



RUSHI KOTA

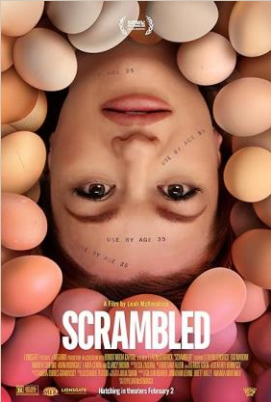
Press Kit



Biography

India-born and New York raised by an incredible single mother, Rushi Kota is a shining example of the American Dream. Before breaking into the industry he pursued a career in engineering but always knew that performing was his true calling. Rushi vigorously pursued his dream in New York, eventually getting into Harvard's renowned acting program. His incredible character work can now be seen by audiences in some of film and television's most acclaimed shows including starring roles on "Grey's Anatomy," Netflix's "Never Have I Ever," Hallmark's "Make Me a Match", and the highly anticipated film following the Wall Street chaos after GameStop's stock skyrocketed due to Reddit "Dumb Money." Rushi is only getting started and audiences have much to look forward to from this stellar performer.

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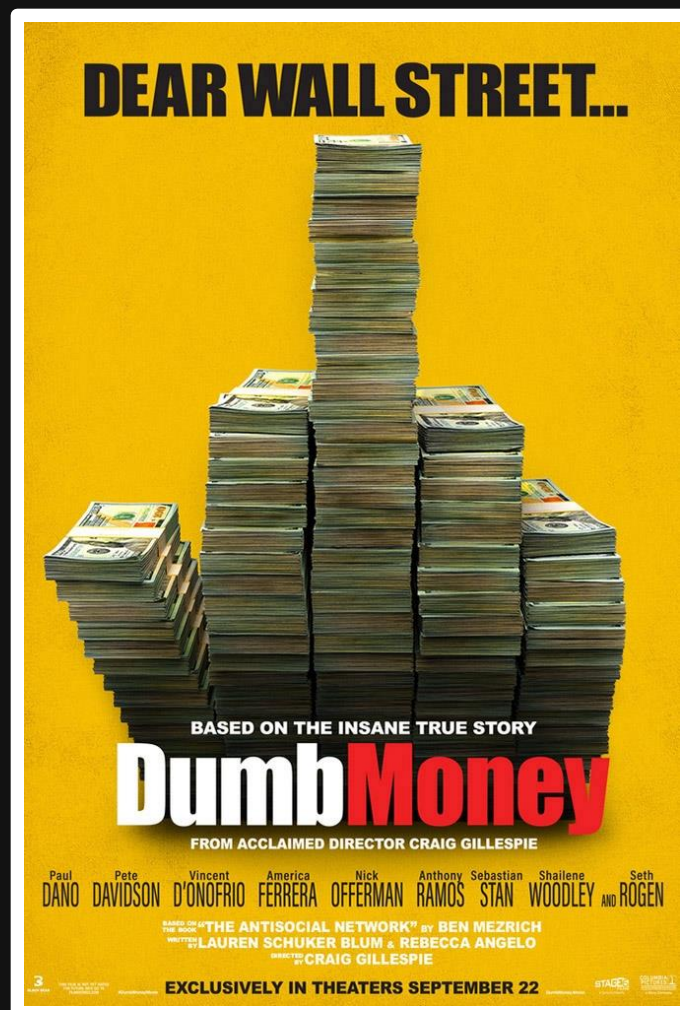




The Charity Stripe

Episode Description

Actor Rushi Kota Guests To Talk About His New Movie 'Dumb Money.' From the filming process, to how he got the role we breakdown his full experience with the film. Plus, we discuss his career in the film industry.



MAKING HITS

**Compelling Actor
RUSHI KOTA
Keeps The Hits
Coming!**

Photos Taken At The Ambrose Hotel Santa Monica
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he silver screen often offers us a glimpse into a world of dreams, aspirations and charismatic personas. Few shine as brilliantly as Rushi Kota, an actor who, with his unique blend of talent and charm, has captured the hearts of audiences around the globe. From the heartfelt movies of the Hallmark Channel like *"Make me a Match,"* to the intricate and absolutely adored world of *"Grey's Anatomy,"* Kota's journey from India to Hollywood serves as an inspiration to many.

Kota was born in India, but raised in Queens, NY which would lay the foundation for his passion for story-telling. Born into a culturally rich environment, Kota would soak up the tales, arts and performances that would later influence his craft. Not seeing too many people on television that looked like himself, Kota really wanted to change the way that the world of entertainment saw people with his background, and he was just the person to really flip that world upside down. The transition from India to New York living wasn't easy, but the American dream that his mother had wished for him was calling, and Kota would pick up that phone and answer it! With each challenge faced, his resilience and determination only grew, forging a spirit that would soon make waves in the cinematic world.

With talent and panache oozing out of every one of his orifices, it wouldn't take long for Kota's prowess to be noticed by the keyholders of Hollywood. Kota would make a notable and very memorable small role on *"Grey's Anatomy"* into a sixteen episode arc. With his compelling portrayal of Dr. Vik Roy, Kota didn't just inhabit the character, he breathed life into, showcasing a depth that endeared him to fans, new and old to the long running giant of a show. This was no mere forgettable arc, it was a statement, announcing the arrival of a powerful talent that was making his mark on Hollywood.

However, his versatility truly came to the forefront with his work on the Hallmark channel, and the movie *"Make Me a Match."* With the film being about a South Asian Matchmaker's son named Boom, played by Kota himself, bringing life and color into a woman's life who is looking for love, it was the role that the talented thespian was born to play. After seeing so many shows and films on television and in theaters without the representation of the Indian and South Asian community to the forefront, the role of Boom was tailor made for Kota, and he for that role as well. Showing the world the talent that his fans had seen for years before, Kota would be able to do that time and time again going forward, and with a new love with the Hallmark Channel and the world of entertainment begging for more, Kota would not let that fall to the wayside, and give them all what they are begging for.

Now as the world eagerly anticipates his newest cinematic venture, *"Dumb Money"* about the rise and fall of the Gamestop stock a few years back, buzz around Kota's role has been climbing. Early reports of the film suggest another riveting performance from the beloved actor, Alongside Paul Dano, Pete Davidson, Vincent D'Onofrio, Sebastian Stan and so many more, Kota is making the waves with this upcoming role. Surrounded by some of the biggest and most sought after names in Hollywood, Kota has made his presence known to everyone, that he has the fortitude and the talent to hang with the best.

Never one to shy away from a challenge, Kota's screen presence is a true testament to just how powerful and captivating his work really is. He has evolved to prove to everyone that he's not afraid to venture into new territories and break all of the boundaries. As the world follows with bated breath of what is coming next for Kota, it becomes clear that he is an artist dedicated to his craft, and one whose star will only continue to rise as time goes on.

Rushi Kota is ready for the next step, and the world is waiting to see what he has up his sleeve next. While we all wait, check out what Kota had to tell *WINGMAN* about his career, and his current and past projects, as well as about becoming a new father!

WINGMAN: You had a film release back in June for Hallmark, *"Make Me a Match,"* tell us about the film, and your character Boom.

RUSHI KOTA: Of course! *"Make Me A Match"* is about a woman that falls flat on her face in search of love until she meets a South Asian Matchmaker and her son Boom, who brings life and color to her world. From the time I received the offer to me being on set, it was barely two weeks. At first, I was panicking but once I got to Vancouver, I was vibing with Boom's confidence and playful sarcasm. It was my first lead role and I was definitely walking a tightrope between the pressure I was putting on myself as an actor to having fun on set every day. The good thing was everyone from the cast to the crew was an absolute delight to work with. They all radiated with such positivity and motivation to crush it every day. *"Make Me a Match"* came out in June on Hallmark and based on the numbers I saw, it did extremely well for the network. It was so exciting to see that a movie with so much diversity and culture resonates with the Hallmark audience that way. I think people were really excited to see something that was so different in the

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romcom genre. I just really enjoyed being part of and making this movie.

WINGMAN: There is a story out there that you also had a baby, congratulations by the way, while you were filming *"Make Me a Match."* How did you balance the shooting schedule along with taking care of your newborn?

KOTA: Thank you! He is a cutie! I'm kinda in love with him now. [laughs.] Yeah, so my wife was set to give birth the first day I was supposed to be on set, which obviously wouldn't work. We decided to induce a week earlier, but as luck would have it, the day we were supposed to go in was the day all elective procedures got canceled — with of course no way for it to be rescheduled. My wife and I both freaked out and did everything we could to get him to come naturally, and luckily the little guy heard our pleas and decided to make a fashionable entrance into the world the very next day. [Chuckles] There wasn't much balancing, our families were there to support my wife and the baby, and I got everyone's blessing to be away for three weeks and shoot a movie. I had a job to do and I had to be 100% present for that, and now that job is done I can be 100% present for my family.

WINGMAN: *"Never Have I Ever"* is based on

Mindy Kaling's life as a first generation Indian-American. How much do you relate to this concept as you were born in India and raised in New York.

KOTA: What a dope show! I'm obsessed with *"Never Have I Ever,"* and everyone that worked on it. Being on this show is one thing but also being a fan is another. I relate wholeheartedly. It's tough being a first-generation American of any race, not just South Asian, because not only is growing up different and trying to fit in challenging, but add having an identity crisis on top of that, fugettaboutit! When I was growing up, I went through a huge chunk of my life not knowing who I was. I had brown skin and I was Indian, but everything around me in Queens was so rap and hip hop and I was surrounded predominately by White and Asian people, that I felt like a fish out of water. My adolescence was a huge melting pot of confusion as I was trying to forge my path in life. The thing I love most about *"Never Have I Ever"* is that it normalizes being brown in America and makes all these complex situations so relatable with humor. I think that's why the show has been such a huge global success. Also, being South Asian is cool.

