

James Adomian

This Charming (and Occasionally Masculine) Man

On the seventh day, James Adomian rested. For the prior six days, up to and including the morning of the seventh, he logged seven stand-up shows, several hours of podcast recordings, the usual audition rounds and had visited his mother. His week back home in the Los Angeles sun was no vacation.

Sitting on the back patio of an organic salad spot on Sunset Boulevard, with the slight chill of November in LA temporarily banished by an early afternoon sun, Adomian had just finished taping an episode of Comedy Bang Bang, where he played with one of his newer voices, American Apparel founder Dov Charney, a man he respects for manufacturing at home, but mocks for his “artist ego.”

“I like him a lot, but he’s always got some kind of sexual harassment scandal going on. But he’s an artist! He’s very sexual because he’s into fashion,” Adomian said, morphing vocally into Charney for a second, before snapping back to himself. “I portray him as a constant wanker and a groping, mad artist kinda guy.”

Currently, Adomian’s known as the guy who impersonates Jesse Ventura, Gary Busey and George W. Bush on a variety of podcasts. He brought all those voices into American living rooms as a Top 10 finalist on the seventh season of *Last Comic Standing*, and blesses his fans on Comedy Bang Bang and at comedy shows with feature-length versions of his favorite targets.

Adomian has been exploring his voice and that of others on stage for about 10 years. Beginning his comedy days in “the residential deserts of Southern California,” his initial call to character and sketch comedy began at 23 in LA’s Groundlings and Upright Citizens Brigade theaters. He’s now emphatically “31-ish” and dabbling on stand-up stages in a relatively new voice: his own.

“Coming from a background of sketch comedy and different characters, I prided myself in doing characters wildly different from myself, from George W. Bush to my drag queen character, ‘Miss Corona Martini.’ Now I do stand-up in my own voice, which includes a bunch of other voices,” he said with a laugh. “I’m really happy to have developed a stand-up voice for myself, after spending so long speaking through a character in a satirical way. I like being able to approach the audience as myself, and also to take credit with an audience as myself.”

Considering it’s a relatively new playing field, I ask if a particular viewpoint or dialogue is emerging as a dominant voice in his stand-up. “My voice is constantly changing, I go through little phases,” he said. “I’m self-aware in hindsight, so I can’t tell you what my phase is right now, but it will become clear to me.” *Do you think you’re arcing in a way that you aren’t able to pinpoint right now?* “What do you mean, arcing? You mean shooting like a rainbow? Always, darlin’. I’m always arcing. And sometimes arching,” Adomian drawled, a coy smirk and slight wink lighting up his face.



GAY VILLAINS, GAY HERO

Adomian’s take on the gay villain is an audience favorite. With vocal exaggeration and wild gesticulation, he illustrates the overtly effeminate portrayal of villain in entertainment — from Transformers’ Decepticons to Robin Hood’s nemesis, The Sheriff of Nottingham — and how a “dumb, blind homophobia has seeped into our culture.”

“When you paint homophobia in that light, when it’s literally effeminate cartoons that you’re viewing as a kid, then it falls apart and looks silly. I think there’s a lot of cultural effort that goes into vilifying same-sex love, and it’s a bit old-fashioned and it’s time that it comes to an end,” he said.

Although his sexuality isn’t a dominant topic in his comedy, Adomian’s aware that it needs to be addressed to both assuage a potentially reluctant audience and to honor his own voice and story. “I really try as much as possible to attack homophobia and mock it in the strongest terms that I can find, that will get an audience on board. I never edit out the fact that I’m gay, no matter what the audience is. I never censor that.

“I’m able, as an occasionally, somewhat masculine man — not that bad of an autobiography title, huh? — to talk to audiences that are latently homophobic or that are outright homophobic, and they listen to me ... I’ve only recently figured out how to play to middle-aged, decent people and not have it be an outright disaster,” he said. “Part of that is acknowledging when I sense them being uncomfortable with me. I’ll bring it up. I’ll say, ‘Oh yes, that’s right. In case you didn’t know, I’m a gentleman of a certain distinction.’ Sometimes people love that, but then sometimes people audibly gasp. I’ve learned to be able to play with that, though.”

