



# Maz Jobrani

The hilarious peaceful warrior is all about comedy with a message

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE  
PHOTOGRAPHY: STORM SANTOS  
GROOMING: ANGIE MIKAELIAN  
STYLING: LAUREN TAYLOR

I only recently discovered Maz Jobrani (while watching CBS' *Superior Donuts*, which sadly, only aired for two entertaining seasons —2017-2018.) and the breadth of his talent. I did my research, watched his Netflix special, *Immigrant* and found that, not only is he funny, he is quite accomplished. In entertainment for over twenty years, Maz has done stand-up specials for Comedy Central, Showtime, Netflix...; appeared in TV shows (*Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Shameless*, *Last Man Standing*) and films (*Friday After Next*, *The Interpreter*), is helming his second podcast, and penned the book, *I'm Not a Terrorist, But I've Played One on TV: Memoirs of a Middle Eastern Funny Man*.

It's late November when I meet up with Maz at The New York EDITION hotel. The place is packed to the brim with people imbibing after-work libations. "I'll hold it like that so you can hear," Maz offers as he takes my phone, which I'm using to record our interview, and holds it up to his mouth. "Here, you go ahead, ask the questions."

Presently, Maz is on his Peaceful Warrior comedy tour, which he has taken all over the U.S., as well as to Europe, Australia, and the Middle East, where he recently shot a special in Dubai. "The reason I call it the Peaceful Warrior tour is because if you look at the *Immigrant* special, I talk about my kids, but then I talk about politics, about Trump —that was recorded in early 2017, shortly after he became President, at the Kennedy Center in [Washington,] D.C. Obviously, the people in D.C. tend to be pretty liberal. During the election, people were still letting you do the Trump jokes without getting too agitated, but quickly after the election, some people got offended at Trump jokes and they need to be reminded that in America, we can make fun of our President, whether he's a Democrat or a Republican," he says lightheartedly.

He recalls a few shows where he offended members of his audience. "Rather than yelling back, I said, 'That's fantastic, you can have your own opinion. That's the beauty of America. We can have opinions!' So I'm trying to deal with anybody that comes at me aggressively

from the audience when they get offended by political jokes, in a very peaceful way. Continue to still make my points... continue to be a warrior, but in a peaceful way."

Maz has always appreciated meaningful comedy. "I actually said, 'What point is art, if it's not saying something?' My first comedy hero was Eddie Murphy, and he wasn't political, but he was a rockstar when I was a kid. But when I really started getting into it, I started listening a little bit more to what Richard Pryor was doing, George Carlin, and then later, things like *The Daily Show*. I've always liked it if somebody can have something that they're doing, but also have a political message in it... If I can come up with jokes that have a message or if I can bring up an item, let's say my audience might not be aware of, then I feel like my jokes are more, I don't want to say effective, but I prefer those types of jokes."

The Iranian-American (Maz was born in Tehran, Iran and raised in the San Francisco Bay area) comedian is passionate about using his platform to create awareness, but wants to make it clear that he doesn't represent anyone, but himself. At the time of our interview, an increase in the price of gasoline had caused protests in Iran, which then resulted in their government shutting down the internet across the whole country. Maz shared that he had been using hashtags and doing a lot of social media posts to try and get the American press to talk about the Iran protests more as there wasn't much coverage. "Iran is a very complicated place, 'cause there's people that want America to get involved and they want them to overthrow the government, the government of Iran is corrupt. But a lot of Iranians don't want a war, so it's a very complicated issue. You gotta kinda tread lightly. Some people message me: 'You're not saying enough about this.' And I'll say something. 'You're saying too much. You're a comedian, stick to comedy,'" he says, shaking his head.

Maz tries to tune out the negativity and not read the comments on social media. "As a person who is a creator, I can't be too worried about these opinions, unless something happens

What would fans be surprised to find out about you?

"That I'm really not that funny in normal, day-to-day life. I love comedy, but I can be pretty serious, even shy at times, especially at parties, when I don't know people. I've reflected upon it. There's some people that are comedians and they're larger than life and they get into an environment and they feel they have to put it on. If I'm in an environment where I don't know people, I'm like, 'Let me go sit in the corner and look at my phone until somebody I know shows up.' I've actually had people at charity events bid to have me come to their homes for dinner and they've paid a lot of money, they're rich people anyway, but they paid \$10,000 for me to show up at dinner. I think they thought I was going to show up and be like, Don Rickles, busting everybody's balls... I don't have a lot of street jokes, 'cause there's a difference between stand-up and street jokes. A lot of times, people see you do stand-up in front of a crowd and you're on and everything's great. So they're like, he's going to come to our house and be like that... This happened a few times, where I showed up and I think they were underwhelmed. I don't know if they wanted their money back, but the charity got the money, so take one for the team."