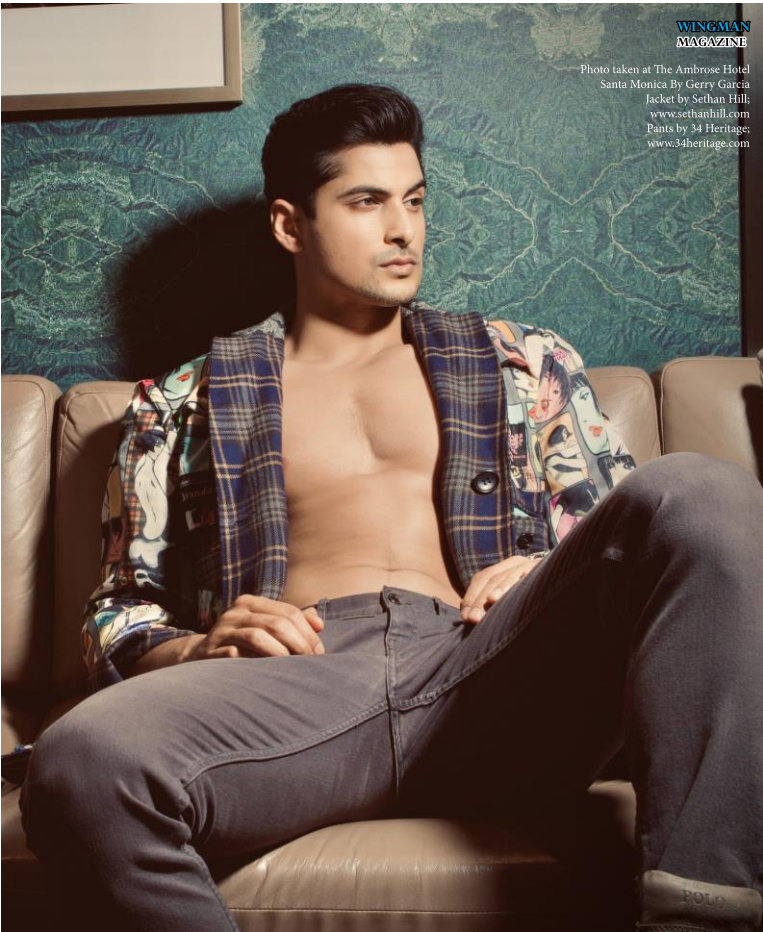
WINGMAN: How much of your own personality do you put into your roles?

KOTA: It really depends on the role. I remember when I first started I was super green. My character creations would be very out there because in my head I was playing a character and so I had to be totally different from who I was, which obviously did not work. But now that I'm a bit more experienced, everything comes from within. I just pull out all these different drawers full of alternate egos to come out and play. Something I did not use my personality for was when I played Baiju Bhatt in my upcoming movie *"Dumb Money."* It's based on a real person who is very much alive. He's one of the Co-CEOs of Robin Hood and this person is very different from me. It was a lot of outside-in creation of character. Absorbing Baiju's physical characteristics, his gesticulation, and vocal pattern which then informs my internal choices. Baiju is very stoic, soft-spoken, and highly intelligent and I am none of those things. That was really fun to play. I want to do more roles like that.

WINGMAN: *"Grey's Anatomy"* is the show that everyone knows you from. Talk about your time on the show, and how ecstatic you were when you booked the role.

KOTA: I remember I had to wait for an hour in the waiting room because they were running behind, and I worked myself up into a nervous wreck by the time I got into the audition room. It was kind of crazy that I booked this job because I didn't think my audition was very good but somehow they saw through all that and took a chance on me. When I booked the job I was originally just pinned for two episodes and then it ended up snowballing into 16 episodes plus a primetime web series from ABC. The job itself was a dream come true and a huge learning experience.

WINGMAN: You wanted to be an automobile engineer,



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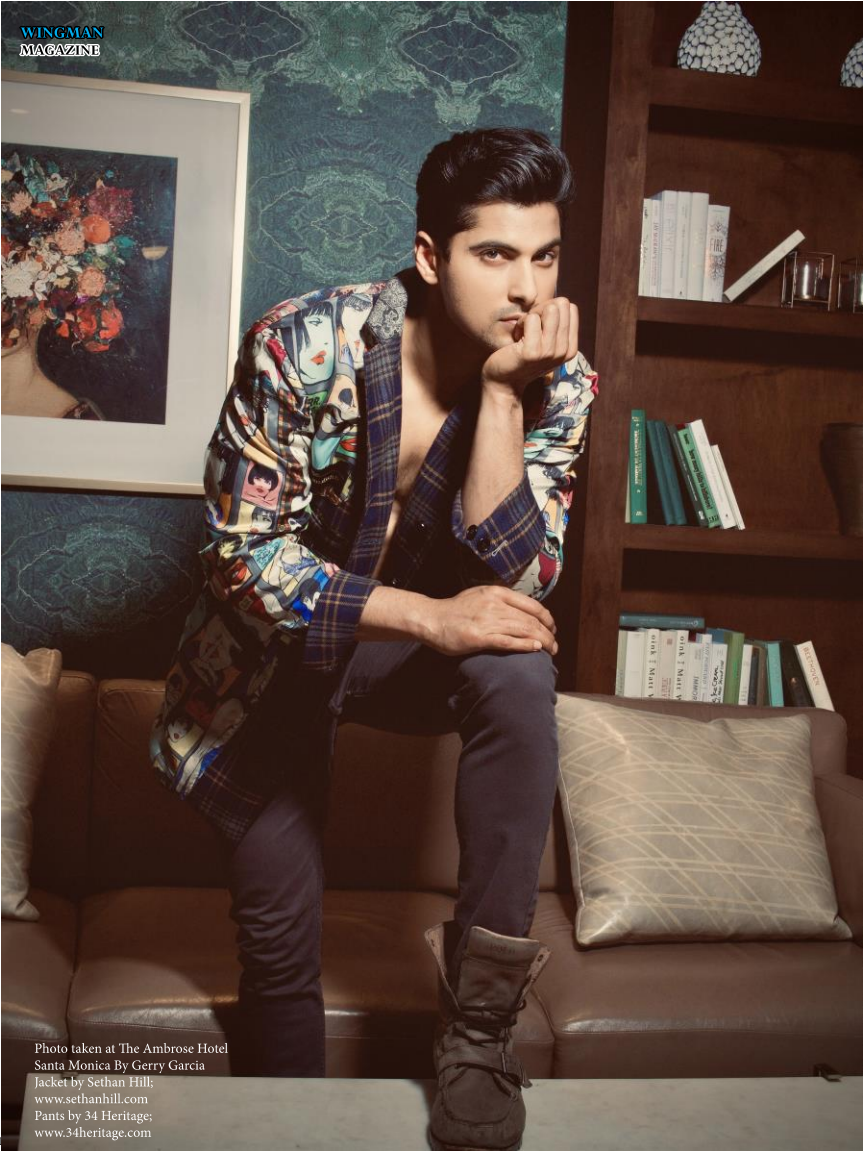


Photo taken at The Ambrose Hotel
Santa Monica By Gerry Garcia
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but instead went on to acting. How does that transition occur?

KOTA: That is true, I got my Associates in Automotive Engineering and Bachelors in Industrial Management Technology because I thought that would be the path for me to becoming an F1 racer — and then I realized how naïve I was to think that [laughs hard!] After I graduated though, first, I realized that's not where my passion lied and second, it was the 2008/2009 mortgage crisis in America. So I couldn't really find a job even if I wanted to and I took that as a sign to make a shift and do something fun that would challenge me every day and oh boy is it challenging me, every day! A little too much if I must say.

WINGMAN: And you went to Harvard for acting, which is usually not one of the majors that you hear about at Harvard. What was the curriculum like, and do you think it was more advanced than some of the other schools?

KOTA: I agree, everyone is always like, they have an acting program there? And I'm like, yes, they do.I would say it was pretty intense. It was a two-and-a-half-year, five-semester program with only 18 students per year and we got to do a residency at the Moscow Art Theatre School in Russia. I never thought Russia would be a place I would ever visit but I was blown away by how light years in advance they are in the theater. The program itself was a complete and total immersion in everything voice, movement, and acting training. It was hard but I am much better from it.

WINGMAN: Where did your love of acting come from? Were your parents supportive of you making the leap from being an engineer to being in the arts?

KOTA: I think my love for acting came from watching a ton of TV and movies as a kid and not seeing someone like me on screen. I thought to myself why can't I do this and do it well? Live as many lives as possible instead of just playing a "type", isn't that what acting is all about? Then, during a summer job in my junior year of college, I met an actor and he bestowed upon me the knowledge of what I needed to start. My mother is very supportive. She watches everything I do and questions why I'm not in every single frame. I'm like, Mom it doesn't work like that.

WINGMAN: What are your top three films of all time, that no matter what, you could watch them anytime?

KOTA: Oh man! If I could only watch three movies for the rest of eternity it would be hands down "Tropic Thunder," "Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga" and "Thor: Ragnarok." "Tropic Thunder" is absolute gold, a movie like that would never make it in today's society and that's why it holds a special place in my heart. 'Eurovision Song Contest' is so underrated. Will Ferrell, Rachel McAdams, and the rest of the cast were magnificent and the music was fire! And finally, "Thor: Ragnarok "is so funny and so out there, one of my favorites of Taika Waititi's films, anytime I'm down 'Ragnarok' brings me back up.

WINGMAN: It's been a busy year for you. What can we look forward to coming up for you?

KOTA: Glad you asked Wingman. In September I have "Dumb Money" coming out that's making a huge theatrical release. It was created by Ben Mezrich who created "The Social Network," Screenplay by Lau-



ren Schuker Blum and Rebecca Angelo, Directed by Craig Gillespie. It's about the whole GameStop movement that took place in January 2021 where a Reddit revolution took down some huge hedge funds by pumping up the stock. I play Baiju Bhatt, Co-CEO of Robin Hood. Then I have an animated show called "Mindful Adventures Of Unicorn Island" coming out September 12th on YouTube Originals, created by Lilly Singh that teaches kids about mindful practices. I play Amar, Lilly's annoying older brother who pokes and prods at her every time she gets in trouble. And finally, I just wrapped an indie project called "A Girl In The Poo" directed by a young prolific director Dakota Gorman with Freddie Prinze Jr. The details for that are still under wraps. I'm excited to see what the rest of this year holds.

And we will be watching all of KOTA's new projects and supporting him for years to come! ▢

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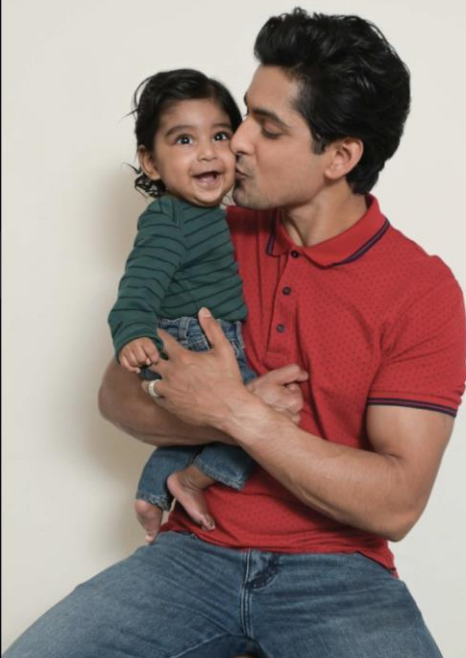
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ACTOR RUSHI KOTA
AND BABY RYDIN



Actor Rushi Kota: On Creative Spaces, the Strike and Dreams for His Son

By Cassandra Lane



PHOTOS BY PHILICA INDELMAN

Four months after becoming a dad, actor Rushi Kota faced an unexpected challenge: SAG-AFTRA, the union representing actors, went on strike, joining the Writers Guild of America in a season where creators and workers in various industries are demanding more of the corporations that hire them.