It happened recently, at a club in suburban Atlanta, he said, jumping into the character voice that saved his ass on stage. “*‘Aww, shit, Jack. Goddammit.’*” he drawled.

“*I, I went to this goddamn comedy show, and yeah, I was laughin’ at it. Turns out, the whole time I was laughin’ at a goddamn queer.*” They loved it. They were all thinking that, and then they were all on the same page.”

Adomian’s also been gay bashed, and likes to tell the story on stage. “It’s a funny story. It was a tough, adrenaline-charged moment,” he said, adding that he talks about it because it’s a good story, not as a sympathetic plea. “This is not my only mission in comedy. Sometimes I like to just be stupid and silly, sometimes I like to be offensive and say the wrong thing. But when I’m speaking *ex cathedra*, when I’m being a good guy, I do consciously feel like it’s important to say things that allow future generations to live better. I don’t want people to have to suffer the way I did.”

GETTING POLITICAL

For the last few months, Adomian’s heretofore unpronounced political and economic reform interests have come to the forefront. When the Occupy Wall Street movement first began to pick up steam in September 2011, Adomian was a relatively new transplant to New York City. In the past four months, he’s been working in material about his experiences at Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Atlanta and Occupy LA—including a particularly memorable story about picking up a fella while locked up in Midtown. He said it’s a critical current event he needs to address.

“There are audiences that are more or less receptive when I talk

about Occupy Wall Street, and believe me, speaking strictly as a performer, it would have been easier to keep doing what I was doing, but I have a responsibility to talk about what I’m doing now. Occupy’s forced me to talk about Occupy. It’s occupied my mind,” he said, laughing.

His ongoing interest in economic reform stems back to college days, where he cobbled together a self-designed major of economics and theater. “I eventually had to abandon my economics major because I got sick of it. Mainstream, neoliberal economics is an autistic discipline; it does not communicate with other social sciences in any responsible way whatsoever. What’s taught in economics classes is bullshit and doesn’t work in the real world, and has never even been tried in the real world. It’s basically just propaganda to help concentrate power in a few hands,” Adomian said.

In speaking about economic reform, Adomian’s fiscal side emerges. “Enough people have been awakened to a reality that’s apparent from many different angles; an out-of-control, warped system of crony capitalism that’s not real textbook capitalism at all, but that’s a zombie Frankenstein version of capitalism. It’s really just set up as a kind of global racket to concentrate wealth in fewer and fewer hands. Enough people over the last several years have realized that that’s happened. The Occupy movement is the most clear and unified expression of that informal movement,” he said. “It started in Sept. 17, 2011, in New York City, but I think it has its roots in the deep discontent of the people in the world, that grows out of out of control corporate power, that grows out of NAFTA, that grows out of the exploitation of people’s lives, which amounts to an informal and indirect kind of cannibalism.”

Adomian has tremendous respect for the performers and “honest doctors” who have been on the demonstration frontlines since the beginning, including podcaster Brent Schmidt, of Fawkes News Podcast, comedians Ted Alexandro, Chris Laker and Eddie Pepitone, and writer Chris Hedges, of Truthdig. “The comedian presence at the Occupy Wall Street movement has made me proud to be a comedian. One of the best things a comedian can do, besides making people laugh — within that, within making people laugh — is speak truth to power,” he mused. “You can get away with things as a fool, that you cannot as a serious person. That’s the fool’s license. The *droit de fool*.”

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“There’s the mythology about the clown, or the fool, being able to talk shit to the king, and that’s the only person that could get away with it. That’s a very important tradition that I uphold in whatever way I’m able to,” he said.

Comedy’s role, with its ability to temper and challenge the powers that be, remains relevant in modern day society. As the sun drops to the Western horizon, Adomian reflected on the role of comedian in interesting times.

“Comedy is a dangerous beast, and it can cut both ways. You can use it for assholery, or you can use it for the work of the angels,” he said.

“I think a lot of comedians have that instinct that they’ve honed to find out where the false notes are, and can say, ‘Oh, that’s wrong, that’s shitty, that’s unjust, that sounds bad, that’s unfair. That’s just ugly.’ I think comedians are good doctors of the culture when they want to be and strive to be.”

Kristy Mangel is RE:COM’s managing editor.