

LEA DELARIA

b. May 23, 1958

COMEDIAN & ACTOR

A bawdy comedian and award-winning actor and singer, she proudly flaunts her lesbian identity.

“I’m a big butch dyke with a smile on my face.”

Lea DeLaria is an award-winning actor, a jazz singer and the first openly gay comedian to appear on American television. As an actor, she is most famous for her role as Carrie “Big Boo” Black, a lesbian inmate and main character in the hit Netflix series “Orange is the New Black.”

The daughter of Italian American parents, DeLaria was born in Belleville, Illinois, and attended St. Mary’s Elementary School. Her father was a jazz pianist.

A self-described “butch dyke lesbian,” DeLaria began her show-business career in the early 1980s as a stand-up comedian in San Francisco’s Mission District, telling raunchy jokes about her sexuality and Catholic upbringing. Hers was the first openly lesbian act in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She is credited with the widely known “U-Haul” joke about lesbians’ propensity for moving in together right after meeting.

DeLaria also turned her talents to musical theater. In 1986 she directed “Ten Percent Revue,” a show that combined music and sketches about homosexuality. Many of the performances sold out. She also starred in two musical comedies, “Dos Lesbos” (1988) and “Girl Friday: We’re Funny That Way” (1989).

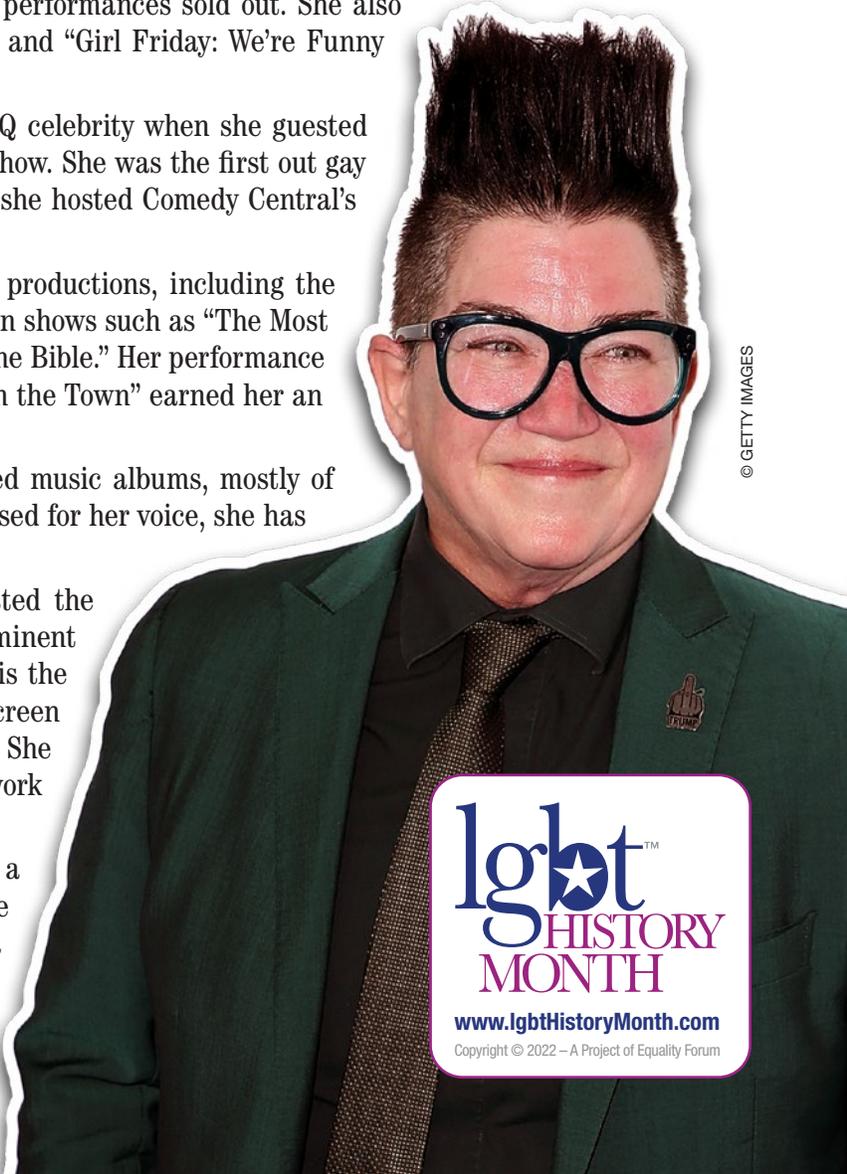
In 1993 DeLaria cemented her reputation as an LGBTQ celebrity when she guested on “The Arsenio Hall Show,” a popular late-night talk show. She was the first out gay comedian to appear on U.S. television. The same year, she hosted Comedy Central’s first all-gay stand-up special, “Out There.”

Throughout the ’90s, DeLaria performed in Broadway productions, including the revival of “The Rocky Horror Show,” and Off Broadway in shows such as “The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told,” billed as “a gay retelling of the Bible.” Her performance in the critically acclaimed Off Broadway production “On the Town” earned her an Obie Award in 1998.

Between comedy and acting, DeLaria has also released music albums, mostly of unique jazz arrangements of popular songs. Widely praised for her voice, she has performed concerts around the world.

DeLaria has guest starred in multiple TV shows, hosted the OBIE Awards and voiced animated characters. Her prominent supporting role in the long-running dramedy “Orange is the New Black,” was created just for her and earned her the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Award for Outstanding Performance. She received the Equality Illinois Freedom Award for her work as an LGBT performer in 2015.

DeLaria was engaged for two years to Chelsea Fairness, a creative director, but the pair separated in 2017. Despite her financial success, DeLaria is said to live simply in a working-class Brooklyn neighborhood.



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