On a recent afternoon, we joined Kota, who has starred in a variety of TV shows and movies — “Make Me a Match,” “Grey’s Anatomy,” “Never Have I Ever,” “Dumb Money” — in his home studio to talk to him about his work, the strike, how he and his wife, Reeshelle, are navigating their new roles as parents, and to photograph him and baby, Rydin, for our cover.

Let’s start in your studio: When did you turn this room in your condo into a studio and what do you use it for?

A room in the house was always meant to be a studio so that I can have a space dedicated to creating self-tapes/VO auditions, or if I have interviews and Zoom sessions. I think it’s crucial as an artist to have a dedicated space to create. I have a writer friend who has a closet in his office where he goes to write exclusively because it is devoid of all distractions.

Are Rydin and Oscar [family dog] allowed in, or is it off limits?

They are more than welcome — as long as they are being quiet. Oscar loves sitting in the office chair and watching me when I’m putting my tapes together, and Rydin is in there while I do vocal warm-ups. I talk and read out loud, so hopefully, he’s picking up on sounds and articulation quickly. I can’t wait to hear what he has to say, though I fear it’s going to be quite a lot.

I think the biggest challenge for me right now as a parent is time. Having enough time to make sure the baby is getting enough stimulation, but also having time to be able to be creative. I have so much anxiety trying to make

sure he’s getting everything he needs, but also making sure I’m able to give a 150 percent when these auditions/jobs come in.

The biggest joys are watching him learn new skills every day. I get surprised at how he just learns something new at random times. And hearing him laugh. The other day, he was having a full-on meltdown while eating watermelon — full-on screaming with tears streaking down his face, but he kept eating more and more watermelon. It was fascinating to observe him express his euphoria through what I conceived as anger and frustration because he doesn’t know which one is which yet. I don’t know, but it was the most hilarious thing that I am still laughing about it days later. Also, it was really nerve-racking to see him have two extreme emotions at the same time.

Tell us about your upbringing. Did you always feel the inner call to act?

I was born in India and came to New York [Queens] when I was 8 years old with my brother who was nine years older. I didn’t speak any English at the time. I was in a single-parent home. Mom was a real estate agent who always said the harder you work, the more money you make, which meant she was working all the time.

Most of my childhood was spent trying to figure out what my passion was. I wasn’t really driven towards anything except being lost in the allure of movies and Formula One racing. I guess fiction was better than reality at the time, and movies and racing provided the escape.

You majored in engineering initially, not acting.

That’s right. I majored in automotive engineering because I really loved cars at the time and thought maybe that... could be a path to racing.

I was dabbling in modeling during college, but I never really thought about acting until after graduating.

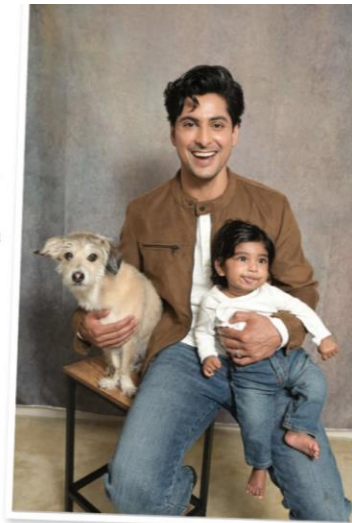
I didn’t think there was a place for people like me in Hollywood, and so the arts wasn’t really a career path to pursue. But while I was interesting one summer during college, I met an actor who gave me the 411 on how to start, which I kept tucked away until it was time to explore it.

Then I graduated during the 2008-09 mortgage crisis, and I couldn’t find a job in my respective field. Feeling hopeless, I turned to acting as an outlet to let myself be free — free from any conformed way of being. I thought as an actor I could go live the life of all these different people and find out what it’s like to work in so many different professions and constantly learn new things. So far, I’ve played an agent, a robot, a doctor, a professor, a political aide, a chef, a really good guy, a matchmaker, a billionaire and more. I guess escaping into my dreams has become a reality.

When did you move to L.A.?

I moved to L.A. about 10 years ago, as soon as I graduated with an M.F.A. in acting from Harvard. I was going to take a month off and spend it at home before I made my move, but I was offered a role in a play, “The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity,” in Sacramento. I packed up all my stuff in my Ford Taurus immediately after graduating and started my journey to California.

That was the first time I drove across the country. And after I finished my run in Sacramento and was on my way to Los Angeles, my transmission gave out on the 405. Which was really fun, as I was trying to navigate to an exit without using the brake and the accelerator not working. It set me back three grand to get that fixed. So that was my start to life in L.A.



Furry family member Oscar joins Rushi and Rydin Kota for the photo shoot.

How are you and your family doing during the SAG-AFTRA strike?

It’s been really weird because I have a few projects coming out this year that I am beyond excited for, but I am not allowed to talk about or promote them in any capacity. All of this life-changing momentum that’s been building up is slowly and painfully dying out. I guess at first glance, it’s hard to see all the good that’s come of it because I am someone who tends to measure success based on what’s next versus looking at the bigger picture. I had to remind myself that I can’t control what’s out there and really take note of everything I do have, which is that we got to spend so much quality time with Rydin, and that precious time with him is priceless and such a huge blessing.

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What do you have to say about the state of the industry and the future of creatives in Hollywood?

This is a very exciting time in the industry! We are in a huge shift towards equality and fairness not just for all people of color and the opportunities we now have, but also financially for everyone. When I started 10 years ago, nearly everyone I came across said what an exciting time it was to be a South Asian actor, and five years later... I saw how hard it was to get cast as a South Asian actor. But in the recent five years, I have been observant of how many Indian American actors have been on the rise. Finally, we are starting to get our time in the spotlight. It is very cool to see this growth.

With this strike, there’s hope of at least getting some semblance of fairness between the top brass and everyday actor/writer. The old model of quantity over quality and not paying the people creating the content while the executives make bank has become obsolete, especially with the streamers. Glad we are all getting on the same page about who actually makes what.

Rydin did such a wonderful job on his first shoot. Think a modeling or acting career is ahead for him?

I know! He absolutely crushed it. We weren’t expecting him to bring that much cuteness. I mean, I don’t know if we want to push him to acting or modeling because, on one hand, we don’t want him to have such an uncertain, confusing and complicated life of an actor, but on the other hand, I am there to guide him through all the obstacles. Our dreams for Rydin is that he would become a world-famous DJ or a Formula One racer so we can accompany him across the world to all the music festivals and exotic party places, which would be a dream come true! Ultimately, we will be there to guide and support in whatever path he gravitates toward.

Tell us a little about the difference between your and Reeshelle’s career.

She’s a “scientist of cancer immunotherapies,” meaning she develops autologous and allogeneic therapies for various types of cancers. Disclaimer: If you didn’t understand that, don’t worry...neither did I.

[When] I was working on “Grey’s Anatomy,” she would come home and say, “We made a huge discovery today that saved a person’s life,” which she did, and I would come home and say, “I had an intense eight-hour fake surgery and ate from three different food trucks that were on set today,” which I did. ♦

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ACTOR RUSHI KOTA AND BABY RYDIN



Rushi Kota Filmed Hallmark's 'Make Me a Match' Days After Son's Birth, Learned Lines 'Between Changing Diapers' (Exclusive)

Rushi Kota made his [Hallmark Channel debut](#) days after he landed the role of a lifetime and became a first-time father.

The [Make Me a Match](#) star, 36, exclusively told *Us Weekly* on Wednesday, June 28, that he did not navigate fatherhood "well at all" while on set in Canada for [the Hallmark movie](#) earlier this year.

"To make a stressful situation even more stressful, [my wife's due date was the same day as my first day of shooting](#)," Kota explained, noting that the couple's decision to induce labor a week early didn't go as planned.

Following a hospital cancellation for their elective procedure, Kota told *Us* he and his wife, **Reeshelle**, tried "everything" to naturally speed up labor.

"Miraculously, he must have heard us because my wife's water broke the next day and he was born after a smooth delivery," Kota recalled of [his son's March arrival](#). "I just remember working on my character and memorizing lines in between changing diapers and no sleep."

Kota revealed that it was "tough being away from [his] newborn son" while on set days later, but noted, "I'm proud of the movie and can't wait to watch it with him when he's older."

Now that his son is three months old, Kota confessed to *Us* he is still "unequivocally unequipped to be a father," despite listening to parenting podcasts and reading up on the subject.

"I might as well have done nothing to prepare for fatherhood and I would still be in the same place as I started," he joked. "Luckily my wife is a freaking genius, and she knows exactly what to do, and she teaches me along the way while I flail around like fish out of water."

Although parenting hasn't come easily, Kota felt at ease with his role as Boom in [Hallmark's Make Me a Match](#), which premiered on Saturday, June 24.

"What drew me to the role of Boom in *Make Me A Match* was that I'd be playing the first South Asian leading man in a Hallmark movie," he told *Us*. "It's ironic that he's a noncommittal serial dater, yet it's his literal job to find people life partners through the family matchmaking business."

The rom-com follows Vivi (**Eva Bourne**) as she learns about Indian matchmaking for her company's dating app while unwillingly becoming the subject of a setup with the matchmaker's son, Boom (Kota).

"For me, balancing 'modern romance' and 'Indian matchmaking' was pretty easy because the two are more similar than people realize. While South Asian culture may be associated with arranged marriages, Indian matchmaking is not necessarily that anymore," Kota, [who is Indian American](#), explained. "Matchmaking has evolved. Just like modern dating [like dating apps], clients are matched based on characteristics like shared interests, physical attraction, age, location."

The [Never Have I Ever](#) actor told *Us* that couples who use matchmakers "may progress faster to marriage because things like astrological alignment and the vetting process between the families happens upfront."

Kota added: "What the movie does well is highlight how traditional matchmaking can be modernized and made accessible to everyone."



Rushi Kota on Highlighting Traditional South Asian Matchmaking Culture in Hallmark Channel's "Make Me a Match"



He's been afforded many different roles in his career. Still, there was one film genre that had eluded actor **Rushi Kota** -- the rom-com. This coming weekend, thanks to **Hallmark Channel**, the Indian-born, New York-raised actor is crossing that off his to-do list with the premiere of *Make Me a Match* opposite **Eva Bourne**. The fact the film touched on so many important issues made it the perfect career match for him. "I honestly wanted to do a rom-com," he said during an exclusive interview with MediaVillage. "It's been on my bucket list of things to do, and I'm so glad this fell into my lap."

