

If you ask me...

Chris Molineux

Seinfeld-collaborating comedian

Interview Mike White

Starting off in comedy - all the late nights and no money - doesn't actually seem that bad at the time. On a daily basis you'll be going off somewhere, and people are giving you kudos and love and affection and going: 'Oh, we like you.' Because that's what it's about: getting people to respond in this positive way to you as a person. George Carlin described stand-up comedy as 'Dig me!' - a direct ego connection. For me personally there's also a sense of wanting to comprehend it and push it and go 'How else can I do this?' So you're wrapped up in all these different things, and as long as you have enough money to pay your rent and put food in your belly, you feel as though the other things in life are taken care of. You go: 'Well, I'm doing something creative and people like me, I feel a sense of belonging. The main things human beings hunger for are being supplied. I'm doing OK!' It's only when you have children or step back and have a sense of perspective or, God forbid, are just naturally sensible that you question these things.

Getting up on stage is very much second nature to me now. When people ask if I get nervous, I say 'Well, do you get afraid when you go to work?' So no, I'm not really afraid of it, but I understand it. From teaching stand-up and coaching public speaking, I deal with a lot of people who have these fears, and so I'm used to addressing them and comprehending them. When people don't know what they're doing it seems a lot more difficult. I mean, if you were asked to diffuse a bomb and you'd done it a hundred times before, you'd go 'Oh, that's easy, you just flip this lever here', but if you'd never done it before, it would be a bit more frightening. Not that people laughing or not laughing is in any way like a limb-wrenching explosion, but still, the analogy holds.

Robin Williams was an interesting fellow. I talked with him for half an hour in a stairwell about ultrasound. I'd just seen the first photograph of my imminent daughter that day, and so I was talking with him about that, and he just went on and on, very informative - and a very sweet, engaging person, interesting and damaged to a certain degree. I think, by the level of success he has. I mean, he's basically hiding when he walks in the room, his hat pulled down very low, his collar pulled up very high, looking at the floor, just to avoid being assaulted. But he's great. Tommy Chong from Cheech and Chong was funny because I worked with him two weeks



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in a row, so we were together every day, ten days straight. And then I met him three months later and he didn't know who I was. You know what they say, 'too much of a good thing...'

I've been attacked on stage several times.

There was one show where there was a road-building gang in, just folks who were rolling through, and they decided they didn't want a comedy show, so I was attacked on stage that night. The entire bar turned into a huge free-for-all, locals versus the road crew, so the show came to a halt somewhat. It wasn't a grinding halt, it was more flamboyant and violent than grinding.

People love to mystify comedy and have this attitude like 'it's all subjective, people are just funny or they're not funny and no-one knows why', and it's really not true. It's usually something as basic as 'Well, so-and-so's funny because of the way they use their voice, or the expressions they use or the way they use language.' These are very basic examples, but once you break it down to something as simple as that, no-one would ever say 'Well, John is funny, but no-one knows why.'

You can't sit a group of three hundred

people down and say 'All right, here's a book, read this and you'll all be comedians.' But you certainly can teach comedy to people, you just have to figure out what defines them, then figure out what tools they need to work on it. The process is as much one of extraction as it is addition: you're finding out who they are and the method that they use to come up with ideas, and then subsequently express them. That's how you let the comedy out.

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