May 8, 2017 - Eric Wareheim is an actor, comedian, writer, and director. He is half of the comedy duo Tim & Eric, who have been making TV shows, movies, books, and music for 20 years. Wareheim also acts, produces, and directs on the Netflix series, *Master of None*.

As told to Hannah Street Elliott, 2441 words.

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Eric Wareheim on working with people you love and trust

How do you stay efficient and productive working with creative partners who are also close friends?

Tim [Heidecker] and Aziz [Ansari] are pretty much the same people. They're hugely motivated, hugely talented, hugely warm, and generous people. They don't have a huge ego. The big thing with partnerships is if you can go into it realizing, "Alright, let's put aside our ego and just make the best thing." It's not about who wrote what. It took Tim and me a while to get over that hurdle. When I was working with Tim, we were young and bickering about jokes and stuff. Then we realized, that doesn't matter. What matters is that we continue making work and making bigger work.

I make a lot of stuff on my own as well, but there's something nice about having someone that you trust to bounce every idea off. Often times, I'll come up and be like, "What do you think about this? I'm not sure." With someone you trust, you just get through the day faster. The big reason Aziz wanted me as a producer [for *Master of None*] is because he's in every shot. I can sit behind the monitors and watch him; I'm quality control. I just tell him, "This is getting too emotional. This is cheesy. This is too hard." It's hard to direct *and* be on camera. With both Tim and Aziz, we've found this really good dynamic of being efficient and trusting each other to make the end product badass.

It's fun, too. It's fun to have your friend on set and be doing silly stuff. Sometimes, especially being in Italy [for *Master of None*], you don't know anybody. It's intense work. You're waking up at 4:00 a.m., being funny at 4:30 a.m. It's good to have your bros there to be like, "This is insane." And every night, we would go out and just drink wine and eat cheese.

How do you balance all your different projects (*Tim & Eric*, *Master of None*, your solo work) and keep things feeling fresh?

Tim and I are celebrating the 10-year anniversary of our first big sketch show [*Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!*]… I can't believe we've been working at it for 20 years. We've been friends for 20 years but working professionally for 10. That's super rare. It's really good to have breaks. I think the last couple years have made us able to continue. Tim did some personal projects; I did some personal projects. It keeps you fresh if you're out in the world. Then when Tim and I come back together we're like, "*Oh*, we're fully energized and ready."

I found that ever since I started getting paid for this lifestyle, I've been traveling every weekend I can. Travel is so important for inspiration. Just, culturally, being somewhere else. Then, you have this new mental energy when you get back. You see things differently.

I don't hang out with any comedians or any actors in my private life. Pretty much none. I feel that is another reason why every week I'm motivated to work. I'm inspired by all these other people; artists, musicians, social workers, whatever. I think a lot of people come to L.A. and they just get sucked into the comedy world.

What do you feel like you learn from hanging out with people outside of the comedy/film realm?

Well, it's cool. I hang out with a lot of artists, a couple people from Miami that have changed my whole world. I'm getting hard in L.A., just hating everyone in the entertainment industry—that gets you down. You realize that most of the world are not narcissistic, egotistical people. These guys I hang out with came from Miami, which is like a real city. It's a really tough, beautiful city. They come from fine art and they look at my work as art, too, which I thought was so cool.

They think I'm on the same level with them but what I see them doing is the most pure vision… the purest form of art is no notes. You're just doing it yourself. You're not making it for money. You're just making this thing. That, to me, reminds me every day that that should be my focus when I'm working. How can I make this pure and not think about the Hollywood aspects of it and the marketability of it? That's what I draw from those guys. It's also just different conversations. You're talking about life versus what movies

you saw last weekend.

You make music videos for people sometimes, like Beach House, Major Lazer, even the unofficial official video for Kanye West's "Famous". How do you approach making something for someone else?

Early on I made a couple videos for people that were my friends. I did that before coming to L.A. and it was really my obsession, my passion. I had one of my early music videos for The Bird and the Bee on MTV, when they still put videos on like seven, eight years ago. I grew up on MTV and being on MTV was the most powerful thing, even more than having my own TV show.

The videos are just my weird ideas and usually the band is like, "Okay, let's go for it." Other times, the band has some ideas and most of the time I shy away from that because there's a million directors they can get to just make their vision. To me, if I want to make a music video, I want it to be a part of my work.

I'll think about ideas and send them a treatment and they're usually like, "This is crazy but let's do it." I wrote a treatment for Kanye West and he was really into it. Then at the last minute, he was like, "This is just too crazy, I can't do this." That might've been the craziest thing I've ever written. When I'm workshopping ideas, I get really into it. It was commenting on Kanye and his position in media… I thought he should do it. We just became friends and talked every once in awhile. It came up to the point of getting something done and then he would either freak out or he had another thing coming up, but it was interesting… I really love working with musicians.

What is necessary for you to be in the right state of mind to be creative?

I spent last year in New York and Italy shooting and then I took a vacation to Tokyo. When I came back to L.A. I had such shell shock being around such douchebags everywhere I went. It was hard. Then I realized, that's what I need to create. It's sort of like when Tim and I first moved to L.A., we landed here and we were like, "Holy shit." This place is beautiful but it's also filled with billboards of people promoting themselves, all the commercialism, and all the money. It was so gross that it made our show good, I think. We were truly reflecting our environment.