"I don't have enough good things to say about it and Hallmark," he continued. "Everyone on set was amazing. From the producers and the director to the entire cast and crew, everyone came to set every single day so prepared to work and with such a positive attitude. I had a great time making this movie. Coming out of the [recent] stresses of life and going to Vancouver, I didn't know if I was going to have enough time to prepare for it, as it happened kind of quickly. But once I got there everything just fell perfectly into place. Then hitting it off immediately with Eva ... I can't say enough good things about her."



In the film, Kota portrays Bhumes (Boom), the son, and business manager, of famed Indian matchmaker Raina (**Rekha Sharma**), whose age-old methods of pairing couples have a huge success rate. Eager to adopt some of those magical traits is Vivi (Bourne), who believes incorporating some of them into her dating app Data Mate could take it to the next level. After reluctantly finding herself the guinea pig of the experiment, Vivi embarks on the process. While trying to find her perfect match it becomes clear she didn't have to look too far.

One thing that became immediately apparent to Kota when reading the script was that by exploring Indian culture he was doing something important. "This is a big deal for [Hallmark] and for South Asian culture," he shared. "For us to be on the mainstream is incredible. This is who we are, and now on TV with shows like *Never Have I Ever* on Netflix, it's starting to get really mainstream and give a lot of people who look like me an opportunity to do this craft. I'm extremely proud that I get to represent and tell this wonderful story."

"It's also a fun story we're telling that's also part educational," he added. "They're not making clichés of anything, so it's a very big moment for me and South Asians. I was like, 'Wow, we're really making some moves over here.' And the other big thing is it's not so different for everyone. The culture is a little different, sure, but at the end of the day, all the issues that the characters in the movie, the South Asian characters, and the non-South Asian characters, are going through are universal. That's what I think is the takeaway from the film."

With the recent box-office and Oscar success of movies like the Indian Telugu-language film *RRR*, Kota is thrilled to be able to further things. "*RRR* was a really cool movie, and actually from where I'm from in India," he explained. "It used the Telugu-language, and that's the first time I've seen anything like it come to the Oscars. That was huge! I think it's really good that all markets are going in this direction, and I hope they do more like it. It's great that *RRR* is getting highlighted, but America is a melting pot, so we have to make stories that are inclusive of everyone."

Regarding the educational aspect of Indian match-making culture depicted in the movie, despite having prior knowledge Kota learned a few things. "I've never personally used it as I met my wife in high school, and we married in 2020," he revealed. "What's depicted in the film is pretty true to how it goes. Especially the traditions of astrology, which are very accurate. We also had a lovely cultural consultant on set who made sure everything was appropriate to real life and that was refreshing for me. I was born in India but growing up in the States I'm a little removed from the matchmaking side of things. I learned an immense amount just by being in this movie."

"And it does work," he added. "India has a huge successful marriage rate. Things are shifting a lot more, but I just realized that most of my family has been through an arranged marriage. That was revelatory for me. After *Never Have I Ever* came out people were asking me about arranged marriage and matchmaking. I never thought about that until recently. All my family has been going through that -- and they're all in very successful marriages. The movie also touches on how important family is because, at the end of the day, you are all part of a family."

With so much of today's dating culture relying on dating app analytics to find that perfect match, Kota is hopeful that by highlighting some tried-and-true traditional methods, that might shift. "Love is a core part of our DNA," he pondered in closing. "I don't think AI, computers and algorithms are there yet. Sure, it can work in theory, but if you hate the way a person snores, or some little tick they have in the morning, it's going to make [things] really challenging.">

'Grey's Anatomy' Alum Rushi Kota Reveals He Was in 'Full On Panic' Mode Before Filming His First Hallmark Channel Movie



Hallmark Channel has a new leading man in **Rushi Kota**!

The 36-year-old actor, who is best known from *Never Have I Ever* and *Grey's Anatomy*, will star opposite **Eva Bourne** in *Make Me A Match*.

Just Jared was lucky enough to chat with **Rushi** about his debut on the network, where he opened up about how nervous he actually was.

"I had an immense amount of anxiety," **Rushi** admitted to us about joining the

network for his first movie there.

He explained to **Just Jared** that it was about three weeks before coming to set that he was in "full on panic."

"I had a lot of personal stuff was going on," he noted (he actually [just welcomed his first baby!](#)), before adding that he "wanted to be as fully memorized and prepared for my character as much as possible. I just remember the week before we got onto set, and I talked to my acting coach, where I told them I had no idea what I'm doing right now. I don't know who this guy is. I'm full on freaking out."

Rushi says he was "so stressed out with everything else, and I just couldn't see it."

However, as soon as he got to set and met **Eva**, the panic left him.

"Once I left my life behind for a second and then finally landed in Vancouver, and met with Eva and Heather [our director]...things started gelling and I was like, 'Woo, okay, we got this now.' Everything else was just, you know, smooth sailing from here on out."

Rushi did say that he "really enjoyed this experience, as my first lead in a Hallmark movie, and for Hallmark to be creating this lovely bubble of hardworking, creative, people who come to set every day with a lot with positive attitude."

"I think about my experience and our collective experience for those three weeks, and it's just it like warms my heart every time I think about it."

If you missed, find out how **Eva** felt [about returning to Hallmark Channel](#) for the movie.

Make Me A Match debuts Saturday, June 24 at 8 p.m. on Hallmark Channel.



in EXCLUSIVES / TV

‘Make Me a Match’ Star Rushi Kota on Being Hallmark’s First South Asian Leading Man [Exclusive]

'Make Me a Match' star Rushi Kota said it was 'a little overwhelming' when he realized he was the first South Asian male lead in a Hallmark Channel rom-com.

Rushi Kota fulfilled a dream with his starring role in the new [Hallmark Channel](#) movie *Make Me a Match*, part of the network’s “[June Weddings](#)” lineup. That included providing guidance during several scenes where Boom and Raina speak to each other in Hindi.

“I always wanted to do a rom-com,” the [Never Have I Ever](#) and *Grey’s Anatomy* actor said in an interview with Showbiz Cheat Sheet. So, when he got the chance to play Boom, the son of a traditional Indian matchmaker who falls for a woman named Vivi (Eva Bourne), he couldn’t say no.

Vivi works for a company behind a data-driven matchmaking app. When her formula for finding love turns out to be a bust, she turns to Boom’s mom Raina (Rekha Sharma) to see what she can learn from a different approach. In the process, she and Boom discover they have an unexpected connection.

“The writing was really fun,” Kota said of his reaction when he read the script for the movie, which premieres June 24. “Nikhil Jayaram did a phenomenal job infusing a lot of humor and original originality into this project ... And then just the whole concept of the twist of Indian matchmaking meeting American dating, I thought was really, really fun.”

‘Make Me a Match’ is a new kind of story for Hallmark Channel

Make Me a Match is Hallmark’s first movie with a South Asian male lead, which Kota admitted was “a little overwhelming” to think about. But he hopes it won’t be the last.

“This is just one story about South Asians,” he pointed out. “It’s not representative of every single person out there. And I think that it’s impossible to think that this is going to be a representation of every single subculture in India or in the [United] States ... I think this is just one beautiful story that gets to be told and there’s room for so much more.”

The movie also incorporates cultural traditions from northern India into a traditional Hallmark story. To make sure that they got all the details right, a cultural consultant was on hand during filming.

“She was able to really walk everyone, the writer, director, the entire crew, and the network, through making sure that we got it right and that we were authentic and accurate to the storytelling and nothing was being left out or overlooked,” Kota shared. “That was extremely helpful.”

“She was there to make sure that we were saying it accurately and all the inflections and the sounds were all coming out appropriately,” Kota explained.

Rushi Kota would work with Eva Bourne again ‘in a heartbeat’



Playing Boom also gave Kota the chance to work with Bourne, who Hallmark viewers will recognize from her role as [Clara on When Calls the Heart](#). He’s hopeful it won’t be the last time they share the screen.

“We became quick, fast friends,” he said of his co-star. “We were able to really be on this journey together. And it was really fun. I’m kind of a jokester on set, and she was laughing at all my jokes. I don’t know if she was taking pity on thought I was actually funny, but it was a real delight to work with her ... I would do it again in a heartbeat, [whether] we’re making another *Make Me a Match* or another movie, I’m like, ‘Let’s go.’”

Could *Make Me a Match* inspire some viewers to embrace a way to find love that doesn’t involve swiping right? It might not be a bad idea, Kota said.

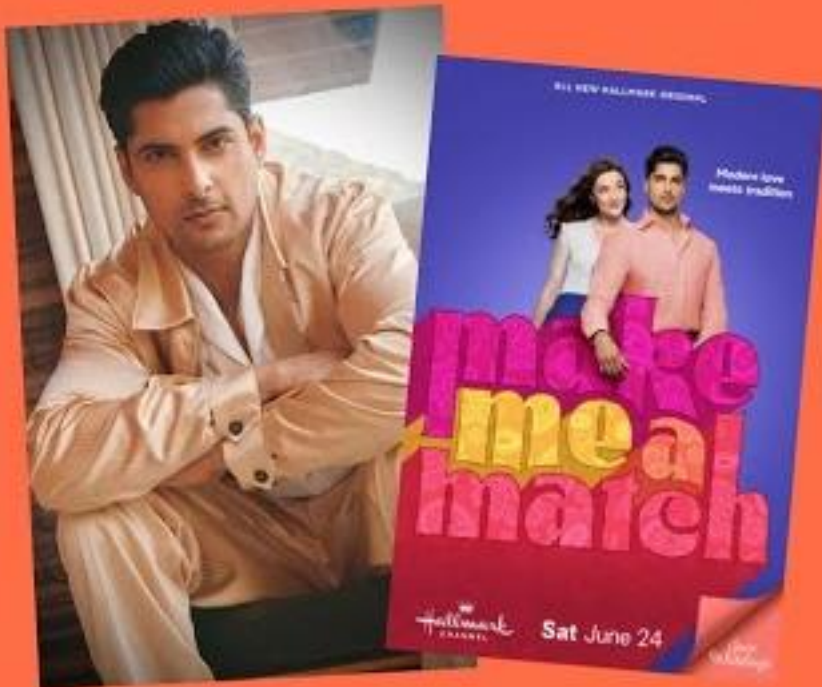
“Dating through all of these apps and algorithms has become so popular that it definitely takes away the element of human connection,” Kota said. “If people are really looking to find their other half, then I think [Indian matchmaking](#) might be the way to go.”

