

Laughing Matter

The Daily Show's Hasan Minhaj finds humor in race and religion in his new comedy special

Past

Hasan Minhaj had been working as a stand-up comic for 10 years, one month, and nine days when he auditioned to be a correspondent on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. It was October 9, 2014, and Stewart hired him on the spot. Minhaj wasn't a household name, but all that stand-up experience "culminated into this beautiful symphony with Jon for like 10 minutes at the desk," says the 31-year-old comic. An Indian-American Muslim from Davis, California, Minhaj brought a brand of racially based humor that was a natural fit for the program, with segments like "Muslim Makeover," in which he outlined steps on blending in to avoid discrimination: "Step number one: Change your name. If you're Muhammad, go by Mo. Salman, your name is Sal. Fatima, your name is now Craig." "Craig?" Stewart asked. "This seems humiliating, Hasan." "It is," Minhaj replied. "Call me Cody, Jon."

Present

Minhaj explores his experience as a Muslim in America in a Netflix special, *Homecoming King*, out May 23. He performed a barebones version of the show off Broadway in 2015 and across the country last fall. "Then Netflix came in," Minhaj says. "It's a grander production, bigger set with real giant LED lights." The show focuses on his upbringing, navigating being a first-generation kid while dealing with the universal angst of fitting in, heartbreak, and striving for success. It's the American Dream, analyzed through the prism of a brown man's subconscious. "I feel like my job as one of the many people carrying this torch of New Brown America is humanizing our experience by unapologetically being myself," says Minhaj, who also headlined the White House Correspondents' Dinner last month. "We're walking this tightrope of 'How much sugar do I have to put in the medicine for you to understand who I am and where I'm coming from?'"

"My job as one of the many people carrying this torch of New Brown America is humanizing our experience by unapologetically being myself."

Future

Next month, Minhaj appears in his first feature film, *Rough Night*, a comedy starring Scarlett Johansson and Kate McKinnon and directed and cowritten by Lucia Aniello of *Broad City*. Minhaj plays the groom's friend in a story about a bachelorette party that ends with the death of a male stripper. "It's like the female version of *The Hangover* meets *Weekend at Bernie's*," he says. He's also filming *Most Likely to Murder*, with Rachel Bloom and Adam Pally. "I don't know why I'm doing all these murder movies!" he says with a laugh. Although he's enjoying the big-screen work, Minhaj finds the process to be less hands-on than *The Daily Show*, where he's involved in writing and pre-production. "It was interesting to be in the situation of, 'Here's your script, go do your thing,'" he says. For Minhaj, who defines success as "getting to express yourself on your own terms," doing his thing seems to be working out very well, indeed.

