

# DAN GABRIEL

## Quiet Funny

BY MARGARET RHEE

I decide I like comedian Dan Gabriel within the first minute I meet him. I realize my initial reaction to meeting him is the same way one reacts when seeing him on TV or on stage: he's kindly unobtrusive, endearingly handsome, and--according to him--a "quiet funny." The half-Filipino ("and half-bald white guy," he quips) stand-up comic has made appearances on Comedy Central's "Premium Blend" and NBC's "Late Friday," and performs onstage regularly at world famous comedy clubs such as the Laugh Factory and the Improv.

Earlier this year, at a comedy competition (which he won) for the failed World Asia TV network, Gabriel met producer Samuel Chi, with whom he co-created "Asia Street Comedy" for the International Channel--the first Asian American comedy show of its kind. Hosted by Gabriel, the half-hour program features a combination of sketches and stand-up routines from peers like Amy Anderson, Jo Koy, and Bobby Lee. "People watch the show," he notes "and say 'hey, he's from neither!'" Here, Gabriel talks about being Filipino, his comedic destiny, and the genesis of "ASC."

### **When did you know you wanted to do comedy?**

I was always into comedy, but I really thought I would be able to create it. When I was 16, I went to go visit my sister in New York and we walked past a comedy club, and I remember thinking, "how do you get to be a part of that?"

### **Were you funny when you were a kid?**

Everyone is funny when you're a kid; all of my friends were funny. I was a funny kid, but I wasn't the funniest, and we all made each other laugh. As we got older my jokes got more sophisticated and I was the "quiet funny." I was never the jackass who made the fart joke in the middle of class. In college, it seemed like everyone was smarter and more people got my jokes. It wasn't until college (at UC Davis) that I felt different about being funny, that I felt clearly funnier than everyone around me. It was my self-defense.

### **How did your folks respond to your career choice?**

They're fine with me being a comedian. They see me on TV and that validates what I'm doing. My sister is a ballerina that didn't go to college. And I feel they're proud of me. My grandfather got to see me on TV making lumpia a week before he died. I remember when the paramedics came to pick him up, they asked him if I was his grandson, and he said, "He's a comedian." It really validated it for me.

### **What do you identify as your ethnicity?**

Filipino American. I get shit for not being Filipino enough from those who consider themselves more Filipino than me. I think I represent the culture I was brought up. There's a lot of "half-breeds" who are half Asian and half something else. They sorta feel in between two cultures, and neither one fully accepts them. Filipinos think I'm a sellout, and white people think I'm Mexican. I still cook all the dishes with my lola (grandmother), and I grew up with the big wooden spoon and fork in the hallway and rice with every meal. Even if Catholic guilt wasn't thrown at me in Tagalog, it doesn't mean it wasn't part of my existence.

### **What's your take on ching-chong accents in comedy?**

Everyone can do the Asian accents. And it happens in every culture. There's black guys doing white guy accents, and there's white guys doing black guy accents. I think the white guys doing the Asian accents pisses me off the most because they have nothing invested in our culture, and it just seems like an easy laugh. I'm never one to go for the easy laugh, whether it's an Asian accent or a fag joke. I don't think it's funny and I won't make it funny and even if I could I don't believe in it. Growing up in San Francisco it's always faux pas to make a gay or Asian joke anyway.



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## **How did "Asia Street Comedy" happen?**

Sam Chi was hired by the International Channel to produce two shows. One was a dating show ("Object of Desire"), and I ended up being a producer on that show. We were supposed to produce another show and [Chi] asked me if I had any ideas. I put together a proposal for a show called "Comic Slant." The International Channel was like "No, we are not calling it 'Comic Slant!'" [But] they agreed to make it a pilot. We were going to call it "Remove Your Shoes" or "Offramp" or "Comedy Oriented," but basically IC said "Asia Street Comedy" is going to be the name of your show.

It was strange, because throughout the whole process we didn't know if it was going to become anything, and [that] gave us the freedom to do what we wanted and make a show we were proud of. We didn't have network executives breathing down our necks, telling us what we can or can't do. Hopefully, people see that in the final product, and I just hope people watch the show and don't try to concentrate so much on the little details that we're missing. I know with a better budget we could have had some things a little sharper, but we did the best we could with a shoestring budget.

## **In one particularly racy sketch, you get your mack on with Joy Bisco.**

When me and Joy had our kissing scene, every time we would cut, her boyfriend would look at us with evil stares. It made it even more enjoyable!

## **Apart from the obvious, what's different about "Asia Street Comedy"?**

A lot of comedy in Los Angeles is segregated, based on a theme. It's always going to be Black night or Latino night that's just how comedy is marketed here. "Asia Street Comedy" has more heart into it and is made by a team of people who put together something really unique, something that's not been done before, and it's not like just filling out a box something that's pure and funny, and using the Asian angle to get our point across to come up with a show that was our own.

## **Is there a competition amongst Asian American comedians?**

There is a competition between all comics, but I don't think I get affected by it because of the "Hapa" thing. Because I don't go out for the same roles, like the Vietnamese soldier parts, everyone is going for and being Hapa separates me and other Hapas not in direct competition with other Asian comics. Most times, I see Asian comics we are all on the show together and we all get the same time so there's not reason for that competitive feel.

But I think Asian comics as a whole feel more bonded together that's one huge positive thing is that we are a lot closer as friends than other groups. I always hear Latino comics talking shit on each other. Black comedy is like that too, there are so few Asian comics that we are a community.

## **What is one thing you love about comedy?**

Comedy is an addiction, and—like any other addiction—you feel fine if you have your fix. If I don't have my fix, I break down. I need to go on stage and write jokes. I can't imagine doing anything else.

## **What is one thing you love about being Filipino?**

One thing I love about being Filipino is how specific it is. I think a half-Chinese person and a full-Chinese person would have a lot less to talk about. I'm going to have a more in common with anyone that's Filipino because there are so many specifics in the culture. Even though they don't speak the language and I don't speak the language, there's just something in the blood that bonds me to other Filipinos. I can look around the room and point out the other Filipinos, and I can look around the room and point out the comedians, and we smell each other like highlanders.