Eliot Glazer on winging it



April 13, 2017 - Eliot Glazer is an LA-based writer and performer who currently serves as an Executive Story Editor on the television series *New Girl.* He also writes for Comedy Central's *Broad City*, where he plays a character called Eliot (alongside his sister, Ilana Glazer). His blog, *My Parents Were Awesome*, was published as a book of essays by Random House in 2010 and his video, "Shit New Yorkers Say," has been viewed on YouTube more than four million times. He can currently be seen performing live in *Haunting Renditions*, his bi-coastal monthly night of musical comedy in which he performs cover versions of songs usually deemed guilty pleasures.

As told to T. Cole Rachel, 2273 words.

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People in comedy often say that these days you can only really succeed by doing a number of different things. Do you think that in order to be successful you've got to be an aggressive multi-tasker?

Definitely. Especially in comedy. Figuring out what I was actually best at doing came out of years of being in the comedy scene and doing all kinds of different stuff. I did live sketch comedy, I did visual stuff, web series, videos, plus my sister and I had a live show that ran at the UCB theater for three years. I was also doing stand up and storytelling and trying to bring in multimedia stuff into my shows. Ultimately I never felt fully comfortable doing any of those things. Improv comedy was fun but I never felt like I was that great at it. I'm ok at stand-up but I'm also surrounded by people who are so fucking amazing when it comes to stand-up, which just shows you how good you are *not*. I always felt like I was about halfway there when it came to any of those things. Somehow combining all of those elements—multimedia stuff, stand-up, improv—meant funneling it through this bizarre satirical music criticism. Then, somehow, actually performing new versions of bad songs became the thing that I truly feel the most comfortable doing on stage. It is the most fun for me and the easiest to do. So ultimately it had to be a mix of all these things for it to work.

So, yeah, it absolutely required me to bounce around from medium to medium and project to project and to work out what was best for me. Not coincidentally, a lot of people want to do that—try anything, do everything. Instead of putting all your eggs in one basket you're trying on different mediums and trying to see where your skills lie. Whether it's on paper, on stage, a podcast, it's different for everybody.

You've had a series of TV writing jobs and you currently work on *New Girl* and *Broad City*. How do outside projects inform doing that kind of work?

I don't know if they actually do. Often I funnel that creative energy into traditional TV show writing, but it is different for everyone. In the world of TV writing, people often work their way into it—going from production assistant to being a writer's assistant, engaging in some process where over the course of five years you really pay your dues. I didn't do that.

I came in from the outside as a comedian, and there are other comedians I know who did the same thing. Often people are writing between doing live shows, so you're feeding both parts of your life that way. But if you're on a show like *New Girl* where it's pretty intensely busy, then you're spending all your time writing and you don't get as much time to be out on the road or even do live shows around town. It all depends on the person and how much you can take on. The material you might develop in your own work may or may not have any bearing on what you are writing for the show.

For me, there is a difference in the writing I've done for *Broad City* or this other show I worked on, *Younger*. Those are a much different experience than writing for *New Girl* because *New Girl* is a big network show and we produce 22 episodes and there are big names attached to it. It is a much different animal than writing on a smaller TV show where our writers' room is no more than six people and everything falls on us. It's all different. In some sense it all works in tandem because comedy is comedy, but it really is a matter of being able to figure out ways to distribute your ideas in different formats. I don't exactly know if there's a trick to it.

Your show, *Haunting Renditions*, turns the notion of a cover song on its head in a specific way. It's funny, but it's also

surprisingly touching. How did you arrive at this kind of concept?

I wanted to put my comedic spin on pop music in a way that I'd never seen before, something that was more than just singing a silly song with silly words. It was more about recontextualizing music in order to *make* it funny. I worked with my childhood best friend, Seth, on first doing it as a web series and then decided after a little while that we should try it as a full-on show.

We started doing that in 2014 and over the past three years, it became bigger and bigger and has gone to bigger and bigger venues and festivals. It is this weird baby that we birthed together. My friend Seth produces it, every aspect of it, and my friend Mike works on it as well. He was the musical director of our a cappella group in college at NYU and he and I always shared the same sense of humor, an appreciation for the weird, a sort of a left of center sense of humor that we tried to somehow use in our a cappella group. It didn't really work that well because, as it turns out, a cappella doesn't allow for goofiness and isn't in any way funny.

So *Haunting Renditions* is sort of an outgrowth of that, too. It's an outgrowth of two relationships with two of my old friends that has evolved in a very organic way. That's why we are so happy doing it and people seem to respond to it because it really does come from this genuine place.

So much "musical" comedy that I've seen is just people with one instrument, parodying a song or singing a song that's a goofy version of another song. It's so recycled and tired. What I'm trying to do is really to recontextualize music in a way that is a bit more challenging. I love when people come up to me after the shows and say they weren't sure what to do, if they were supposed to laugh or supposed to be moved and that the whole thing was kind of confusing. To me that is the best response you can get because you want the show to be a little bit indefinable, so that is the highest compliment for me.

In creative careers there is generally no clear path for success, no clear way to tell someone how to move from Point A to Point B in order to secure the kind of job they want. You sort of have to invent the path. This seems particularly true in comedy.

Yeah, it is really interesting. When I left NYU my first job was as an office PA for a production company. As much as I enjoyed the job and really appreciated my coworkers and bosses, I never wanted to stick around there and put in the years and years of work required to rise in the ranks until I became a producer of reality documentary television or something. For me that job was a means to an end, honestly. It was a great way to figure out how editing works and the bosses there were kind enough to let me borrow equipment all the time to make my own stuff, so it really was from the very beginning an experience and an education in being resourceful. That's when I jumped into the comedy community, too, and met all these other people who had to be resourceful and who weren't handed stuff on a silver platter and had to make their own way. We all figured it out together. It was kind of a magical time in the comedy scene in New York. Everything felt very communal and making things required taking a multi-faceted approach to everything, a willingness to just wing it.

