

5 Minutes with...

Actor/Comedian Maz Jobrani



How soon after George Bush named Iran as a member of the “Axis of Evil” did you realize what a gift that was?

I got upset at first! As an Iranian in America, I’ve been here now for almost 40 years. The moment I came, Iran was on the list of public enemies and it has remained there. Really, it’s pretty frustrating. Yet at the same time, it is a gift because comedy is about emotion and passion, as well as having a point of view. We watch a guy like Lewis Black lose his mind and it makes us laugh. I think when I got upset about it, it helped me then to be able to talk about it in a passionate way.

How important is it to take audiences out of their comfort zone?

I think it’s important to push a little bit, to make people be open-minded a little more, to open up their boundaries. I’ll cuss here and there, but my shows are not X-rated. I feel like somewhere in the back of my mind I’ve got my mother or father’s voice in my head criticizing me if I’m saying anything that’s even a little risqué. That said, when I do a headlining show, there’s obviously a lot of Middle Easterners in the audience, so when I make some type of [sexual] innuendo, I’ll make fun of the fact I *know* what my audience is thinking. It’s become a part of my act. I enjoy calling them out on it because I think, when you do that, it helps them come on the ride with you.

Maya Angelou said *Don’t trust anyone who doesn’t laugh*. Do you agree?

I do. And I feel sorry for anyone who doesn’t laugh. I’ll do a show for a cultural event that’s been sponsored by, let’s say, a Persian group, and so there are kids there and the elderly, and my material sometimes is a little edgy for them. Recently, a woman came up to me afterwards and said, “I just want you to know that people might not have been laughing because they were a little older and maybe they were just offended by some of the stuff you said.” I told her, “I appreciate

you telling me that but I honestly feel that, if they’re offended by my stuff, I think they have bigger issues... and should talk those issues through with a therapist.”

When did you realize you had the ability to make people laugh?

Coming to America in the late-70’s when I was six years old, I remember there were three things that helped me adapt to the new country. One was sports—I was good at kickball and soccer. Another was that I would go grocery shopping with my mom and just buy a ton of sweets, and quite often I would take extra sweets to school and hand them out to my newfound friends. I was bribing my way into their hearts with Starburst. The third way, definitely, was being funny. I like laughing and I like making people laugh. And I stuck with it.

How did you develop your comic timing?

It probably started first as an actor. When I was 12 years old in school, we did musicals and I loved being on stage; as soon as I stepped on stage I felt alive. I was a huge fan of Eddie Murphy—to this day he is my comic hero. I wanted to be a comedian, but I just didn’t have the confidence then, so the actor part came first and the comedian part came second. **EDGE**

Editor’s Note: Maz Jobrani is a member of the Axis of Evil comedy group. He was born in Teheran and grew up outside of San Francisco. Jobrani plays Fawz in the CBS sitcom *Superior Donuts*, which was just picked up by the network for a second season. In all, Editor at Large **Tracey Smith** spent a good 10 minutes with Maz. So for 5 More Minutes with Maz, log onto edgemonline.com.