**Finding the Funny**

by Remy Reya

Morgan Carmen is no stranger to the absurd. Two years into her undergraduate degree in public policy, she’s found herself immersed in a world of comedy writing and improvisation. She lives in a duality that few can claim to inhabit, writing research papers by day and sketches by night – and she’s found her element.

Theater wasn’t a clear calling by any means. Reminiscing on a third-grade summer theater performance, she noted her grandmother’s relief to know “what she’s *not* going to be doing for the rest of her life”; and coming to Princeton, she was reluctant to deviate from the political extracurriculars that dominated her high school experience.

But Carmen was quickly swept up into the arts in her first year on campus. A friend of hers, Asher Muldoon, pushed her to audition for Quipfire! (an improv comedy group) and Triangle Club (a musical comedy show). He was thrilled when she was accepted to and joined both groups. “I think she was always meant to be in that world,” Muldoon said. “Her sense of humor is so personal to her, and that individuality makes her an asset to any group she is a part of.”

Carmen remembers being frightened at every meeting from the start. “It took me a long time to be comfortable enough to start learning how to write. Like, I couldn’t take a risk, and so none of my stuff was really funny because I just couldn’t produce,” she said. But as time passed, she began to find her voice. She wrote a sketch for Triangle about “werewomen” – women who transformed into werewolves during the full moon every month but couldn’t convince a self-proclaimed feminist man that they weren’t just on their periods, and that they would actually kill him if he didn’t leave the area. Her writing collaborator and improv partner, Sophie Evans, said that it brought down the house when it was performed. More recently, Carmen proposed a song about an imagined Barbie Dreamhouse were women could pursue their dreams of being doctors and lawyers because they couldn’t do so in the real world.

“A lot of what’s absurd in the place that we live has to do with inequality,” she said. “But regardless of what the absurdity is, there’s great humor in it. And when there’s great humor in it, there’s a really novel way to get people to notice it.” In Morgan’s eyes, an intellectual conversation just won’t get you to the same place as a stand-up routine, because laughter makes people more receptive to the ridiculousness in the world.

The Barbie Dreamhouse piece was ultimately rejected from the show – and Carmen saw it coming. But taking up the challenge of advocating for her own work has come with a willingness to take risks in her comedy. And others on campus have noticed this change. Muldoon feels that Carmen’s deepened understanding of comedic structure has allowed her to “break the mold more and more.” And Evans believes that she’s started to be “truer to herself” in her writing.

Just in the past year, Carmen’s investment in writing has swept her into even more uncharted territory – the world of journalism. She sees comedy and journalism as fundamentally oriented towards the same goal: “exposing the truth and making the public aware of what’s happening.” And she values that pursuit in her life, especially as it reflects her development.

“It’s fun to see yourself grow,” she said, “and to see yourself become a little less fearful.”