

The female characters of *The Big Bang Theory* bring in plenty of their own funny on the predominantly male set.



GEEK Goddesses

The two newest stars shine brightly on *The Big Bang Theory*

As the theme song to TV's No. 1 comedy goes, it all started with a big bang. And then in the third season, the writers decided to add a new breed of nerds to the group—this time, bringing in the ladies.

The Big Bang Theory had already rocketed in the ratings when it moved to Thursday nights last fall. Around the same time, the sitcom introduced two brainy new characters, and in just a single season Bernadette Rostenkowski (Melissa Rauch) and Amy Farrah Fowler (Mayim Bialik) have become regular characters and integral parts of the *Big Bang* formula.

"It was wonderful adding Melissa and Mayim," says Jim Parsons, who plays persnickety Ph.D. Sheldon Cooper. "They're strong actors who fit perfectly into the tone of the show. Their characters have opened up new roads for full stories to be formed around them."

For one, Penny (Kaley Cuoco) now has "a circle of girls she can hang out with, so it makes it easier for us to have new storylines," says *Big Bang* executive producer Steven Molaro. "Our little world has grown in a great way, and we're thrilled to have so many new options."

A PITCH-PERFECT AUDITION

Rauch, 31, was booked at first for just a single episode, in which quiet, Catholic microbiologist Bernadette and the Jewish mother-reared aerospace engineer Howard (Simon Helberg) were set up on a blind date. Then, as Molaro explains, "we thought she was so great, we kept finding ways to bring her back."

After studying theater at Marymount Manhattan College, Rauch received acclaim for her one-woman show, *The Miss Education of Jenna Bush*, and moved West. She says the years she spent waiting tables—perfect training to play part-time Cheesecake Factory waitress Bernadette—mean that "not a day goes by that I'm not super grateful" to be on a show she'd already loved as a viewer.

Ironically, Rauch admits, she was never good at science. "I know that every time I have a line that has to do with microbiology, my high school teachers in New Jersey are saying, 'She couldn't even pass Earth Science!'" she says, laughing. But the actress nailed other aspects of Bernadette instinctively: "Right before the audition, I was on the phone with my mother, who has a very high-pitched voice. And I



Penny (Kaley Cuoco) and Amy (Mayim Bialik) have become unlikely but intriguing friends.

CHUCK ZLOTNICK/CBS; MONTY BRINTON/CBS



Season 4 of *The Big Bang Theory* is now on DVD and Blu-ray! Buy your copy at wbshop.com.

decided then, sitting in my car telling her about the part, that I'd do my mother's voice for the character."

The actress also recalls being immediately impressed with the way Bernadette was—and continues to be—written. "So many times [in sitcoms], the women are just the straight men. But the material [*Big Bang*] gives us is equal, as far as who is carrying the jokes."

A SMART RETURN TO ACTING

Bialik got her big acting break at age 11 in the film *Beaches*, and by 14 headlined her own sitcom, *Blossom*. At 19, she decided on a different direction, ultimately earning a Ph.D. in neuroscience at the University of California, Los Angeles while making only sporadic TV appearances. Then just a few years ago, the now-married 35-year-old decided to jump back full time into acting, which offers more time at home with her two young sons than a career in academia.

Her first *Big Bang* appearance, in the show's third-season finale, "was maybe four lines," the actress remembers. "I was told, 'We need a female version of Jim Parsons,' and so I did my best to do a socially awkward character with very little emotional content to her voice." The writers obviously loved her deadpan take on Amy, but as Bialik admits, "I feel like I'm cheating: I have Jim Parsons as the perfect model for my character. If I ever don't know what to say, I wonder how Jim would say it."

As Molaro notes, "It's funny, but also kind of sweet and sad, just how important a new friend like Penny, and the world she's opening up, is to a sheltered person like Amy. And Mayim is not only hilarious but really good at bringing that sweetness to the role, so she's not just this disconnected intelligence."

Plus, he adds, there's a side benefit to having a real-life scientist in the cast: She's both actress and technical consultant in one, "very respectfully asking to change a few words if something's not quite correct." While rehearsing last season's finale, Bialik recalls, "there was a description of the anatomy where Sheldon was rubbing his shoulder, and [*Big Bang* co-creator] Bill Prady turned to me and said, 'Is that right?' I felt my face get hot. I don't want to be that person! And as I started to say, 'Well ...,' [co-creator] Chuck Lorre turned to me and said, 'Can you just fix it and email it to us?'" — *Jim Colucci*

THE BIG BANG THEORY

airs Thursdays
at 8 p.m. ET/PT
on CBS.

SOUND OFF

SOME OF THE FUNNIEST LINES AREN'T SCRIPTED

Quotes from celebs across the Web

— Kim Forrest



David Hornsby
(*How to Be a Gentleman*):

"Finally, after being a temp, a nanny, a caterer, valet, food expeditor on the Sunset strip, a waiter and a telemarketer ... I landed where I am today."

on itsalwaysunny.webs.com, about his slow start into sitcom writing



Sarah Michelle Gellar
(*Ringer*):

"Maybe now I can finally get some *Gossip Girl* spoilers."

on eonline.com, discussing why she's looking forward to working on The CW

Kat Dennings
(*Two Broke Girls*):

"Just asked a boat full of dudes if they had any Grey Poupon."

on Twitter, about her special requests



Ashton Kutcher
(*Two and a Half Men*):

"Why the hell do I still have a land line?"

on Twitter, in response to 'questions to self'



Simon Baker (*The Mentalist*):

"After this season, you're going to have the lead character on a network TV series being a cold-blooded, vengeance-killing murderer... That's heavy."

on tvguide.com, about the ending of last season and having a lot to play with