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The

Kind of COMEDY

GQ speaks to SA's favourite homeboy and comedian Trevor Noah about taking up the mantle at *The Daily Show*, his new Netflix special and staying true to his roots



NO DOUBT TOLDY

TREVOR NOAH HAS – OVER A MERE THREE YEARS – SOLIDIFIED HIS SPOT in popular culture since succeeding comedic powerhouse Jon Stewart as host of *The Daily Show*, one of America's most revered late-night talk and news satire television programmes.

Noah, now 34, was propelled into the global spotlight – and naturally, thrown to the wolves – when tasked to lead an American cultural institution. But amidst the scepticism that Noah would triumph, with scrutiny from Stewart stalwarts and TV critics alike, Noah found his voice, won over the viewership and successfully made it through one of the most historic election cycles in the US. Among numerous award nominations, *The Daily Show* under Noah now boasts a GLAAD Media Award, MTV Movie & TV Award and a Primetime Emmy Award, the latter adding to the show's existing 24. Noah's tenure has been confirmed through 2022.

And his influence extends far beyond just the show. He's 'in' with the notoriously cliquey fashion crowd, becoming a regular at the 'Oscars of the East Coast', the Met Gala, and he sits front row at fashion week. Noah continues to perform live stand-up and has landed comedy specials with the likes of Comedy Central and Netflix. *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2018.

Not since Charlize Theron has a South African managed to permeate the global entertainment industry to this degree. Trevor Noah has made it in America.

GQ: You've never shied away from being political and have said before that your comedy is often based on observing the landscape. Has that approach changed at all in the last few years?

TREVOR NOAH: No, not at all. I think, you know, coming from South Africa, we were all people growing up in a political world. I continue to learn new things about myself, I continue to get more and more involved in what's happening in the world around me, and so it's only natural that my comedy follows that path as well.

GQ: Does anything in the news genuinely shock you anymore? How do you fight news-cycle fatigue and manage to preserve your own headspace?

TN: Well, I think when you love engaging in the news and if you really enjoy what's happening, you get shocked but you still process it as it's coming to you. You know, in South Africa – whether it was Julius [Malema] or [Jacob] Zuma – it was always a character that I enjoy following, it was storylines that intrigued me, so the same happens with America. It's like when I watch *Game of Thrones*, I don't get *Game of Thrones*

fatigue, even though there's random people being killed every week. I get shocked but I don't get tired of a show that I enjoy. When you really engage in politics, you don't ever really get tired, I think, because you enjoy following the story.

GQ: On that note, which president has given you more material: Donald Trump or Jacob Zuma?

TN: [laughs] That's an interesting one. I think Trump has given me way more material just because he, unlike Zuma, communicates directly with people every single day via his Twitter account. He loves the media, he loves the spotlight, whereas Zuma generally kept to himself – you didn't hear from him all the time, you didn't see him all the time. I think that's really the big difference between them.

GQ: If you were to interview Trump, what would you ask him?

TN: It depends on what day I interview him. Every single week the question changes because every single week he's doing something new. So, it would literally depend on the week, the story and what's happening in the news. He's going from one scandal and one controversy to another. It's always changing with him, which is part of the reason that he's been so good at keeping afloat from one scandal to the next – he has so many that people don't have the time to ask him all the questions that they want to about what he's done.

GQ: Do you think this distraction is something he does on purpose, as some have speculated?

TN: No, I think that's who he is. I think part of it is him doing it on purpose, but I think a lot of it is just who he is as a human being. He was like this when he was on *The Apprentice*, he was like this before he was involved in politics. He's always been this type of guy. In many ways he just loves the spotlight and he loves being talked about, so he does a lot of that on purpose but I don't think the scandals are something he does on purpose. I think he stumbled into those.

GQ: Do you think the political and cultural environment you're in – where lots of long-standing behaviours and attitudes are being questioned and challenged – is forcing people to become more honest with themselves?

TN: That's a tough one. I don't know that that's necessarily happening and I don't know that it's not happening. I think every issue that comes up in society moves us in one direction or another, but as for individuals, I think a lot of people are willing to change, or they are open to changing their perceptions of life when it's not something that they feel fundamentally changes who they are as human beings. So that's a tough one to answer, because I don't know that it's intrinsically changing.

