

The Funny Four

The guys of *Impractical Jokers* talk about their show and more

Words by Vanessa Pascale | Photo Credit Martin Brown

Before my interview with James “Murr” Murray, Joe Gatto, Sal Vulcano and Brian “Q” Quinn, aka The Tenderloins, I wasn’t aware of their hilarious truTV show *Impractical Jokers*, which has impressively garnered over 60 million viewers since premiering in 2011. You’ll have to excuse that my television defaults to E!, Food Network and TBS. After I crawled out from under my rock, I caught a couple of episodes prior to my chat with the guys. I expected funny to be on the menu,

but got a whole lot more: a marriage proposal, a flute concert and A LOT of laughs.

I arrive at Murr’s New York City apartment on Wall Street. “We can start. The other guys will be here,” Murr tells me, as he, Joe and I sit down in his living room. Sal and Q are driving in from Staten Island, where these four best friends grew up. *Impractical Jokers*, which premiered their second season this past



August, is a hidden camera show that captures the dares and pranks that the guys direct at one another in the midst of unsuspecting people. Throughout the show, the guys compete in “challenges.” At the end, the loser is punished -- normally something completely embarrassing that is planned by the other three guys. Some of these punishments will make you cringe, like digging through elephant poop and sticking a random stranger’s toe in their mouth. “You can’t say no to a punishment. That’s the caveat of the gentleman’s agreement we’ve all made,” Joe tells me.

As I am about to ask my next question, Sal and Q walk in. “We’re just bs-ing and she hit record, so *this* is all on the record, including your introductions,” Joe warns the two. The guys get settled and the small talk ensues. “Do you want some iced tea, Vanessa?” Q asks as he pokes around Murr’s kitchen. “I’ll take something refreshing and low in calories, if that exists in there,” Sal interjects. “We’re going to eat dinner in a little while,” Sal reminds Murr, who has returned to his armchair with a tube of cookie dough and a spoon. “I know, but I’m having a little snack now. I’m a grown man; I can do what I want. This is America,” states Murr. “Are you a grown man, as you scoop cookie dough outta there with a spoon?” Sal asks. “It’s delicious, you want some?” Murr counters. After I answer a few questions the guys ask me and we’ve all become acquainted, I continue the interview.

Murr, who comes off as the leader of the pack, tells me that the four reconnected after graduating from college and joined together to create the improv comedy troupe, The Tenderloins, a name chosen for its *embarrassing* factor when said aloud. Picked from a list of a hundred embarrassing words like: nougat, culottes, fondant, ‘tenderloins’ (actually, the first word on the list) ended up being the one they kept coming back to and stuck with. Touring and performing for fourteen years now, in 2007 The Tenderloins competed on NBC’s sketch comedy competition show, “It’s Your Show” and won the grand prize: \$100,000. “Split four ways and taxed, it was about, what you’re sitting on [a leather sectional] is what I was able to afford,” Murr explains.

After shooting various TV pilots that didn’t take off, it suddenly became very clear to the four. “We were like, ‘We always mess around with each other. Why don’t we just film that and come up with a way to do it?’” says Joe. They shot a video, pitched it as an upside down prank show and sold it to truTV. It turned out to be a golden idea well-received by viewers. The show was recently picked up for a third season, slated to debut in 2014, and has resulted in a spin-off series, *Jokers After Party*.

“The show is as much about friendship, you can quote me on this, as it is about hidden cameras,” says Sal. “Everybody can remember being in high school and messing around with your friends. We basically never grew out of that. It’s really about hanging out with friends who are genuinely having a good time together,” Joe adds.

At times, the execution of the prank can be challenging. The guys know each other so well that they know what the others won’t do. “I know things that Sal won’t say, so I’ll tell him to do it to get him to lose. There comes that moment where he’s going to go one way or the other, that’s what is fun for us on the show. Will he do it? Sometimes they say something to me, and I’m like, ‘Oh, they got me. Those sons-a-bitches, they got me,’” says Q with a smile. “We want this to be as funny as possible -- there can be funny in the failure as well. You don’t always have to nail it. If we fumble, it’s just as funny, like, we look like idiots. It’s almost like a ‘can’t lose’ situation --that’s the magic of it,” Sal explains.

There are a few times the interview goes off topic as the guys ask me questions about myself or get distracted by Murr’s sexually explicit “art” statues. “We’re going to write a profile on you as well,” Sal jokes about all the questions directed at me. “*For Staten Island Living*,” Joe adds. “There’s *another* sex art work over here. What is going on with you!” Q exclaims. “That’s another gift!” Murr says. “You don’t have to keep every gift that people give you. You know that, right?” Q asks, “I keep finding these weird sex objects.” “They’re not weird sex objects,”

Murr defends. “You just happened to pick up the two sex-related items in the *entire* apartment.” The conversation remains on the objects found in the living room. The next questionable item: Murr’s flute (a gift from Joe). “Here’s my thing, the flute is used. I mean I know they clean it, but someone sucked on that every day *for years*,” states Sal. The room fills with laughter. Murr blows a few puffs of air into the shiny instrument. “Are you saying you’re getting good?” Sal asks. “I’m hitting notes,” says Murr proudly. “That’s not getting good. I can throw a basketball at a hoop, but,” Sal counters. “*Great analogy*,” adds Joe.

When I ask what fans would be surprised to find out about them, I receive a few --surprises. “I’m a woman!” Joe calls out. “I’m a reverend” says Sal, (not a joke, he has his license) “I can marry you two right now.” He motions at me and Q. “You wanna get married?” Q proposes. “Um, I’m good,” I reply. “I now pronounce you man and wife. You came to do an interview and you got married,” says Sal with a smile. “Honey, can I borrow \$20?” Q asks, then adds, “My mother hates you.”

The guys were in Florida over the summer to perform their improv show in Orlando, West Palm and Ft. Lauderdale. The high point of their trip, in addition to the kale salad that Q could not stop raving about, was a day at the beach, where they, unexpectedly, swam with sharks. “The four of us are standing talking. No one else around,” says Sal, “and Q goes, ‘There’s two sharks.’” “Like, stereotypical shark fins,” Joe exclaims. “We were here. You are the shark. Waist-deep water. My number one fear in life is to get eaten by a shark,” Murr tells me. “I mean, it was this big,” Q says, suggesting that it wasn’t that large, “Let’s not get...” “Most people that die from sharks, it’s from bleeding. They sever an artery and bleed out. They bite your leg and you’re dead 10 minutes later,” says Murr seriously.

Don’t miss *Impractical Jokers* on Thursday nights at 10 pm and *Jokers After Party* at 10:30 pm on truTV. Catch the guys live as The Tenderloins, touring October through January. For tour dates, visit: TheTenderloins.com. **ML**

The Impractical Jokers / Tenderloins describe one another

“**Murray** is a very driven character. I find that I can just not worry about things ‘cause I know he’ll get them done ‘cause he really wants things to happen. He’s like my auto-pilot. Very focused and driven,” says Q.

“**Sal** is the sweet one of the boy band. He wears his embarrassment right on his face. He can’t hide it,” says Joe.

“**Q**, I would say is complex,” Joe says. “You never know what you’re going to get. He’s like a...” “Mixed chocolates!” Sal interjects. “He’s either smiling and hugging you or walking in and throwing shit,” says Joe. “He’s my bipolar chocolate, all the time,” says Sal. “Out of the four us, Q is charming,” Murr adds.

“**Joe** is the fearless one. He was born without the shame gene. He will do anything to make us laugh,” says Murr.