

TV Close-Up: Joan Rivers

by Eirik_Knutzen

With Joan Rivers and her daughter/sidekick Melissa working two hours live interviewing major, major celebrities on the Red Carpet leading up to Hollywood's Kodak Theater before the 79th Annual Academy Awards telecast, anything can happen.

And, of course, it usually does.

Shooting from the hip without the benefit of later video and sound editing, Rivers often manages - however unintentionally - to put a movie star's nose out of joint. Fortunately, only two truly bizarre, horrible events pops into her mind.

JOAN RIVERS - When Joan Rivers hosts the 79th Annual Academy Awards, along with her daughter/sidekick Melissa, just about anything can happen. CNS Photo by Trae Patton.
"One of them was during an interview with Anthony Hopkins and the charming woman at his side," Rivers recalled. "In the middle of it, I said, 'Oh, and this lovely lady is your mother?' She was his wife (at the time). That was a very bad mistake, but all I could do was keep talking. And wanted to kill myself though I didn't do it purposely.

"I was so upset afterward that it ruined the entire night for me; I'm sure I ruined that nice woman's evening, too, probably her entire life - they got divorced shortly thereafter," Rivers said, ruefully.

The second huge gaffe was at the expense (or lack thereof) of Kevin Costner and the woman who is now his wife, Christine Baumgartner.

"When they came on the carpet, she said proudly, 'We're engaged!' and showed me the smallest ring in the history of mankind," Rivers said. "I said to her, 'Is this a joke?' She was so upset ... and he was so angry that he

has never spoken to me since. He eventually got her a bigger ring, but he should be ashamed of himself."

When Rivers and her daughter started the fashion-oriented Red Carpet treatment for E! Entertainment at major show-business awards events 11 years ago, they were all alone as they delivered their signature question, "Who are you wearing?"

As a duo, they also repeat their mantra at the Emmys, Grammys and Golden Globes, wedged between hundreds of international entertainment reporters representing broadcasters from Argentina to Zaire. Many other things have changed on Oscar's rug in recent years, too.

"Each team or member of the world press is now assigned a 'celebrity wrangler' by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences," Rivers said. "They all grab the biggest names they can find and bring them over; sometimes they get into fistfights. Other people from the Academy act as 'mouth police,' meaning they will pull a celebrity away from you if the conversation lasts more than three minutes."

It was a lot more fun in the old days, according to the 73-year-old comedian, TV host, fashion jewelry designer, best-selling author and businesswoman.

"Now viewers tune in for the fashions, absolutely," she said. "They used to watch our show to see who was drunk and who was high. (Some) would get high in their limos, then come down the carpet not knowing where the hell they were. It was fun because you'd just talk, and they'd just laugh."

The main reason why the mother-daughter team is ahead of the curve, Rivers said, is that they are noncompetitive in the dog-eat-dog world of entertainment.

"We have a loving relationship and aren't afraid to say, 'You're wrong,' 'I totally disagree with you.,' or 'Come off it!' Both in love with fashion, we are able to express the views of different generations on the same outfit" Rivers said.

Although the final arbiter of good and bad fashion is self-taught, Rivers believes she is always right.

"Most movie stars have great taste and look beautiful in their Oscars dresses and blend in. But the really bad ones tend to stand out, including Bjork's swan or chicken outfit - which is No. 1 in my Hall of Shame. Lara Flynn Boyle came dressed as a ballerina one year. I could go on ..."

The daughter of Russian immigrants, Rivers was born and raised in Brooklyn. She earned a bachelor's degree (and holds a Phi Beta Kappa key) from New York's Barnard College, where she studied anthropology and English.

Obsessed with making it as a stand-up comedian, Rivers honed her material for more than 10 years in every venue from Greenwich Village cabarets to Borscht Belt hotels. Her comedy career took off after a 1968 appearance on "The Tonight Show" starring Johnny Carson.

She is the widow of British partner-producer Edgar Rosenberg. Today, Rivers is developing a new daily talk show in England and designing the Joan Rivers Classics Collection of costume jewelry on QVC.

But her pride and joy remains her 6-year-old grandson, Cooper, who remains in California with his mother, Melissa. "He's adorable," she said. "He's at that age where they're good and dear, and I just love him so much. I make him call me 'Grandma' ... or 'Nana New Face.' "

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