Chat With Roxanne



Podcast

Rushi Kota



**Thursday
June 15
8:00 pm ET**

Chat With Roxanne



Podcast



Paramount+

ON PARAMOUNT +
Peyton List and Kristian Flores star in "School Spirits," which has graduated to a sophomore season.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Pete Davidson and Joe Pesci will return for more "Bupkus" now that Peacock has renewed the series for a second season. Co-stars include Edie Falco, Brad Garrett and Bobby Cannavale.



Heidi Gutman/Peacock

TV Saturday

A NEW TOP CHEF

Will Poulter's pastry guy Luca turns heads on 'The Bear'

By LAUREN SARNER

KISS the cook — but this time, it's a different guy. Move over, Jeremy Allen White, there's a new chef in town on "The Bear" that fans are going gaga over: Will Poulter's tattooed pastry chef character, Luca. "will poulter in the bear s2. look at his fine ass i cannot," one hot and bothered fan tweeted.

Another viewer said, "Yes yes Jeremy Allen White, but may I give you The Bear Season 2's major thirst object: Tattoo'd pastry chef Will Poulter."

Season 1 of the hit FX/ Hulu show, which premiered last summer, followed Carmy (White, 32), a chef from the fine dining world who returns to his home of Chicago to run his family's sandwich shop after his brother's death. Along the way, he made friends such as Sydney Adamu (Ayo Edebiri).

He also became an unlikely sex symbol, even fueling "hot line cook summer," when the world seemed to collectively thirst after people in that profession, calling the appeal of the sweaty and tattooed look, "Anthony Bourdain mixed with Pete Davidson."

Season 2 of "The Bear," now streaming on Hulu, expands the show's world. The plot follows Carmy and the gang in the lead-up to their restaurant's fine-dining re-launch.

ON THE MENU

Roku has ordered up six episodes of "Empty Nest Refresh," hosted by Liza Koshy and design expert Orlando Soria. Young adults moving out renovate their bedrooms for their parents.



Roku

Jeremy Allen White and Ayo Edebiri in Season 2 of "The Bear." Inset: Will Poulter as Luca.



Chuck Hodges/FX; FX/Hulu (inset)

There's also a plot line in the fourth episode where Marcus (Lionel Boyce) goes to Copenhagen to learn more about dessert making.

There, he learns from Luca (Poulter, 30), an English-born pastry chef.

The London-born Poulter has been on the scene since he was a child actor

in 2010 film "The Chronicles of Narnia: the Voyage of the Dawn Treader," but in recent years, he's best known for co-starring in horror film "Midsommar" alongside Florence Pugh, his Emmy-nominated role in Hulu's "Dopesick" alongside Michael Keaton, and his turn as a superhero in "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3."

And now, he's a pastry chef that

fans of "The Bear" are getting hot and bothered about.

One fan stated that he will replace White.

"Will Poulter as a tattooed pastry chef in season 2 of The Bear will heal a broken nation," another fan proclaimed.

Another fan tweeted a photo of Poulter, and said, "when i tell you i screamed, know i f -- king

screamed."

"tattooed will poulter is exactly what the world needs to heal," one viewer tweeted, following that statement up with, "i'm in love i think."

Another fan was so overwhelmed by one of his tattoos, she resorted to all-caps.

"WILL POULTER'S CHARACTER HAVING THE FORMULA FOR SUGAR TATTOOED ON HIS WRIST IS SOMETHING SOOO PERSONAL TO ME YOU GUYS DONT GET IT," she wrote.

Another viewer concluded, "the sexiest thing #TheBear ever did (which is saying something because of how sl went viral here) was bring will poulter on as a pastry chef in s2."

"The Bear" Season 2 is currently streaming on Hulu.

FX has not yet confirmed whether there will be a Season 3.

RUSHI KOTA WHAT I'M WATCHING

"I'm always down for a good sci-fi series. I've been getting my suspenseful drama thrills from 'Silo.' This dystopian premise and the hook at the end of every episode has me coming back for more. I'll definitely be picking up Hugh Howey's books, from which the show has been adapted.

— Kota stars in "Make Me a Match" (June 24 on Hallmark).



Raul Romo

Rushi Kota of ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ talks about ‘Make Me a Match’ film

Motivations as an actor

On his inspirations as an actor, he said, “Now that I’ve been doing this for some time, the thing that inspires me the most is playing as many different characters as possible, genre-jumping, playing with actors of varying caliber, and challenging myself. I want to be constantly evolving in my process.”

“The other big thing that inspires me is seeing how far the industry has come in being receptive and inclusive for people who look like me. I don’t have to just play my skin color and be typecast in certain roles. If you look at the things I’ve done and am doing, my body of work is starting to become very diverse and I’m really proud of that,” he said.

The digital age

On being an actor in the digital age, he responded, “It feels overwhelming and exhausting. I passionately loathe social media and the need for people to express every single facet of their life for the world to see. It takes away the mystery of who a person is, but of course, I’m a hypocrite because anytime it comes time to promote a project, I’m on the socials.”

“That doesn’t mean I like it though,” he said. “Now they want to use AI to mimic an actor’s performance or digitally alter an actor’s look. Or using AI to write about a human experience. Are we a video game or an animation? I mean there’s definitely a place for that and that requires a different set of skills to tell that particular story, but to want to replace actual humans and words with digital ones and say that it’s real.”

“I feel like it has just become a very overcrowded space and I think quality is getting sacrificed,” he added.

Advice for young actors

For young and aspiring actors, he encouraged them to “study.” “Acting requires talent yes, but also skill, technique, and business acumen. Influencing is not acting and acting is not influencing,” he said.

Those are two very different professions,” he admitted. “Not discounting being an influencer by any means because that is also hard work, but when an actor has to repeat living the life of a character over and over again in a scene for 10 hours straight, that requires skill and technique to make sure they are doing it safely and healthily.”

“The same thing goes for any form of an action sequence, where you are handling a weapon or fighting someone. It’s acting to make it look real so you are not hurting yourself or anyone else. That requires study and practice. My advice is to read as many plays and screenplays as you can,” he said.

“Explore the different styles of acting because it’s not a one size fits all type of thing. And most importantly, have fun because, at the end of the day, we are just playing pretend,” he added.

Future plans

Regarding his future plans, he said, “I have no idea! I mean I do know but anytime I make plans for anything life just comes in there, kicks me in the ass, and says nah bro. Some of my immediate future plans looks like me taking a week off and playing video games.”

“I have anxiety anytime it’s time to ‘relax’ because then I feel like I’m not working hard or smart enough and I’m leaving room for someone else to get ahead of me,” he admitted.

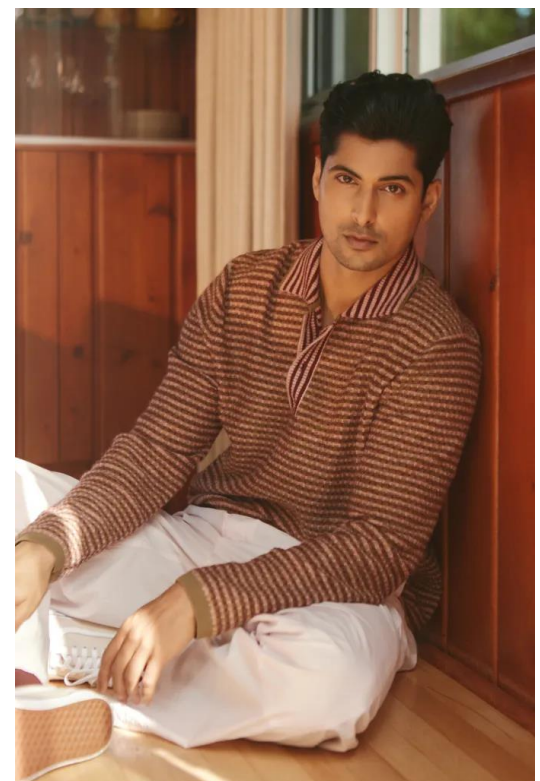
“I would also like to not put so much on my plate and focus on a singular task for a period of time. Then I would like to read a book, like an actual paperback where I can feel the pages. I would like to also get on a track and race some cars, that sounds really fun,” he said.

Success

On his definition of the word success, he said, “For me, I think success first and foremost means financial freedom. The ability to just take off a year and practice a completely new skill or immerse myself in a creative project. I’m not going to sugarcoat and say it’s all about the art. It is and it’s not. I can’t think about the art when the stress of basic needs are not met.”

“Then, it looks like a lucrative production company that has the ability to purchase and/or acquire rights to books so I can connect actors, writers, directors, producers, and financiers and bring the packaged product to distributors. Like what Brad Pitt, Mindy Kaling, and Reese Witherspoon are doing,” he elaborated.

“Finally, it looks like building my dream home from scratch, encompassing form, function, and a little bit of luxury,” he concluded.



‘Make Me a Match’

On being a part of this film, he said, “Honestly, it was a hell of an experience. As an actor, I was filled with tremendous growth and joy. However, I had a lot of anxiety the two weeks prior to shooting because this was my first lead in a movie, and my wife was due to give birth to our first baby.”

“Luckily, everything ended up working out and I got to spend a week with my newborn son before shooting began and once I landed in Vancouver, I was relieved at how organized everything was. Hallmark knows how to put these groups of people together to create a wonderfully collaborative space,” he said.

“Nikhil S. Jayaram wrote an original and meaningful rom-com and Heather H. Doyle captained the ship with such finesse as a director. I truly had one of the best experiences working with this cast and crew, every single person came to set every day with positivity and readiness to go above and beyond,” he elaborated.

“If I had to complain about one thing then it would be that my view of the Canadian mountains every day was too serene,” he added.

Kota spoke about his character in “Make Me a Match.” “I liked that my character Boom had a really cool name,” he said. “I liked that Boom was rooted in culture but it wasn’t shaded with just that. I liked how layered he was underneath that sarcastic cool guy exterior there was an altruistic softie, masking the pain from the loss of his father, which was ultimately preventing him from seeking out his own happiness.”

“I liked how Boom brought out my playful mischievous side. I liked how fun it was creating Boom’s life,” he added.

‘Grey’s Anatomy’

Kota opened up about his experience in “Grey’s Anatomy,” where he played Vik Roy. “It was great. It was one of my first big TV acting jobs,” he said.

“Ellen, Sarah, Chandra, Justin, Kelly, Kevin, and James were all exceptionally gracious with their time. Just like in the show, they say Grey’s Sloan Memorial is a teaching hospital, it felt very much like a teaching show in acting as well. I had a lot of fun getting to do the stunts for my character Vik who was getting into all kinds of trouble,” he explained.



