

Josh Fadem on putting in the time



June 27, 2017 - Josh Fadem is an actor and comedian based in Los Angeles. He plays the cameraman Joey Dixon on *Better Call Saul*, Liz Lemon's agent Simon Barrons on *30 Rock*, and Phil Busby on *Twin Peaks*. He's written for *The Eric Andre Show* and directed a number of his own shorts. Fadem has been a regular performer at UCB Comedy since the Los Angeles theater opened in 2005 and hosts his own weekly series, *Loosey Goosey*.

As told to Brandon Stosuy, 3116 words.

Tags: Comedy, Process, Beginnings, Anxiety, Inspiration.

You write comedy, do stand-up, and act. Nowadays, everyone has social media or a YouTube channel. With those kinds of things happening, if you tried to start from zero right now, would it be harder than it was 10 years ago to break into "show business"?

I don't know if there's an easy yes or no answer. It's dependent on how into social media you are. How into promoting yourself are you? How aggressive are you with creating material? It's probably the same, to a degree, but maybe now there are more avenues to get material out there and workshop it in front of an audience. Whereas maybe, I don't know, 15 years ago, your options were to hit an open mic, to go to a live show. I'm not saying that I'm good at social media. I don't have a big Snapchat following or anything like that... and maybe the content that is made there isn't necessarily the stuff that I'm interested in, you know what I mean?

How do use social media to help you with your career?

I tweet. I put Instagram things up. I don't tweet anything too personal. I just try to promote shows, and if I think of something funny, I'll put it up there. But I'm not super aggressive about trying to get a major following. I know there are some comedians who are really good at doing online stunts or taking that sensibility and putting it to use. There's a comedian named Jamie Loftus who's really funny and she's got a sense of humor that I really like, and she uses social media well, where I don't even realize that she's using social media to do it, I just think of it as funny. Just being like, "Check out my vlog!" Or whatever. She's younger so she probably understands it in a way that I don't.

You grew up in Oklahoma. Was moving to Los Angeles to be a comedian something your family supported or was it a tricky thing to decide to do for a living?

I had a guidance counselor in high school who said, "Don't do that. You're not going to go to L.A." Whatever. I think I wanted to go to film school. I was like, "I like movies. I'm funny." Then it turned into comedy and all the other stuff. I figured it's all the same. So, yeah, I came out to do L.A., baby!

I have pretty supportive parents. They may not have understood it completely when I was younger, and then I may not have even been able to phrase what I was trying to do, but I have an older brother and he went the pretty traditional college and business school route and so I think they were like, "Well he's doing that and Josh was..." I was always a little bit more of an oddball kid. Probably every step along the way was always different for me. I was in the learning disability class, but also the creative and talented class at the same time, and kids would come up to me like, "Are you dumb or are you smart?" "I don't know." Good mix of both. Those things are a good indicator for, "Okay, he's just always going to have to figure it out."

When did you decide what you were doing was going to be doing it as a professional versus as a hobby?

When I did stand up and got laughs. I did comedy theater when I was in my early 20s, but I kept meaning to go to college and then I kept saying I was going to go to college to people who asked because that's what people ask people in their early 20s. "You go to college? What are you studying?" Stuff like that. I did comedy theater and then I did standup once and I bombed terribly and I thought, "Oh, I'll never do that again." Then I did it one more time half a year later and then I got laughs and I was like, "I'm just going to tell people I'm a comedian." Then I was fully into that idea, and then I got more into working on being an actor as well.

How did you first get people to pay attention to your work?

I've just been around a long time. In terms of Hollywood, it's been a slow, continuous build. The turtle wins the race, or at least stays in it.

You're on Twin Peaks now. You were on 30 Rock. You've had acting success, and you still do stand up pretty regularly.

I do. I'm pretty much always doing standup when I'm not getting work elsewhere. It's a mix of staying loose, and if I'm traveling, I get to do my act in front of a crowd that probably hasn't seen it in a while. I usually only perform in L.A., so it's nice to have a fresh audience and not someone who's seen you multiple times.

Do you book things yourself that way or do you have a booking agent or a manager that handles that sort of thing?

I just usually reach out to folks. Like, "Hey, you know any shows?"

Or things come to me. If I'm excited by an offer, I will maybe get back myself. But I do also have representation that does stuff. It's case by case. If some people reach out to you, and you're excited by what they're asking, you'll say, "Yeah, I'm free!" In other cases, you just forward it to you rep, and their rep contacts the person and says, "He's not free."