I feel that right now, too. I was kind of depressed being back in L.A. I was thinking it's not as cool as New York. I'm not walking out on the street and bumping into some weird Brazilian dancer or something. It's very different here. Then I wrapped my head around it, I was like, "No, this is perfect." I need to have this energy of grossness to create, to have that spirit to work hard and create things that are making fun of this world.

I haven't really had writer's block yet. But it depends, when I was in New York working with Aziz, I was writing this movie. Then I tried to write when I came back to L.A. and I couldn't put one word on a page. It's really interesting, I can't wait to be back in New York because I'm going to sit down and just finish this movie. It's all about your location and the people you're around.

I find that I keep a certain crew of friends around that inspire me. It's really about curating a life and going to certain things that will make you happy but also further your creativity. I feel like I actively decide on what I'm going to do every day. Some days I'm lazy but other days I'm like, "I'm going to this thing, even though I don't know what this thing is." Going to art stuff, performance art, dance, music, that kind of stuff, you get little glimmers of, "Ooh, that's a technical thing I could use," or, "that's a feeling I want to try to communicate." I don't get that when I sit down and watch TV.

Why do you think being uncomfortable, portraying that, or making other people uncomfortable is important? Why do you want to capture that?

I think it's a two-part answer. One is when I grew up as a kid, I was really tall. I was 6'7" and 100 pounds, just a gangly monster of a kid. I was always uncomfortable and awkward and just super sensitive about my body. I didn't really hang out with the cool kids. There's a feeling of wanting to fit in or being awkward or trying things, that has always been a part of my work. I always draw from that. Then it's partly because of what we grew up on in Philly, we started collecting videotapes of newscasts gone wrong or a guy doing a weird song. It was so bad and people were like smiling and laughing. We just thought that was so funny and so interesting and we latched onto that.

Then we moved to Hollywood and we realized everyone here is just faking it. They're faking being happy, faking being pretty, faking being comfortable. Everyone is awkward, everyone has a little bit of social anxiety. We started playing with that. There's so many of these videotapes that we would watch of people trying to make a reel or a film. Like Tommy Wiseau's *The Room* is a prime example. That's so awkward. It's this guy trying to make a normal film and *that* is unbelievable.

I feel like we were successful in recreating that. Making things feel real. I like playing with the audience… making them think, "What is this? Who is this? Is this person real? Is it an actor? Is it a guy off the street?" I like the mystery of it a lot because most of the time, everything's so spelled out for you and you can just research everything to death. What I want is to have this magical moment that you really can't describe.

Are you shifting how you're approaching making comedy in 2017, like with the darkness of *Bedtime Stories*, in response to it being such a bleak and terrifying time politically?

Tim is very active in making amazing anti-Trump stuff right now. But for us, it gives us motivation to go

even deeper, the more fucked up our world gets. Even if it's a dark time, media is getting so normalized. I had this conversation the other night… We were talking about *Enter The Void*, the Gaspar Noé film. I feel that, I just haven't seen many cool films come out. Maybe there are at the art houses and stuff, but on the larger scale, I feel like everything's being marginalized and just very blasé, boring.

That gives us inspiration to just go harder on our work. The things that I love are things that move me, whether it's laughing or crying, that's our goal. *Bedtime Stories* is going to take you in a direction where you're going to laugh but you also see this other side of humanity that's really fucked up. I like that Lars von Trier feeling, when you're like, "this is the saddest thing I've ever seen." I'm still very into that and trying to communicate that feeling through a TV show. It's about making stuff so that there's not a nice clip that you can tweet. It's frustrating and hard to write about.

Having reached a point in your career where you don't have to prove yourself so much, and people trust your vision, does that change the way you think about your own work and how you approach it? Are you more intimidated or do you see it as being empowering?

The last thing [Tim and I] just put out are these new tour promos. When I put that out, I was like, "This is the same thing I was making 20 years ago. There's almost no difference." I felt so proud of that. The fact that it was still this crazy, experimental thing that wasn't really giving you much information but I felt like that was so true to the core of us. I felt like, "Man, we haven't lost that spirit yet."

We've reached this level where people are imitating us, which is so funny and flattering. So now, it's like where do we go? Tim and I constantly push ourselves. With the new *Bedtime Stories* it's like how much darker can we get? Can we make this look like a film? It is this is a whole new set of rules that I'm excited about trying.

Tim and I are hustlers, man. We come from Philly and we know we were given this chance and we use every moment to further our lives and further our careers. Like, I'm writing a film right now, which is very… It's almost not even a comedy. I know that *Master of None* increased my popularity a little bit, so I started meeting with movie people right away. That was my first thought.

I was like Billy Hustler. I was like, "I've got to use this momentum." I don't feel like I've reached the point where I want to stop… I still have a lot of things to say. I also love swimming in the beaches of the Mediterranean half the time, but the other time, I still have that drive.

<u>5 things I hate by Eric Wareheim:</u>

People that forget to brush their teeth.

Friends who bring gas station wine to my birthday party.

White man wearing fashion turban in Silverlake.

White man wearing large white hat with feather danglers.

Naughty cats in the morning.

Vocation
Filmmaker, Comedian, Actor

Fact
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