

Grandpa Aziz

COMEDIAN AZIZ ANSARI MAKES HIS EUGENE DEBUT AT THE HULT

by Alex Notman



PHOTO BY NOAH KALINA

You know him as the government employee with the most swagger (Tom Haverford, *Parks and Recreation*), the rambunctious, Oligocene-era rabbit pirate Squint (*Ice Age: Continental Drift*), the guy at James Franco's party who gets kicked into hell's sinkhole by Kevin Hart (*This is the End*) and the tagline-spewing hack comedian Raaaaaandy (*Funny People*). And, of course, just as standup comedian Aziz Ansari.

Ansari has become a sort of internet-age spirit guide, sifting through all the digital chatter in search of what it takes to make a real connection with another person in a world of texting, Instagram and Twitter. That's at the heart of his forthcoming book, *Modern Romance*, and his tour of the same name, which hits Eugene 7 pm Thursday, March 27, at the Hult. *EW* caught up with Ansari via the interwebs while he was doing book research in Tokyo to chat modern courtship, *Parks and Rec* and his superior sartorial style.

You're working on a book, *Modern Romance*, about dating, relationships and love in the tech age. You've used your Reddit subreddit *r/modernromantics* to do crowd-sourced original research. What have you been most surprised to learn from the responses?

We've done focus groups and interviews in New York, L.A., Buenos Aires, Wichita, Monroe and, just yesterday, Tokyo. The through-line you find in all this is that, a lot of times, everyone is going through some version of the same nonsense. A big idea of both the standup tour and the book is the notion that no matter how specific and crazy your personal romantic dramas are, everyone has their version

of it and we're all in the same boat, and hopefully that's comforting to know.

From what you've seen from the responses, is there any hope out there for modern romance?

Absolutely. I definitely don't want the book to be one of these books with a "we're doomed!" tone. A lot of the stuff written about how technology affects relationships focuses on the negative, but when you hear stories about people connecting and meeting people who they describe as the love of their life because technology allowed them to connect, it's hard to say it's all negative.

What do you miss most and least about pre-internet courtship?

I do think the drama added by texting is considerable. The stress of that just didn't exist before. And yes, I do call people, but some people don't like calls, so you can't totally avoid that nonsense. Granted, I dated way more in the texting era, so it's hard for me personally to say whether it would have been less stressful pre-text, but it seems possible. Then again, though, texting has made it easier to connect with so many people and I may be dwelling too hard on the negative. In a way this is the heart of the whole discussion in my head that led to me wanting to write this book. Are things better or worse? What's the real effect of all this stuff? It's not an easy answer at all.

The thing I miss least is how much harder it would have been to reach out to someone you barely met at a party or something. There are so many instances in my life where I've probably become closer to people because technology

has made it so much easier to casually get in touch with people. That's *the* biggest advantage we have today it seems.

What's the timeline for this book? When can we expect to see it in print? Or will it be an e-book? Or will you release it in Twitter chapters?

It'll be a regular book release in the fall of next year. I turn in a draft end of this year. Book stuff has a long turnaround.

It seems these days that comedians are releasing their specials in innovative ways. Louis CK with his website, Maria Bamford on Chill.com. You released your latest comedy special *Buried Alive* on Netflix. Why did you decide to go with Netflix?

I just felt like when my older specials went on Netflix, a shit ton of people watched them and it also seemed to be people's preferred way of watching things — instantly, with no hassle.

What kind of artistic freedom does Netflix allow?

With standup specials, I've always had the same artistic freedom and it's unprecedented. I edit it and turn it in and go "here it is." No one gives you "notes" on standup. It's really unique in that way — to be able to deliver content and receive absolutely zero notes and still have it reach a wide audience, it's a pretty rare thing.

Do you binge watch anything on Netflix?

I destroyed season two of *House of Cards*. Shout out to Remy Danton and Freddy's Ribs.