GQ: In terms of personal identity, how has yours evolved over the last three years?



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How has moving to the US changed your perspective of the world?

TN: Hmm. It's always tough to know how your personal identity has changed, because you're living it constantly, especially because I have friends that I've been close with for over a decade, I still associate with the same crowd – I haven't changed my social circles very much. I don't know that there's been a dramatic and drastic change in that. What I have done is that I've grown a lot, I've learnt a lot, I've worked a lot, I've explored ideas and politics in a way that I didn't maybe before, so that's probably the biggest change that I've experienced in my life.

GQ: In *Son of Patricia*, your latest Netflix special, you mention how you've had to change the way you pronounce certain words for Americans to understand.

TN: Oh yeah, I'm aware of it every day. I mean, that's fun – hoping people will understand you and trying to understand them. I enjoy it.

GQ: So people go to a country like the US where English is spoken, but as you tease in the special, they actually speak American.

TN: It's funny because it's very similar to South Africa and maybe that's great about living in SA – that you travel a lot and you speak so many different languages and there are so many different people in just SA alone, that when you move from one place to the next, you are exposed to different worlds consistently.

GQ: And with South Africa so culturally diverse, in many ways, that's not too different to America's own cultural diversity and history of immigration?

TN: Yeah, definitely. It's very diverse and very homogenous at the same time, because the one difference is many people identify as just being American and in South Africa we have all of »

our cultures, we have all of our languages in school. It's great because it gives us a perspective on different people and who we are as human beings. So I'm a big fan of being in a place where... How can I put it? I like being in a place where everyone is something different and everyone is trying to be their own thing while working together as a community – and that's what SA is in many ways. We have our challenges of course, but I think there's something fantastic in how you can still move towards the greater things in life.

GQ: You've now been at the helm of *The Daily Show* for three years. What's been one of your funniest or most memorable moments? And some of the more challenging?

TN: There are so many moments that they blur into each other. I remember how much fun I had when Jennifer Lopez came to the show. I had a ton of fun when I got to interview Barack Obama. A lot of the time my favourite moments are happening off camera or behind the scenes, which I really enjoy. When it comes to that, they blur together.

When it comes to challenges, what's really hard is not only are you moving to another country, but you're also trying to create a show that's political and funny and connects with people in an environment

GQ: In your special you make a couple of comparisons between SA and the US, so it's evident that you are still very much inspired by your South African roots. Do you think that will continue to be the case in your future specials?

TN: I would be lying if I said I had the answer to that. For me, every special has just been followed by who I am and what I'm doing. So, like, I wish I knew what my next special will be but I really don't. I create as I grow and I create as I live.

GQ: But with so much going on, practically, how do you find time to actually sit down and work on a new project?

TN: I create organically. I'm on the road every weekend. I'm travelling and I'm doing shows in every city in America, in every country I can go to in the world, so I'm always creating organically. I'm always in a space where there's constant comedy being written, there's constant material. So what I'm always trying to do is just consistently create in that space.

GQ: How would you say your stand-up differs from *The Daily Show*?

TN: Well, my stand-up can go in any direction. *The Daily Show* is fundamentally a political show,

that there's no guarantees, so I'm not performing and I love being in the space where I'm not 100 per cent sure how it's going to go.

GQ: You've maintained your comedy and business connections to SA, especially through supporting emerging talents through both live shows and streaming series. Why is it important for you to continue to support South African artists?

TN: Because I'll always be a South African artist. There were great comedians who supported me when I started out. Everybody from John Vlismas to David Kau to Joe Parker. All these people who gave me an opportunity to perform, people who helped me get out into the world. Guys like Riaad Moosa, who were great mentors to me. So when I look at that and go, 'If I have an opportunity to give anyone a chance, then why wouldn't I do that?' I love the comedians and I'm friends with many of them, so it's an easy decision for me to make as a person because it's not like I'm doing anyone a favour – I think it's just great for comedy in the world. Like now, people like Loyiso Gola, who's doing amazingly in the UK, and Loyiso Madinga who's doing fantastic in America and in Canada. I really, really enjoy that. I like to stay connected and I like for people to experience

'A LOT OF THE TIME MY FAVOURITE MOMENTS ARE HAPPENING OFF CAMERA

where many people are being disconnected by social media and news and politics at the same time. So that's been the biggest challenges: how do you share your voice in an authentic way, while still maintaining your audience?

