

On being present in the moment

Comedian and actor Jade Catta-Preta discusses finding your voice, letting go of expectations, and controlling your own weather.

December 11, 2023 -

As told to Greta Rainbow, 1796 words.

Tags: [Comedy](#), [Acting](#), [Process](#), [Beginnings](#), [Focus](#), [Inspiration](#).

You performed last night as part of the New York Comedy Festival. How did you prep for your set?

I did no prep. I like to be hanging out and talking to someone and being surprised when they call my name up on stage. I hate the prep. I hate the time in between getting ready and the show.

At first I was worried I was in the wrong place because all these other people were doing sets before yours. How did you gather up your openers?

I met [Mario \[Adrion\]](#) doing these "German versus Brazilian" videos. [Casey Balsham](#) and I came up together about 15 years ago and I think she is one of the best writers and female comics ever. When I started doing comedy, there were not a lot of women in the game, which is crazy. I didn't start in the 1800s. It was the early 2000s and it was still a super boy's club, and I didn't get a lot of opportunities from other women. I don't fault them because it felt competitive in a way where we couldn't join together because there was only ever one spot and we all wanted it. So I like to give opportunities to people that I feel like have something special but don't get the deserved time on stage. What we do is a trading game. It's a question of, "How can we help each other?," and it's not in an opportunistic way. I just want to work with my friends.

I have a love-hate relationship with standup. When I'm doing it too much on the road, I get really burnt out and forget to have fun and forget why I love to do it in the first place, which is to connect with people. Last night when a guy in the audience sang back to me, I was like, "Oh my god, should I only be doing shows here, where people burst into song?"

What do you do when you're burnt out or creatively stuck?

I love mindless TV. I like having a *Real Housewife* talking in the background while I write. And walking is a good way to break it up. I go to the beach. Up until two months ago, I was a big pothead. I stopped smoking weed. I still eat it, if I'm partying! But it's the first time in my adult life I don't regularly smoke and it's been a big shift for me.

How has that shift changed you creatively?

It's making me more inspired. I thought weed helped me but in reality it was slowing me down. I didn't notice I was in such a pattern of, "Now I get home and it's 6:00 and I smoke weed." I was wasting so much time. It was my self-sabotage, in a way. Now nothing is holding me back. It's time. I'm taking this period I've had off [from acting] to write a completely new hour. It's exciting, and horrifying, too. Stuff has to eat shit. It's not going to be good, or anything close to it, right away.

How do you revise and test out material?

I like to write onstage. I like to say a funny thing that happened to me out loud and see if any part of it gets a laugh, then take the little moment that got the laugh and expand on it. I wish I was a more studious person. I have drawers full of notebooks filled with random sentences. In one I found a note that said, 'wet lettuce.' That's it. What about it? What about wet lettuce? I know that I don't like it, but where is the joke?!

What is it "time" for?

I'm excited to be done with this current run. There's some kind of evolution that needs to happen...When I was in college, at Emerson, there wasn't a comedy major. There is now, not that I would have even taken it—I was very dedicated to being a *film* actress with a comedic *background*. I remember seeing other comics do standup and thinking, "Why would you do this? It's a poor man's theater." Of course, I fell in love with it. But I can't be on this plane forever.

[The future project] is definitely something with music. A variety show vibe. I wish I'd recorded video last night because the piano player was so fun. That's what makes me horny for performing. I joked that he was my lifelong friend but I didn't know him. We had just met. What if he was horrible? Which has happened, by the way. I got this guy to play for me at a club and he wouldn't listen to me when I said to stop, so I had to go against his music. Then sometimes it clicks and it's magic. I'm constantly chasing that dragon of the unknown working out great.

That requires a lot of faith in other people.

I think that's why I get so exhausted right beforehand—because of the fear. It does hit you for a second. David Koechner said to me, "You decide how the show is going to go ahead of time." I think that's brilliant. You visualize it already going a certain way, and you give yourself one thing to focus on. And it's not, like, "I'm going to work on crushing it." It's deciding to focus on your posture so that during your set you remind yourself to stand up a little straighter. My thing yesterday was deciding I wasn't going to judge myself and that I was going to do whatever feels funny to me. Expectation ruins everything. Sometimes it works and other times I feel like shit on stage, but it's always better if I'm enjoying what I'm doing when I'm up there.

So much of your writing is about your own life. How do you choose what parts to share?

I keep nothing. No, I'm kidding. I have chronic oversharing. I like to make people feel like they've known me for 15 years, to make people feel at ease. I don't want to say "manipulation" because that has a negative connotation, but I do actively try to create a sense of safety. When people are watching something, they want to know that they're being taken care of, that their time is not being mishandled. Part of me feels like I'm lying to an audience if I don't share every detail of what's going on with me. That's what makes a piece feel real. Lately I keep more to myself. My friend told me, "The healthier you get in your life, the less you want to do standup."

When I came out as gay in my personal life, it was anticlimactic. So it's been nice to have the standup platform to feel like I'm coming out in a legitimate way. I feel like I never got to talk about it and I would be annoyed when other comics did. And now it's all I talk about. I had this inner homophobia towards comics like Cameron Esposito because that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to be one of the women who are super comfortable with themselves. It's also nice having less men hate-watch me and more women find me and relate to me.

What is your relationship to posting your work online?

It's so funny—I'll work on a joke forever, I'll finally get a good video of it, and it'll get, like, 50,000 views. Okay, whatever. Then of course I do a dumb video with Mario and it gets 2 million. Is most of the population wanting content that's quick and easy? What is it that makes something approachable? I'm trying to write an esoteric, pedantic piece about being a lesbian and I keep getting caught on who I'm doing it for. It always is that question. Are you doing it for a reaction or are you doing it for yourself? Are you creating

something that you love or something that needs to get views? There's a shallowness to things made for social media. I look at my Instagram and I think there's some for you, some for me, some for you. I'll sprinkle in things that are kind of dumb but are in service of having more of a platform for reachability when I need it in the future. Instead of hating the Internet, I'm using it as another tool. I'm making the best of it and not letting it manipulate my mood too much. I'm trying to control my own weather.

I love that.

That's my girlfriend talking.

In your set you mentioned her a little bit, specifically that she's a private person. Was it a negotiation to determine how much she would be incorporated into your work?

No. I just want to be respectful and make her feel safe. Really early on when we started dating, she basically said, "I don't want you to make jokes about me." And I'm so vain, I said to her, "I want all *your* art to be about me." Her friends saw me perform for the first time last night. I was nervous because I do a thing where I'm flirtatious with audience members and I didn't want them to get the wrong idea. My girlfriend is a visual artist and has a different experience and doesn't get why my friends don't come to my shows. This is what I do for a living. I do it so much and have been doing it for so long, I'm past the point of telling everyone, "Hey guys, come out!" I will be there regardless.

Jade Catta-Preta Recommends:

Five tips for comics:

If there's anything else you could do for a living that you also enjoy, do that instead.

As a comic, I'm constantly in need of instant gratification, but when it comes to a long career in this business, it's helpful to look at it as "planting seeds." Not all the flowers are gonna grow right away, but it's important to always tend to your garden and know that soon enough, something will bloom.

When you're starting comedy, find a group of like minded folks who are also starting. It's important to have support and people who keep you motivated. Plus getting free rides to open mics doesn't hurt.

Don't compare yourself to others. Comparison-itis is a disease that only focusing on yourself can cure.

Don't write to be funny. Write to have a point of view and let the funny come from the honesty. (Insert fart joke here for drama and hypocrisy).

Name

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Vocation

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