

TALKING TO STRANGERS

Stand-up comedian Hannibal Buress talks Chris Rock and 30 Rock

Before Hannibal Buress started doing stand-up comedy at 19 in Chicago, he wanted to be the “black Howard Stern.” Since then he’s written for *Saturday Night Live* and *30 Rock* and has appeared on *Louie*, *Conan* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* In 2012, he released his first Comedy Central special “Animal Furnace,” and now he’s working on his new web series *Talking to Strangers*, in which he interviews musicians like The Roots’ Questlove. Just don’t ask him when it premieres, because, well, he has no idea. To read the extended interview, visit our website.

You’re fresh off SXSW. What’s it like doing comedy at SXSW?

It’s crazy being down there because it’s so many shows happening at once ... You walk down 6th Street, the main street of Austin, and there’s just music blaring from every bar, people are just packed in the streets ... Got to see Prince live, which was just crazy. He did six encores, which sounds like a lot, but it’s true.

There’s also a ton of buzz swirling around that one night at New York’s Comedy Cellar [Feb. 27] where it was you, Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock, Kevin Hart, Marlon Wayans and Questlove. How did that night come about?

It worked out that a lot of people were in town at the same time. Chappelle and Chris Rock the night before that, they did a set where it was the both of them riffing on stage. So I was just coming to watch, you know, and hopefully they’d do something like that again. I come there, I make it in time for the second show; Kevin Hart is on because Kevin Hart was hosting *SNL* that week so he’s popping in the clubs to do stand up in New York and then Chris Rock does a set after Kevin Hart. Then the second show is over and then the third show starts and they ask me if I want to go on. I’m not booked for that show. I’m thinking, wait, Chappelle is going on but they want me to go up? If Chappelle is going on then that means they need less comics, they don’t need more comics.

It turned out Rock had asked the managers to put me on. So I went on and then Chappelle went on and did a great 45-minute set. Then Kevin Hart yelled about having a story about Jay-Z, so Dave Chappelle brings Kevin up to tell

the story and then everyone starts coming up out of the wing; Bill Bellamy, Chris Rock. It was just a real crazy thing to watch. I don’t know how long it went, maybe an hour and a half, two hours of them just joking on each other, telling stories and passing the mic. It was a real cool night to be a part of.

I watched the mini documentary leading up to your Comedy Central special. There’s a scene where you play a voicemail from Chris Rock. It’s pretty hilarious. I was wondering, what role does mentorship play in the world of comedy?

He gives advice. I wouldn’t say he’s necessarily a mentor in that way. But I mean that was my first Comedy Central special so I was asking for advice. If I wonder about something, I’ll run it by him and ask his advice. But for the most part he’s just a cool dude that I can talk with sometimes. I’m sure some other guys, they have mentors, and it varies for comedians — or it might just be an older comedian you ask for advice. It’s not like, a *Karate Kid*/Mr. Miyagi situation. [Laughs]. I wouldn’t describe it as that but he is somebody that does have good insight.

What advice did he end up giving you?

He was just saying, I mean obviously you’re supposed to run your set a bunch of times and work it over and over and just really try to make it a good show. He said, “It’s a special, so make it a special, not a normal. It shouldn’t be a normal show.” So that was great advice. He also told me to watch *Rocky*, but I didn’t end up watching *Rocky*.

You’ve written for SNL and 30 Rock. What’s the difference between writing for stand up and writing with a team of comedians?

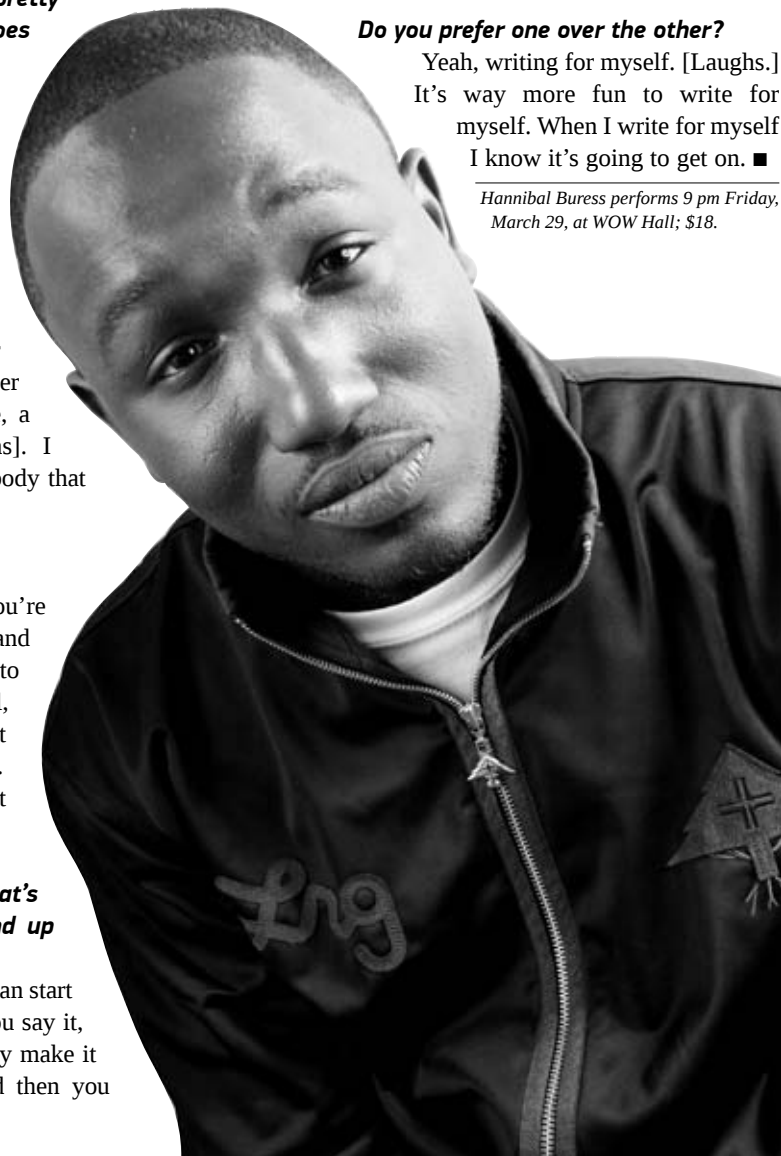
If you’re collaborating with people, you can start out with a small nugget or idea and then, you say it, you bounce it off somebody, you add it, they make it better. Somebody else says something and then you

have a fully formed idea. That’s more how the *30 Rock* writing style was, as far as pitching jokes for a script. Whereas stand up, you’re on your own so you have an idea and you can try it on stage, and you decide or the audience decides, based on the audience’s reaction, what you want to do with it. Then on *30 Rock*, you’re writing for characters that have been established already that have their own voice. So you’re thinking of a joke that Jack Donaghy would say, or Liz Lemon.

Do you prefer one over the other?

Yeah, writing for myself. [Laughs.] It’s way more fun to write for myself. When I write for myself I know it’s going to get on. ■

Hannibal Buress performs 9 pm Friday, March 29, at WOW Hall; \$18.



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