GQ: It must have been quite nerve-racking moving from a mostly South African audience to not only the global stage, but catering to an American viewership with an entirely different political landscape?

TN: Yeah, I think it was very nerve-racking. The biggest thing was the pressure that came with it and understanding how important the show was to Americans and in America, understanding the undertaking that I was embarking on. Those were very difficult things to be able to be working towards on a show. And just making a TV show is hard enough, nevermind that the show was connected to the culture.

GQ: Apart from your mother, what was the inspiration behind *Son of Patricia*?

TN: I'm always motivated by the world. I think I choose my titles based on the essence of what my show will be about, but it's not necessarily based on the contents of the show, so really the special is based on my time and where I've been travelling to and what I've been experiencing in my life. And I think what's been really fun about that is just how all the pieces come together.

whereas my stand-up isn't a political show – it's a show about just everything that I'm experiencing, my observations on life, talking about everything from movies I enjoy to what I did on a vacation. And I can also talk about the news or what's happening in politics, but it's not defined by what's happening in the news, so that's the big difference.

GQ: And why is it so important to you to continue doing your live comedy?

TN: Because that's fundamentally how I started. That's where I have my original fans. That's where people have connected with me from the beginning and where I connected with them. And it's where I get to be 100 per cent myself with no restrictions whatsoever. There's no adverts, there's no camera, there's nothing. It's just myself and the audience engaging with one another. And so I really enjoy that because it just means I get to create for the audience in that space. Each show can be unique and authentic and it has no necessary beginning and no necessary end, so that's really enjoyable and exciting.

GQ: Despite the success of *The Daily Show* and returning to your live comedy, do you still get nervous before your own shows?

TN: Yeah, of course, all the time. Especially when you're working with new jokes, you have no clue how it's going to go. You have an idea of what you think is funny, but what's great about comedy is

the world and I like for the world to experience South Africa.

GQ: What do you want your legacy to be?

TN: I'll be honest with you, I'm not too concerned about a legacy. I've never been stressed about those things as a human being. I only hope to do good things while I'm alive, I only hope to have a good impact on other human beings while I exist. If people forget me as soon as I'm gone, I don't really mind. I think too many people focus on legacies and stress too much about what's going to happen when they're gone. I'm more focused on what's going to happen while I'm here. So, I do my best, you know, I'm in a lucky place right now where as a person I get to make money and live a really wonderful life, and so I've decided that I'll use that money, that privilege, to try and make other people's lives better in conjunction with mine. So that's all I'm trying to do.

GQ: On a not-so-heavy note, what are you currently binge-watching on Netflix?

TN: I just finished *Stranger Things* and I'm watching a few comedy specials. There are a few series that are really great that aren't shows that people really know, like this one called *Dirty Money* – it's just like a bunch of little documentaries into shady business in different ways and in different places. ❧

A full-body portrait of Trevor Noah standing against a plain, light-colored background. He is wearing a teal varsity jacket with black leather patches on the shoulders and sleeves, over a black t-shirt and black trousers. He has his hands in his pockets and is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

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As the world's leading internet entertainment service, Netflix now counts among its ranks 130 million paid memberships in over 190 countries, with SA joining the party in 2016.

With no limits on where you can watch – all you need is an internet-connected screen – Netflix allows you to be fully in charge of your viewing experience, and offers personalised TV and film recommendations. Plus, it's the official home of amazing comedy specials featuring the most iconic comedians in the world such as Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock and Kevin Hart.

Trevor Noah's first Netflix performance, *Afraid of the Dark*, is still one of the most-watched shows on the service in South Africa.

Catch his latest exclusive special, *Son of Patricia*, on Netflix now.