## MIAMI LOVE

"I'm a big fan of Miami! I was just there this past year to do the Miami Improv, then I did West Palm Beach, which was interesting to be in Trump territory doing stand-up, but it still went fine. I was right there by the beach. The only thing that worried me, I went into the water and these little tiger sharks were swimming by me and I went up to some guy and go, 'Hey man, there's a shark in there.' And he goes, 'Oh, it's just tiger sharks.' I'm like, 'Really? You sure?' It's OK, until they bite you once. I enjoyed Miami... The weather is such that you can't not be out until 3 in the morning, it's a very interesting place. This one guy we know, it was after my show, 'Let's get on my boat, we'll go to some happening club!' So we got on the boat, took us like an hour to go out, and then we showed up at this club and it ended up being the wrong club. It wasn't what we thought it was going to be, it was an after-hours Russian karaoke club. It was the weirdest. It was another dimension. We went in and we're like, 'What the hell is going on here?' They're obviously looking at us like, *Who are these guys?* But yeah, Miami was fun. Miami feels to me— 'cause I'm in L.A.— like a whole other world."

where it's an overwhelming response like, 'You're doing X, Y, and Z, which is hurting such and such people,' at which point, I would probably have my people who are close to me saying, 'Dude, you gotta take that post down.' Or whatever that is, or 'You can't do that joke.'" He finds comfort in knowing that he's not alone — that people like Howard Stern, David Letterman, and Stephen Colbert experience this too. "I remember one time, David Letterman, when he had the *Late Show with David Letterman*, he did one joke where he said, 'Now, they have free WiFi in Central Park, which is great, because that means I can take my laptop out there during lunch and read all my hate mail.' I was like, Oh my god, how much hate mail must he get or a guy like Stephen Colbert for expressing their opinions? So you can't let those opinions really alter who you are and what you're saying, as long as you're true to your beliefs, you'll be fine."

In early 2019, Maz gave podcasts another go (his first podcast was called, *Minivan Men*) and launched *Back to School with Maz Jobrani*. This time around, Maz chose a theme that allowed for endless topics. "My kids, who are 8 and 11, kept asking me questions that I did not have the answers to, things as simple as: *Why is the sky blue? How does rain work?* I'm always like, I think I know, but I'm not sure, let me Google it." Maz then decided that he would much rather bring in the experts — professors, authors, etc... — to answer these questions. "Every episode starts with questions that my kids have asked, for whoever the guest is and then we get into it and try to learn something," he explains. Former guests include, writer/producer Reza Aslan, basketball player Enes Kanter, and scientist Firouz Naderi. "It's all over the place, but it's a lot of fun and you realize there's a lot of interesting people out there." People he would like to invite onto his show in the future, include Valerie Jarrett, Frank Figliuzzi, Spike Lee, Martin Scorsese, and Al Pacino.

This month, Maz's latest film, *A Simple Wedding*, will be released in select theaters and available on most streaming

platforms on Valentine's Day. The indie film, from the producers of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, is about a young, Iranian American woman who goes to great lengths to appease her parents and their need to see her settled down. And he has two projects in development: a TV show based on his life and an animated series. He compares the former to ABC's critically-acclaimed TV show, *Black-ish*, except it's with his family. "I'm Iranian and my wife is Indian...and our kids are confused," he says with a smile. "It's that, in a setting of just trying to raise kids and also being in the middle of this divided world that we're in." Maz is co-developing/co-writing the script with Nastaran Dibai and has Jonathan Goldstein and John Daley — writer/directors of *Horrible Bosses*, *Game Night* — producing it. The animated series, which he has teamed up with Courteney Cox on, is about an immigrant family from a fictional immigrant country that comes to America. "They love America, America is skeptical about them. It's like *The Munsters*, but with immigrants. These things are a long shot, but at least we're writing something we're really happy with, so fingers crossed on that."

I really liked you in *Superior Donuts*, it's a shame they cancelled it. "I know! It was a fun show to do. Again, I'm happy to be able to, hopefully, do my own thing and we'll see. It's such a long journey and you really don't know what's going to be the thing, you just keep going. I tell my kids, the hard part of doing what I do now is being away from the family. So touring, I love being on stage but I don't like getting away from the family, but I do tell them, whatever you do, you're going to have problems, issues, there's going to be difficulties, but the beauty of it is, I really love doing what I do, so I'm not miserable going to my work, which I think, [only] a small percentage of people in the world can actually say. So I'm lucky and I'll keep going." ML

Keep up with Maz on Twitter and Instagram: @MazJobrani and <https://www.mazjobrani.com/>.