I'm known a bit for doing physical comedy. I've had people contact me like, "Hey can you come do this thing where you fall down a bunch?" And you're like, "Eh, I broke my wrist one time." But if you trust everyone involved, then you probably do it. It depends.

Sometimes people end up being identified as a specific character they played. How do you avoid that and also maintain the Josh Fadem who's writing comedy and doing your own bits?

I don't have enough things for that. If I'm lucky I'm in "that guy" status. Oh, he's "that guy." I think as long as you're in that zone, you can do whatever you want. No one's telling me, "You got to do the one thing that you do," because a lot of people don't know the one thing that I do. I guess some people who know me are like, "Can you come do the falling down a bunch?"

Sometimes I'll get offered things specifically that are physical and if I wind up wanting to do it, which usually I do, I try to stick something in there that's different from the other things. Or maybe there's a different character that I can play or just even being silly with it or playing dress-up. I don't think I'm pigeonholed because I have only a modest following.

Is there a certain benefit to that?

I hope I get in a position where I'll be able to make whatever I want someday. I don't really get hounded by people familiar with my work and if people do say something than it's usually nice and I like that.

A luxury and a benefit to not being majorly in the spotlight is being able to workshop material. I heard a story about an art teacher-maybe it was mine in high school, I can't remember-who told the students they could turn in a piece every day and it didn't matter the quality of it, or they could turn in one at the end of the semester but it had to be great. Most of the ones who turned in one were crap and most of the daily students made a lot of interesting work. I think about that a lot.

Also, if you do the silly thing, or the low pressure thing, you can work up to doing the high-pressure thing-then you're like, "Great, I'm proud of the high-pressure thing!" Then someone's like, "Hey, I loved that low-pressure thing and you're like, "Hmm, maybe I need to bring some of that low-pressure stuff to the high-pressure stuff and the high pressure to the low pressure," etc.

What've been useful resources for you as you've developed your career and developed your practice? Is it basically a community of other comedians and other writers that you're working with or are there any tools that you've used that you find useful to go back to?

A lot of it is being a part of a community and finding like-minded people. A lot of it is having the urge to find resources, to look for them, to find inspiration. Having a process. The thing that bogs me down the most with any kind of creative endeavor where I'm like, "I don't know what to do," is usually when I don't have a process and I'm like "I have no idea how to do this." I brainstorm ideas. It's like, "How about this idea? How about this idea?" Then you go from there and think, "Here's how we'll do this; here's how we'll do that." It's like, "Wow, I have a process for how to make this. This is amazing."

I worked at an archival video store for 10 years. It was like my home, like a clubhouse, where I'd always go even when I wasn't working. They had every movie and so if there's something that's like, "Hey I have an idea about a German sex romp. I'm going to watch every movie of that genre." Or every movie with a dentist character, or whatever. Whatever horror franchises I haven't caught up on. There's also a lot of experimental films there and different concerts. If there's something where I need every movie where someone plays someone with a limp then I can go digging and be like, "Where are all the limping guy movies? Okay here's my list of limping guy movies. Okay we have about 40 of them." But that's not a resource everyone is fortunate to have. You can find a lot on the internet, though, I guess.

I like sometimes to get obsessive about a reference. If I care about something then I'll try to do as much as I can to be prepared for it. I think collaborating with people that you know and like is always a good thing, too. I'm not a very good editor, but I

know people who are.

You just find people with like interests and then you communicate what you want to do with them.

Having an editor can be helpful. It's nice having people point out when you fall into a comfort zone, or are unintentionally lazy with your work. It's a good exercise, seeing if you can create something without using things that you fall into.

I wish I had someone who would bust me on those things, to be honest. Sometimes you don't know what yours are until someone calls you out on it. That's another thing: If you think about who your favorite comedians are, when they get older, you're like, "Why aren't they funny anymore?" It's maybe because they've surrounded themselves with people who keep telling them that everything they do is great. That's a good thing to look at creatively. Or looking at movies where someone has too much power. Like The Last Movie, that Dennis Hopper movie, or something else where it's like, "You got too much and you did too much. You should've done less." I'm just saying you can find some neat things with restrictions.

If you have a creative block, does having a process help you get out of that?

Yeah. The downside for me is, say I have something that I know is out of my comfort zone in terms of my ability, the discipline comes in where I know I have to do this thing that's out of my comfort zone when it would be so much easier to get the immediate satisfaction from doing the thing that's in my comfort zone and get the positive response 10 times over.

Standup is an easy metaphor. If I have a solid five minutes, but I want to work on this joke that doesn't really go well, but I think it's going to work at some point, it'd be much easier to do the five minutes and not work on the thing that may not work.

