the Basilicotta!

JASMIN: I'm sure it's disgusting. Why don't you just --

MYQ: I'd love to.

MARIANN: We're doing the rest of the show in Italian.

JASMIN: Yeah. Well...

MYQ: Ahh! Can I just use this?

ELLA: Go for it!

MYQ: Mm. Mm!

JASMIN: Okay. He likes it.

MYQ: I do.

JASMIN: And Ella, you've traveled all over the world, as is sort of evident from your food here. What would you say to people who say, "I just really love this particular food that is very rich for my culture that is based in animal products"? What would you say?

ELLA: Well, I can tell you that Faux Gras is very much based on a product I grew up with here in Brooklyn, which is chopped liver, this pate, foie gras kind of. There are so many foods out there to experiment with today and so many things that make up for the dairy, that make up for the meaty, that make up for the nutty, that make up for the crunchy, that all you need to do is reach for the internet to find out what those substitutions are.

JASMIN: Or reach for the Faux Gras, as it were.

MARIANN: You mentioned foie gras. And one of the amazing things about your product is that it can help people give up that horrible product. And I think people don't even realize, not all pate is foie gras. All pate has some cruelty in it, but foie gras is just one of the cruelest foods there is. They actually force feed the ducks by sticking metal pipes down their throats and pouring literally pounds of food into their stomachs until their liver becomes diseased, and then they kill them and they sell the liver. It's just awful. And you actually participated in a lawsuit, I understand, against a foie gras producer.

ELLA: I did. Hudson Valley Foie Gras was advertising themselves as the "humane choice."

MARIANN: Come on! This is the humane choice.

JASMIN: No kidding.

MYQ: The nicest Nazi.

ELLA: Anybody who knows foie gras knows that there's no way that it can be humane. And Faux Gras is really the only humane foie gras. So we went to court with the help of the Animal Legal Defense Fund to get them to take down their advertising. Like, stop ruining the word "humane."

JASMIN: Yeah, absolutely. Like you're saying, this is truly what "humane" means. And there is a cruelty-free alternative to every kind of food out there. As you were saying, Myq, before, even if you're not like, "I don't want to be a vegan lesbian like that woman with the tattoos."

MARIANN: Why not? Who wouldn't want to be you?

JASMIN: Why not? Myq wants to be me. But in addition to that, you can go vegan three days a week to start. Is that kind of --

MYQ: Give it a shot.

JASMIN: Give it a shot.

MARIANN: That's why those restaurants are out there all across the country. It's not just vegans going to them. It's everybody going to them having some vegan food.

JASMIN: By the way, this Superfood Pesto is absolutely outstanding. Where can people find out where they could get your products?

ELLA: Well, if you go on our website, regalvegan.com, there's a store locator.

MARIANN: It's amazing!

ELLA: You can find all the stores in your hood where you can find these products. They're available at a bunch of Whole Foods, at a bunch of Union Markets, the Park Slope Food Coop. What what?

MYQ: What what.

MARIANN: So I understand you're also working on a cookbook. Is that what I hear?

JASMIN: No way.

ELLA: Yeah. I'm working on a cookbook! It's hard to launch 150 things all at the same time, so...

MARIANN: What the hell?

ELLA: A cookbook was my way of getting these recipes out to people who have a cultural background that they feel is important to them, that they feel close to and they want to honor. And you know what? I want to honor foods too. I want to honor cassoulet. We are in Paris, after all.

JASMIN: We are in Paris. I was going to do this whole thing in Paris, but that would be awful. The only thing I know how to say in French is “Me llamo Jasmin.” So...

MARIANN: Oh dear.

JASMIN: Yeah, that’s bad.

ELLA: That’s Spanish, but...

JASMIN: That’s Spanish. Whatever.

MYQ: Basilicotta!

MARIANN: Basilicotta!

JASMIN: So Ella, do you think people are often surprised when they taste this that this is so rich and decadent? ‘Cause this is absolutely outstanding.

ELLA: One of the most common reactions I have when people try the Faux Gras is, “oh my God, that’s amazing! I can’t believe it’s vegan!” And today at Smorgasburg Market, where we have a booth every weekend, somebody said, a French woman, mind you, a real French woman, not like you.

JASMIN: I am French!

MYQ: Not faux French.

ELLA: She said, “Incroyable!” She was shocked at how good it is because she was expecting, uh-oh, this is gonna be some weird vegan thing.

MYQ: I must try ‘cause I’m French.

JASMIN: Yeah, but --

MYQ: But she thought it was incroyable.

MARIANN: The French are pretty stern about their food, so that’s high praise.

ELLA: Well, they really feel that it’s their cultural right to have foie gras and all their *fromage*.

MARIANN: I think that you point out just a really good point. And one of the things that keeps people from thinking about going vegan is this idea that they’ll have to give up foods that are really an important part of their heritage. And I love being in Brooklyn where there are so many different heritages and finding these foods that can substitute for and carry on that heritage, not deny it. And that’s exactly the theme that you’re working on is that.

ELLA: Yeah. That is exactly the theme I’m working off of. Don’t give up your cultural heritage! Just give up a little bit of that animal product that’s in there.

JASMIN: But we need to evolve. We all evolve anyway, so yeah, let’s see some more of this.

MYQ: If you want, give up your cultural heritage. I don’t care.

JASMIN: Totally. I just am --

ELLA: There are so many solutions these days. And Faux Gras, Basilicotta, and our new Superfood Pesto, they're really attempts to bridge the gap for people. Like, you want to have something decadent and hearty. It doesn't have to be only an animal product. You can have decadent, hearty, rich, creamy, savory foods that are also vegan. And that's what we at Regal Vegan really want to bring to the table.

JASMIN: You are bringing it to the table, literally. And thank you for bringing us these amazing treats today, Ella.