What is your advice for kids who are trying to get involved with comedy? Is it just a matter of doing it yourself, making it yourself, getting together with a bunch of your friends and creating your own thing?

Yes. No one is going to do it for you, you have to do it yourself. Especially if you want to make content for yourself—you have to do it and find the resources and sacrifice the money and sacrifice your free time and just dive into it. And if it is good stuff that you are making or doing you will find a way to get it to the masses and get funding—or maybe *not* get funding—but at least insert yourself into a community that will hopefully understand you and support you. Or someone else in the community might help and bring you along on their ride.

Your work often plays around with the notion of guilty pleasures. Pop music is often seen as a guilty pleasure or a somehow lesser kind of art, as is comedy sometimes.

A guilty pleasure is so real. I have tons of my own guilty pleasures. I think at this point, it's like everyone wants to be quirky and by being quirky you are forgiven for having guilty pleasures. You don't keep your guilty pleasures a secret anymore, you actually make them as public as possible so people know how dynamic and quirky you *really* are.

It's all a great source of comedy. I think now, rather than a pop song that makes you feel guilty for life, the guilty pleasure is more about a sound that's outright terrible that you just happen to like. It's not just something that makes you feel guilty but something where you're just like, "This is unbearable but I can't stop." I find that's funny, especially with music. For a long time we were in a bubble where genuine terribleness was dominating pop music. Like, the

Black Eyed Peas had some *really* shitty stuff. Then there was an abundance of meta-trashy music that was satirizing being trashy but still followed that same trajectory of trashiness. Then we were hit with Adele and everything became about being authentic. You believe her, you *fully* believe her. Even someone like Lana Del Rey, people view her with such reverence because she is such a specific type of authenticity, even though some people might argue she's completely inauthentic. It's an interesting moment now where people don't want the fledgling pop star, they want the real thing. We've left room for people to have those guilty pleasures, which is great for someone like me.

You have a lot of things that you're working on, but do you have some kind of dream project?

I developed a show last year that had to be put on the back burner, but I'm definitely always working on projects that are dream projects. A variety show version of *Haunting Renditions*, a somewhat autobiographical comedy about my crooked view of the world as a frustrated gay guy. But yeah, there are a bunch of projects that are dream projects that we are in the process of trying to pitch and sell and get up and running. It's not a complaint at all, but when you get locked into working on a network show, negotiations get tricky so it becomes a delicate balance. Ultimately, I'm still someone who is hyper focused and I understand that it is all a matter of timing.

In the meantime, you just keep doing everything.

Recommended by Eliot Glazer:

Lenny Dykstra — Yes, I'm from New York and yes, I'm a Mets fan. But all I care about when it comes to Lenny Dykstra are his appearances on Howard Stern. I'm a HUGE Stern fan, and Lenny Dysktra's handful of interviews over the past 6 months have become the stuff of legend. He basically whispers everything in a creepy, pervy voice because he is, indeed, a creepy perv. He considers himself a master of pussy eating, and has no sense of humor about it. It's terrifying and enchanting. I think he's a homophobe, too, which makes it easier to find him repellent.

The Fosters— Call me an angsty tween, but I love this melodrama about 2 lesbians and a house full of their adopted kids. Plus, it's a Craftsman, so it counts as real estate porn, too. It's just where I want to be all the time: wrapped up in blankets knowing my lesbian mommies are OBSESSED with my well-being. Also, Teri Polo is SO butch. It's awesome.

Who Weekly? — As a comedian, it can be weird to hear your own friends' podcasts, but Lindsey Weber and Bobby Finger are brilliant in their pontification of "whos" vs. "thems," or famous people you should know and those you shouldn't (or don't). Seriously, WHO IS JOY VILLA?

Sound Baths — It's SUCH an annoying LA trend, but as someone who doesn't buy into New Age schlock, I can't say enough about sound baths. They're basically giant group naps where a leader (and sometimes a small band of instrumentalists) will use music and ambient noise to lull you into slumber and meditative sleep. I'm addicted.

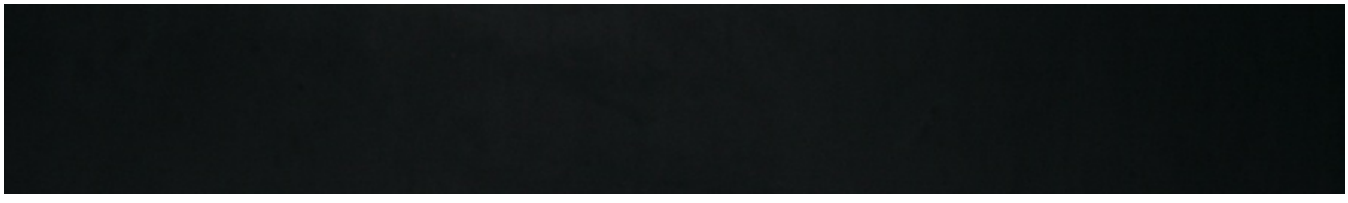
Tronicbox — Some Canadian dude named Jerry Shen takes pop music vocals and re-writes songs by Ariana Grande, Katy Perry, and Justin Bieber and turns them into '80s FM radio jams. The artwork for the singles is equally hypnotic as the tracks. Let's just say that, at this point, I listen more to Tronicbox's Ariana Grande than Ariana Grande's Ariana Grande.

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Vocation
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Fact

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Robin Van Swank