



TELEVISION

‘The Politician’s’ Bette Midler for president? Well, no, but she has ideas for the job





“Time flies and soon you’re not getting the big, scenery-chewing jobs and that’s that,” says Bette Midler, who guest stars on “The Politician,” about aging. (Michael Nagle / For The Times)

By RANDEE DAWN

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Showbiz whirlwind Bette Midler has — like most of us — been temporarily corralled, riding out the COVID-19 lockdown in her upstate New York home. But such containment is a rare state for Midler, who in her 50-odd (sometimes quite odd) years in entertainment has gone from singing in New York City’s Continental bathhouse to winning Grammys (three), Emmys (three), a Tony and scoring Academy Award nominations (two).

She’s up again for an Emmy this season for guest starring as firecracker political manager Hadassah Gold in “The Politician,” and even official quarantine hasn’t kept her from starring in the upcoming remotely shot “[Coastal Elites](#)” for HBO. Midler spoke via phone with The Envelope about legacy, Twitter and getting impeached. Prepare for a totally *divine* experience.

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**Sounds like you’ve managed to make the most out of being stuck at home.
Are you coping?**

I have good days and bad days like everyone. I've never lived through anything like this. There's a lot of reflecting going on; we're all sitting around and saying, "What did I do with my life? What was my life?" I'm 74 years old; if I die tomorrow, I'm going to say, "Where did the time go?"

It seems like you've made the most of it; you're *this close* to getting an EGOT, after all. Does that matter to you, personally?

Well, I'm never gonna get that, and I'm perfectly OK with it. Time flies and soon you're not getting the big, scenery-chewing jobs and that's that. [For the Emmys] it's a good group to be included with. I mean, my God, if they're passing them out, I'll raise my hand.

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This was your first time working with "Politician" creator Ryan Murphy and costar Judith Light. What impressions did you come away with?

Well, I really, really liked him. My daughter [Sophie] was in his "[[The Assassination of Gianni Versace](#)] American Crime Story," which was fabulous. I became a real fan after that. It was great to be part of his team. Judith — I've seen her over the years, and it was actually a thrill to meet her. We became a bit of a team and a bit of a pair. She's genius; she's always present and a world-class act, with a sense of style I find so captivating. It's fleeting, it's elusive.

“Politician” may be a comedy, but things take a very topical turn toward focusing on climate change. You’ve been pretty active on Twitter for a long time sharing your own political views — do you find that cathartic?

Very much so. It used to be way more fun. But the last 3 1/2 years have been so dire, you get very agitated. I’m a reactive personality, and it takes up a lot of time. Sometimes it’s like spitting in the wind. But I feel like it’s my civic duty to remind people. And it feels like Ryan and Brad [“Politician” cocreator Falchuk] are trying to address that too.

The Best of Bette Midler | The Politician



Highlights of Bette Midler in Season 2 of “The Politician” on Netflix.

There’s a point in “Politician” that gets made more in the second season than the first, that while youth has the passion, experience can only come from veterans with years in the game. What’s your take on that?

Until you’re inside politics, you don’t know how it works. It’s all very well to run and have ideas and plan — but if you can’t get people to go along with that plan, you’re dead in the water. So we see people who have ideas, who’re in Congress for years, who’ve

never passed a single piece of legislation except to name a post office. You've got to be able to work with people; you have to be able to engage them. If you're not willing to, if you're trying to pass a purity test, you're never going to get anything done. I'm exhausted.

Did you ever consider running for office?

I was the president of my [high school] class, and the other wing tried to impeach me. I never forgot it. The reason they tried to impeach me was that I didn't know [Robert's Rules of Order](#). But you know what? I don't think I'm smart enough. I don't think you can be a pinhead like some of these guys we see now, these used-car salesmen who think they'll make a profit ripping someone off. I'm just ... I'm an entertainer. [H]e's an entertainer, that's what's so ... horrible. He thinks this is show business. He makes us all look bad.

Once things open up again, it sounds like you'll be quite busy, but ... do you think you'll ever tour a live show again?

I don't know that *anyone* will ever tour again. Let's get real here. Mostly I'm interested in philanthropy. I mostly think about my daughter, who recently got married; I think about my husband and my charity [the [New York Restoration Project](#)]. I'd like to make life easier for a lot of other people. I think I've had my hour on the stage, and I've had a wonderful time. But I don't know what's going to come up. We don't know what tomorrow will bring.

The Politician: Season 2 | Official Trailer | Netflix





Trailer for Season 2 of “The Politician” on Netflix.

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