Same with writing. I don't know, there's a character I've been trying to write but it's not really something I can easily improvise, I have to actually sit down and write it, and writing is just harder for me. It takes more discipline. Or if the idea's not immediately coming to my head then it's like, "Ugh." I got to click around and research and find something to imitate or whatever and that's just about budgeting your time, I guess. I think it's that organization thing.

What makes you freeze up?

I have a hard time anytime I feel like I'm auditioning. So, even if it's clearly a big showcase, I like to find a way to convince myself that it doesn't matter. Sometimes doing the stupidest thing imaginable... It's my own little mental "fuck you" to it. "Look at how stupid I am! Here I am Radio City Music Hall. I'm going to put a diaper on as a bib," or something like that. Not that I've done that or would... but maybe I would. I don't know. Only a few people came.

It's helpful finding a way to have a high pressure situation be low pressure. Not being afraid to be bad. Not being afraid to make something that sucks. Not being afraid to fail. I think all those things are good things, and you find new things, and you learn new things when you do it. It's almost like that with drawing. I casually draw, and sometimes trying to draw really badly you find some new fun way of drawing.

Do you ever have something where you'll write something and you're really excited about it and then you go to perform it and it just doesn't work?

Yeah, for sure. I think nowadays I'm a little more trusting of my judgment where I'm like, "Alright, if it didn't work, that's on me. I need to find a better way to communicate it or set it up." I may not be setting up what's funny about it. I just need to find a new way to get it out there.

Some comedians I've spoken to talk about using social media as a testing ground, but I imagine actually delivering something live is something you can't recreate until you actually deliver it live.

I think it's case by case. There are some jokes I've tweeted and then I've said them onstage and they got laughs. Then they've evolved into things that have been one-liners or longer bits, and then there are other things that came from the show I host weekly. That's another thing that I do. I have shows that I host weekly where I go up there with no plan and just ramble. Sometimes you find nothing and sometimes you find a lot. Then I'll try to remember if I said something funny or got some laughs off something to stick it in there.

Do you ever take time off?

There's an element of self-care I have to remember, where I sometimes will do a day where I'm like, "Make sure you do nothing today." I have to write it down. I have a day-planner that I write everything in. I use a phone, so I put a big X on the day. Saturday-X. Nothing on Saturday.

But in terms of "I'm taking a vacation" or "I'm on holiday"... I don't like doing that. Maybe if it's the holidays, I'll go home and hang out with my family, but even then I'm still thinking about what I've got to do when I get back. So I'd rather be working; I like doing stuff.

I go through phases where I like to say yes to everything even if I think it's going to be a total piece of shit. It's an opportunity to do something. A lot of the things I thought were going to be really bad, as an actor particularly, maybe it's not my job to judge a part. I've got a big, snobby critical mind, but maybe it's not my job to decide whether it's going to be good or not. It's my job to figure out a character.

Obviously, there are bad times along the way where you're like, "This is frustrating" or "I need a break." I've had, like anyone, my fair share of big career rejections or things that I thought were going to work out better or whatever and they didn't, but I'm grateful for them because if you're still in it, they'll make you better. It gives you a stronger perspective. I generally don't do any kinds of vacations, though.

It's like you said, with the turtle. If you don't like what you're doing, it's hard to be slow and steady like the turtle.

The turtle's having a good time. He's not having a bad time, is he? I don't know; I've got to look at the fable again.

Josh Fadem recommends:

5 GO-TO THINGS I THINK OF WITHOUT THINKING TOO HARD:

a boob
a butt
the name jerry
soft cookies not that crunchy shit
my dog bobby

5 FAMOUS MOVIE QUOTES I GOT WRONG:

"Forget the chopsticks Jake? it's Chinatown."
"King Kong ain't got shit on me-I just saw it on TV it sure is a classic though!!!"
"This whole world is Wal-Mart and weird on top."
"Have you seen what a .44 magnum could do to a woman's tushy?"
"I love the smell of Napalm in the morning, smells like Vicks vapor rub."

5 THINGS THAT DON'T GOT NOTHIN TO DO WITH EACH OTHER:

the suit that michael hutchence wears in the music video for "new sensation"
this sign that hangs in my apartment that is a family heirloom I just like it
this underrated movie called "hallelujah the hills" check it out
this nice lady who knows about charts and zodiacs told me I should wear more colors
this book called "psychopath free" about sociopath and narcissist red flags

Name

Josh Fadem

Vocation

Comedian

Fact

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