HOLR CHATS: RUSHI KOTA STARS IN HALLMARK'S UPCOMING ROMANTIC FILM "MAKE ME A MATCH"



Get to know Rushi Kota, the star of Hallmark's upcoming release, "Make Me a Match."

Rushi Kota is talking to HOLR about everything- from how he got his start in the industry to his newest upcoming release, "Make Me a Match," which will premiere this week, on June 24. The talented actor is also known for his roles as 'Prashant' in Netflix's "Never Have I Ever" and 'Dr. Vik Roy' on ABC/Shonda Rhimes' hit dramas "Grey's Anatomy" and "Grey's Anatomy B-Team."

Check out our full conversation with Rushi below, where he goes into detail about his latest releases- including a new film he stars in hitting theatres this October- what he loves most about being an actor, and some of his future goals.

Talk to us about how you got your start in the entertainment industry as an actor.

Sup HOLR, thanks for having me.

Well, I always loved movies and going to the theater and being lost and entranced in someone else's story. In college, I was dabbling in modeling but never really thought about acting. I had no idea how or where to even start, so I put that on the back burner and focused on school, but by senior year I realized automotive engineering wasn't going to be my path in life. At a summer job, I met an actor who was also working a temp job. I was quite fascinated by him and I picked his brain during lunch. He told me all about the basics of how to start looking for acting gigs- to start taking acting classes, getting headshots, creating a profile on actors access and backstage.com, learning a comedic and dramatic monologue, reading and seeing plays, and really immersing myself in everything acting. When I graduated during the mortgage crisis of 2008-2009, I couldn't find a job in my respective field which I took as a sign to make a change. And that began the journey that led me to where I am today.

The Hallmark romantic film you're starring in, "Make Me a Match." is premiering on June 24. What can you tell us about this film?

This is the first South Asian rom-com for Hallmark written by an amazing Indian writer named Nikhil S. Jayaram and directed expertly by Heather Hawthorne Doyle. The story follows Boom, who I play, and Vivi, played by Eva Bourne, who have diametrically opposed views on finding love. When Vivi's dating app company realizes their matchmaking algorithm is flawed, as well as her love life, she seeks out an external expert to help resolve it. Enter Boom, the son of an Indian matchmaker who will help her find her match while also fixing her company. This movie's got sultry eyes, heart, laughs, tears, and most importantly, love.

You will also be starring in "Dumb Money" alongside Seth Rogen, Pete Davidson, and Shailene Woodley, which is reported to come out later this year. Tell us more about the upcoming film and your role.

Correct, it is coming out on October 20th in theaters. Dumb Money has everyone in it and I still can't believe I was cast. It's based on the book The Anti-Social Network written by Ben Mezrich, who also wrote The Social Network. The screenplay was written by Rebecca Angelo and Lauren Schuker Blum and was directed by Craig Gillespie. The movie is about the big Reddit revolution that took place in January 2021 that caused hedge funds to lose upwards of TEN BILLION DOLLARS. It was a real-life David versus Goliath story. I got to play a real person, one of the CEOs of the trading app Robinhood, Baiju Bhatt. Being in this movie is definitely one of the highlights of my career. I got put on a wig and a beard, and dive deep into character like I have never done before because I was playing a person who is very much alive. Researching and absorbing Baiju was a tremendous amount of fun. Plus, I got to play opposite Sebastian Stan, one of my idols. You can't see it right now but I'm blushing over here just thinking about our time together on set.

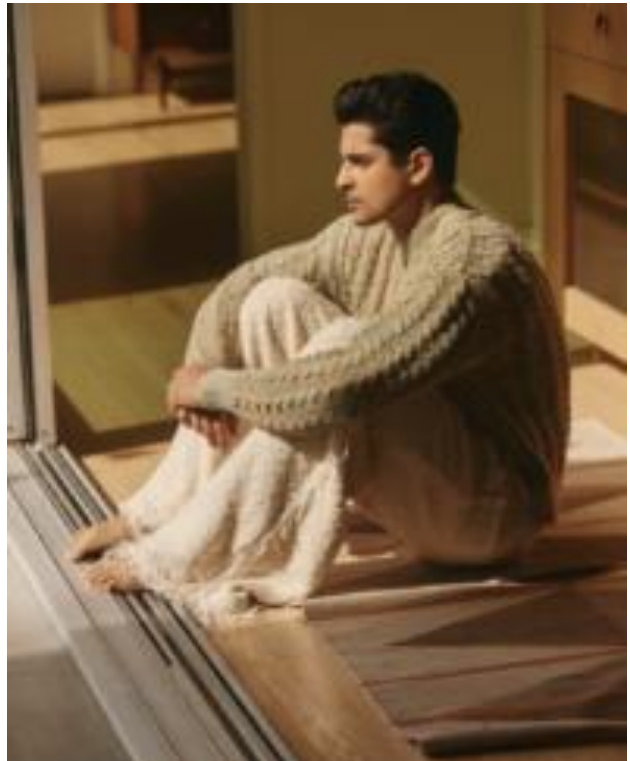
What do you love most about being an actor?

I love being on set and being lost in character, constantly thinking and breathing truth into an imaginary moment. I love being in a bubble of creativity, where everyone is working towards a singular goal. I can spend hours and hours writing and talking about a character's memories, thoughts, and experiences- all of which help me create a fuller life for when the director yells "action".

What are some of your future goals?

Some of my future goals are to be in a big franchise movie that everyone around the world gets to see. I would also like to play complex characters that have had an impact, whether it be good or bad- like Bikram, the yoga instructor. I find his story fascinating, like how he made yoga more accessible and mainstream, yet his downfall was his tyrannical and abusive personality. It would be a transformative and multi-layered character to bring to life onscreen.

Published by [HOLR Magazine](#).





Rushi Kota – Make Me a Match

Q) Please tell us the premise for the movie *Make Me A Match*.

A) The premise of the movie is about two people who have opposing views on finding love. They realize that they have so much in common but because of their baggage, they can't be together. Dun, dun, duuun...drama, conflict, heartache. It's Indian Matchmaking meets Dating Apps.

Vivi, played by Eva Bourne, is a tech executive who works at a dating app company but realizes her love life and client matchmaking results are at an abysmal low. She hires a consultant, an Indian Matchmaker, Raina (played by Rekha Sharma) who suggests she goes through the Indian matchmaking process to figure out how to increase the app success rate. Enter Boom, the son of Raina, who runs the matchmaking business. He and Vivi spend time together as part of work and the matchmaking process and along the way find love.

Q) How was your character Bhumesh initially described to you?

A) Boom was described to me as a humorous man who runs the family Matchmaking company with his widowed mother, Raina. Although Raina is one of the most successful matchmakers in the world, her reluctance to adopt modern methods, despite Boom's urging, is seriously impacting their client base.

When Vivi wants to team up with them, to incorporate their ancient South Asian techniques into her own tech-forward online company they agree — but only if Vivi acts as their first client and test subject. As Boom works to match Vivi with the perfect man, he starts falling hard for her. But he is still grieving for his late father and he fears that if he marries, he will be effectively abandoning his mother.

Q) Hallmark movies usually have a light tone with some fun and a little mystery within them. What about this story made you want to be involved in the project?

A) So many things. First, I thought it was well written. I loved the banter between Boom and Vivi. I loved the rom-com twist of Indian Matchmaking meeting modern dating. I loved that this is Hallmark's first venture into highlighting South Asian culture. I also really loved how my character Boom was masking deep-rooted pain that kept him from moving forward in his life.

Q) The movie is all about love and finding that perfect match. Talk about how your character, Bhumesh, helps move the plot along.

A) He runs the family business and acts as a client concierge, so he's quite involved in Vivi's matchmaking journey. For each date, he's prepping, driving and analyzing with her — even checking in when things don't go so well, which only further strengthens their bond. They realize they have chemistry and possibly a connection but are too clouded by their own baggage to really see each other.

Q) You have starred in various roles from “Grey’s Anatomy” to “Never Have I Ever” and more. How did you prepare for this particular role that was a bit different from your previous ones?

A) [laughs] As fast as possible! I was really up against the clock on this one. I only had two weeks from when I got the offer to when we started shooting. So while I was memorizing lines, I was doing character development and scene breakdown and coaching with my acting teacher. Since my previous jobs were mainly through auditions, I definitely felt a lot more pressure walking into this job because my character wasn't fully baked. I had to mentally prepare myself for being open to change and finding out new things about the character — that was really new for me, but very, very fun and made me listen even more intently.

Q) Were you familiar with any of your costars before working with them on this film?

A) I was not. I met everyone on their first day on set.

Q) What was your favorite scene to film for the movie or maybe one that challenged you the most?

A) I had a blast every single day on set. One of my favorite and most challenging scenes was the one between Boom and Raina when they are talking about the whole loss of his father/her husband left in their lives. It required a lot of emotion and I'm someone that can't easily cry, so it required a lot of concentration on my part. I listened to music in-between takes and used sensorial work to help me stay in the zone. Once we were shooting, Rekha gave me an immense amount of emotion to react to. She's such a seasoned veteran actor and very giving as a person. I think that both of us took a beautiful dance together and helped each other overcome this huge loss in our character's lives and it translated really well on screen.

Q) What do you think it is about *Make Me a Match* that will make it a fast fan favorite Hallmark Channel film?

A) Definitely the chemistry between Boom and Vivi, it's so palpable in this movie. You'll be smiling ear-to-ear the whole time. Also, the relationships between Boom and Raina and Vivi and Raina were beautiful to watch unfold. I hope the audience finds the South Asian cultural scenes refreshing, vibrant and colorful. It was a huge deal for Hallmark to include this kind of diversity in the June Weddings 2023 series.

Q) Tell us about some of your future projects coming out.

A) For sure. So, there are a few projects coming up. One of them is *Dumb Money* coming out in theaters on 9/22/23, which I shot last year. It's got some pretty heavy hitters in there — Sebastian Stan, Seth Rogan, Pete Davidson, Paul Dano and America Ferrera just to name a few. I got to play one of the Co-CEOs of Robin Hood. This movie is all about the Reddit revolution/Gamestop movement of January 2021 that took down a couple of huge Hedge funds. It's going to be dope. Then, there's this one I just finished shooting called *A Girl in The Pool* directed by a young, prolific up and coming director Dakota Gorman. It's a satirical thriller and I play opposite Freddie Prinze Jr. And finally, an animated project I voiced with Lilly Singh called “The Mindful Adventures of Unicorn Island.” It's partnering with Headspace and YouTube Originals to create this mindful animated show for children to help them overcome their anxieties and deal with their challenges in a space way. It also stars Padma Lakshmi, Kal Penn and Utkarsh Ambudkar.

Q) What would you like to say to the fans of you and your work?

A) Thank you for tuning in and for your support! Know that I don't take anything for granted. I work my ass off every single day. I'm constantly learning, growing and challenging myself to be a better actor and a better human. I hope to bring you the best of me always.



THE List.

Romantic Lead Rushi Kota Details The Surreal Experience Of Joining Hallmark - Exclusive Interview



Since starting his acting career, Rushi Kota has had several roles you may have seen in projects such as ["Never Have I Ever"](#) as Prashant, along with "Grey's Anatomy" and "Grey's Anatomy B Team" as Dr. Vik Roy. However, he's taking on a different kind of project and making his romantic lead debut in Hallmark's "Make Me a Match."

"Make Me a Match" premieres Jun 24, 2023, as part of [Hallmark's June Weddings collection](#). Kota stars in the film as Bhumes, alongside Eva Bourne as Vivi. The pair meet when Vivi seeks the expertise of Raina, an [Indian matchmaker](#), for advice on the data-driven matchmaking app designed by the company that employs her. Working with Raina, Vivi meets her son, the spontaneous and charismatic Bhumes, who starts to change the way she sees romance.

During an exclusive interview with The List, Kota discussed how different this film was from other work he's done. He shared some of the biggest challenges as well as his favorite parts of taking on such a different character. Kota also opened up about his journey with acting and how he went from automotive engineering to where he is today.

His experience playing the romantic lead



What was it like for you to play the romantic lead in a Hallmark movie?

This was really cool. I don't know if it was all in the works before or not, but for me, it came out fairly quickly. This was a very exciting role, it was the romantic lead of this movie, and I don't think I've ever played anything of this magnitude so far. There were so many ups and downs for the character. It was a huge arc for the character, and that was really nice to settle into a role that I don't think I've ever had before.

What would you say was the most challenging and also the best part of the role?

The most challenging part was the amount of words that were in this movie. When I first got the script, my brain was literally hurting, because it was a 110-page script, and almost every other page was monologue, monologue, monologue. It was a lot of words. That was the most challenging part of this role, I only had three weeks to get ready for it. I was like, "I got to put all of this into my brain as quickly as possible."

Once I got there ... it was all shot in Vancouver. Once I got there, after the first day was done, everything felt like, "I got this." It felt very smooth throughout the process, and I was having a lot of fun on set. Everybody else was having a lot of fun on set. Everything else, all the stress, took a backseat to it.

Working with Eva Bourne



What was it like working with Eva Bourne opposite you?

She was great. We had way too much fun on set. There were many times when Heather [Hawthorn Doyle], the director, was like, "I need you guys to stop laughing so we can really get through." She [Bourne] is extremely talented, and she's so fun to be around. She has this quality where she knows how to have fun on set but also knows when to bring it right in. When the director yells "cut" or "action," she's right there with it. That was really fun to see that shift in her. I was like, "Oh yeah, that's cool." I was doing that, too, and we both were right there with each other, and there was so much chemistry between us. That was really fun.

Do you have any memorable moments from behind the scenes with her or with the rest of the cast?

There were so many ... the way this movie is structured, there were many parts to a scene. Usually, there's one scene, and there's a beginning, middle, and end, but for the purposes of the way this was written, especially during an engagement scene or a wedding scene, there were a lot of mini scenes within the scene, which made it into about a nine or 10-page scene. It was very daunting, too, those days.

I remember, during the wedding scene ... which was at the very end of the movie, we were shooting it on day three, and we had been through a couple of very exhausting days on day one and two. This day three happened to be [when] we barely had any lines. It was just us getting married. I remember having so much fun on that day, because you're acting and being with each other and being in the scenes, and we didn't have much to say except we're both communicating and looking at each other in the eyes. That was the most amount of fun that we had. It was a lot of days of giggles and laughter.

How his Make Me A Match character is different from past roles



How do you feel like this character compares to past roles that you've had? He is quite different.

Yeah, it's very different. First, the magnitude of this role was huge, and I was able to find a lot of nuances within the character of really seeing it within the scene, but also taking a macro, objective view of the whole picture and figuring out, "Okay, where can I go high, or where can I go low, and which different parts?"

That was really cool to explore a character from beginning to end, whereas, in other parts that I've had, they were a little smaller. Either I'm on there for a day or two or three, and [they] didn't have that much of an arc for those characters. It was fun to explore, like, "Where can we push, and then where can we pull back? And then what is the end goal that we're trying to get to, and what is our journey, and how can we hit all of these different moments by trying to get to the end goal?"

You've done a lot of varied roles, as far as genre. You've been in horror and romance and comedies. Is there any genre that you're the most interested in, or do you try to keep it fresh like that?

I honestly wish I had a choice in the genre. I've done a sitcom, I've done drama, horror, comedy. The other one I really want to do is action. I want to get physical with a role. I see where the wind blows and then see what happens.

I now have been doing this for a little while, and now I'm like, "I'm really interested in the character, in the role, even if it's small, even if it's big." I'm like, "Okay, what's really different about this..." whatever genre it's going to be, and I want to explore that a lot more.

Going from mechanical engineering to acting



Before you decided to go into acting, you were planning on going into engineering. What was it like making that decision to actually pursue acting?

It was a whole quarter-life crisis ... an early 20s crisis, for sure. I spent four years of my life studying engineering, automotive engineering, and then thought, "I don't really want to do that anymore." I remember having a lot of questionable inner monologues with myself of, "Oh man, am I doing the right thing? Is this fun? Is this going to be lucrative? What's this going to be?" It was just a lot of questions that were yet to be answered when I was starting out.

Was acting something you always wanted to do but talked yourself out of, or was that more of a later-on thing that came to you?

Yeah. I dabbled in acting in high school and community theater in high school and before college, but I don't think I ever saw that as something that it was for me because ... I came from a more traditional background of, "You've got to get a good job and you've got to make money." I don't think the arts were the way to go for that. I definitely talked myself out of it. I'm trying to think. It was really a blip on the radar while I was in college.

When I was getting my undergrad, I was dabbling in modeling a little bit. I was doing this one summer job where I met this one guy who was an actor, and he was working a temp job at the same company. We had a conversation, and I wanted to pick his brain of, "Okay, if this was something that I wanted to do, how would I do it? How would I go about it?" He gave me all the tidbits of information that I stored away and didn't really use until after graduating.

His upcoming role in Dumb Money



You're also in another upcoming film, 'Dumb Money,' that's coming out soon. What can you tell us about that project and what it was working with the cast? It was a lot of people like Seth Rogen, Pete Davidson, and Shailene Woodley.

I'm so excited for this movie. It's about the whole Reddit revolution that took place in late 2020 and early January 2021.

With GameStop, right?

Yeah, when ultimately GameStop, which was a nothing stock, was trading at somewhere under \$10, and then at its height, it hit about \$450, and it cost these hedge funds tens of billions of dollars. It's about this whole David versus Goliath story. It's got an incredible cast. I'm very lucky and honored and grateful to be a part of that cast. That was really cool.

I got to play Bajju Bhatt, who is one of the CEOs of Robinhood, and [Sebastian Stan](#) was playing Vlad Tenev, the other CEO of Robinhood. All my scenes were opposite Sebastian Stan, so that was a freaking dream come true. Every day on set, I was like, "Oh my God." I was calling my wife, and I was like, "Babe, I can't believe this is happening right now! I'm with Sebastian Stan. Oh my God. Oh my God." Meanwhile, I'm on set, I'm like, "Yo, what's up, bruh? Everything's cool."

You're like, "This is no big deal. I do this all the time."

Totally. It was internal. Inside, I was like [shaking]. There was Craig Gillespie, who was directing it. He directed "I, Tonya," he directed "Pam & Tommy," all these really cool movies, and his directing style was really cool. There were so many covering shots that we were doing. There were shots [where] he was talking about how "I need you to feel him right now. I just need you to feel him right now." I'm like, "Whoa. I never had a director tell me that before."

I got to put on a wig. They painted a whole beard on me. It was a whole character transformation and a lot of physical characteristics of what was going into the character.

Everyone on set was saying how much ... they could be gassing things up, but who knows. They were saying how much chemistry Sebastian Stan and I had playing these two characters. I was like, "Yeah!" It's coming out [in September], and I'm pretty sure it's coming out in theaters, and I'm very excited about it.

"Make Me a Match" premieres June 24 at 8:00 p.m. ET on the Hallmark Channel.

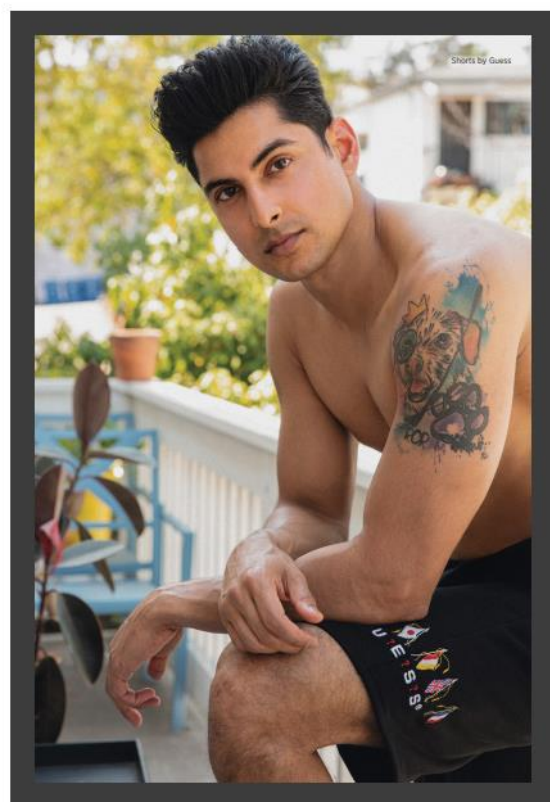
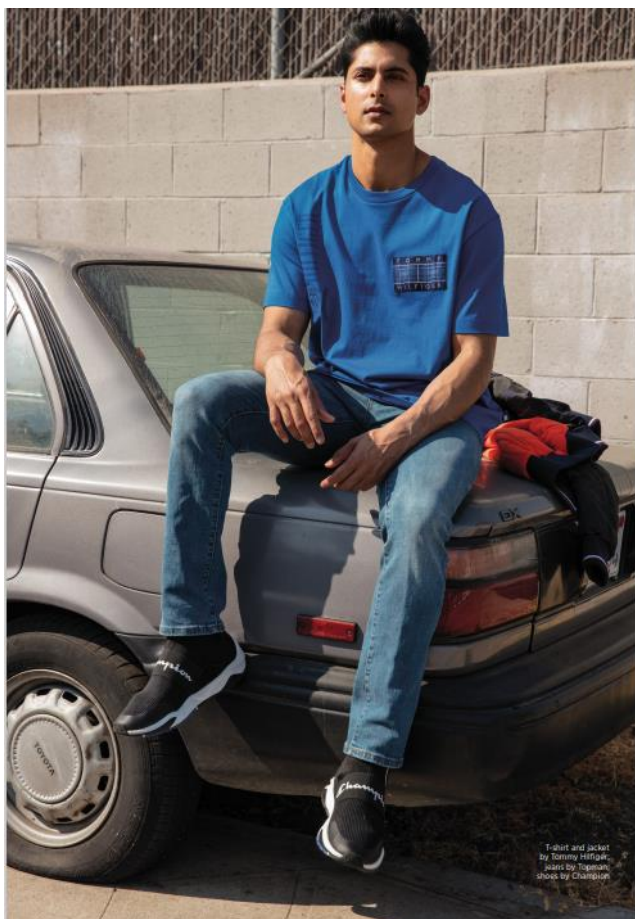
This interview has been edited for clarity.

PART OF THE CHANGE

PHOTOGRAPHY MITCHELL NGUYEN MCCORMACK & IAN PHILLIPS
STYLING KIMBERLY GOODNIGHT AND AMR DOBOS

American-Indian actor
Rushi Kota shares
with *DAMAN* about his
involvement in Netflix's
"Never Have I Ever,"
tackling challenges in
life and more

Sweater by C&A;
shirt and shoes by Tommy Hilfiger;
pants by Vince



W

ith the rise of Asian representation in America's film industry, Rushi Kota is proud to be part of the push for this long-overdue change.

To be exact, he is involved in Netflix's "Never Have I Ever," the series created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher that has been described as a watershed moment for South Asian representation in Hollywood.

Of course, Kota is not new to the industry. In fact, he has a decade of experience under his belt. He and his mother moved to New York when he was eight years old and when he first started, he was aggressively hustling and trying to book as many jobs as he could. While luck was on his side, Kota realized that he had no idea how to actually act. So, he got himself a coach, applied to grad school for a Master's Degree in Fine Arts in Acting, then got into Harvard. Through the showcase he had in both N.Y. and L.A., Kota landed a manager and an agent, which set him on the path he is on right now.

DAMAN: Hi, Rushi, glad to have you with us. How are you doing these days?

Rushi Kota: What up! Thank you for having me. You know I would like to say everything is great, but honestly, the truth is, I have been having waves of anxiety every day for the past year—and it has been driving me insane. Career, finances, family life, personal life, worldly issues, all of it has been weighing heavily on me, and I have been trying to navigate through a tornado of the unknown while trying to stay in the present.

DA: Can you give us a glimpse into your roots? Where did you grow up and how would you say did it shape your path?

RK: I grew up in Queens, New York, with lots of other immigrant families that had strong family values of

working toward the American dream. But at the same time, they were just as confused as I was about how to achieve that dream while trying to be true to their culture in a new world they didn't understand.

DA: By the way, congratulations on the success of "Never Have I Ever." How do you feel about being on the show?

RK: Thank you! I mean, I could cry! I just keep thinking where was a show like this when I was growing up and feeling so uncomfortable in my skin? Where was this show when I hated everything about my culture because it didn't fit in with American norms? It's a lot of mixed emotions to say the least. But as an actor, oh my God, I am beyond the moon! I—along with the other South Asian actors on the show—got to be the defining moment in rewriting the stereotype of how Indian men and women are portrayed on American television. As romantic, intelligent, attractive, complex leading individuals! And that's insanely huge! I am very grateful that I get to be part of carrying that torch.

DA: How was the casting process for the role? And how did you prepare to get into the shoes of your character, Prashant?

RK: It was a traditional casting process. My manager got me the audition, then I went into the room, did my thing and left. A couple of days later I got the call. I am very lucky that I get the number of auditions I do, so I have to train myself to let go after each one. When something clicks, it's a good feeling and when it doesn't, it's time to move on. As for my preparation, I tapped into my Indianness that I had buried so very deep inside of me. I did a lot of creation around the character of how he walks and talks, how he carries himself, what he wears, what his personality is like, what family values he adheres to, along with his relationship to

not only the people in the scenes with me but the people not in the scenes with me, like my parents, my co-workers, how much time he has spent in the States and how that has shaped who he is now versus who he was before. Also, relationships with objects. Especially in season one, there was the house, the grandfather clock and the crystal beaver. They all have to carry weight before I walk into the room.

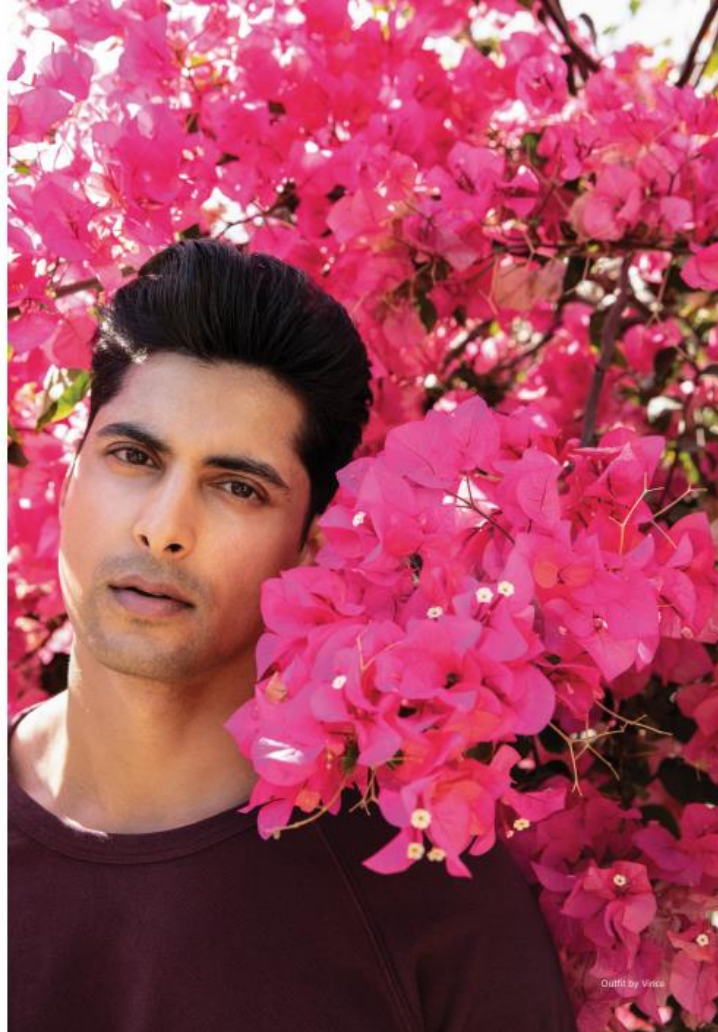
DA: They say that with every role, you learn something as an actor and maybe something about yourself. What was it that you took with you from your experience on "Never Have I Ever"?

RK: I am very different from my character. I don't follow the same family principles as the other Indian families just because I grew up in a very different household. I was the "make it or break it child," and my parents didn't make it. [Laughs]

My mother divorced my abusive father in India and brought my brother and I to New York when I was eight years old. She tried to do everything in her power to make sure we fit in, and because of that I tried to move away from being seen as "Indian" in the eyes of ...everyone. This show and this character have taught me to accept myself, to accept who am I and where I am from. It has been a long journey of acceptance, but after thirty something years, I am finally willing to try.

DA: Acting is a profession that presents a lot of challenges and hurdles. How have you overcome these in the past and how do you prepare for them in the future?

RK: I think the biggest challenge is finances. Until I am a lead in a big show or a movie, I am bleeding money, paying taxes, paying my reps, marketing material, union dues and all the other ten thousand different fees out there, which are extremely necessary. It's not at all



Outfit by Vixie



Tank top by Calvin Klein

glamorous living the life of an actor on the rise. I have a few survival gigs that I am not a fan of, but it keeps me fed, keeps my bills paid and enough coin in my pocket to invest in my career. But the absolute most important thing I have never ever done was let my survival gig get in the way of acting. IDGAF! If it ever feels like I am sacrificing my career for a stupid job that is not willing to accommodate my schedule, then I cut it loose! Just like an actor is replaceable, so is a job. There are a million ways to make money. I will find a way.

I was always very good with managing my finances and preparing for the future. I have opened a 401k, savings account and investment accounts, so I have money that's saved that I can't touch until I am 65. And I have money that is growing. It's also important to live within my means and not flaunt what I don't have like all those influencers.

DA: All in all, what would you say is your most favorite part about being on a film set?

RK: The adrenaline. When everything is exactly where it needs to be—lighting, sound, camera—and the director yells "Action," that's when living truthfully in the given circumstances comes to life for me. Being able to dance in that surge of adrenaline.

DA: What kind of roles would you like to try out in the future? Your dream projects, if you will...

RK: An action comedy. Something that has phenomenal fight choreography but also really hysterical like "Deadpool," "Kick-Ass," "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World," "Guns Akimbo," "22 Jump Street." I want to get physical with a role. I want to move away from so much cerebral analysis to much more instinctual playing and physical comedy. I want the opportunity to work with Anthony and Joseph Russo. Even just being an assistant to their assistant's assistant would instantly give me more street cred. But honestly, any Marvel project. You have one brown guy as a superhero for a movie that hasn't even come out yet, representing all colors of South Asians for the entire Marvel universe. I mean, come on!

DA: What's the best piece of acting or career advice that you've ever heard from someone in the business? Something that you really took to heart...

RK: To give it your all in every single take. Sarah Drew from "Grey's Anatomy" told a story of when an actor she worked with taught her the importance of giving it her all in every single take. I think this happens with actors higher up on the totem pole, when the camera is not on them, they "phone it in" to save their mojo for when it counts, which is bullshit. And to never have an ego when it comes to acting.

DA: Looking ahead, in what ways do you see the world of acting and filmmaking change even further?

RK: Diversity in front of and behind the scenes to an equal playing field of what America looks like now. There are many studies going on that say without proper representation these big budget movies bomb! So, all these Hollywood execs who are only concerned about money have no choice but to change their ways. The old white man ideology of "I can't bank a movie on a person of color because it will never make money" is obsolete.

DA: Will we see you appear in any other movies or TV shows in the months to come?

RK: Well, it's been a busy past year. I had four projects come out, two movies and two shows that I have been promoting: "Useless Humans" on Showtime, "Phobias" on Apple TV, "iCarly" on Paramount+ and "Never Have I Ever" on Netflix. Now that those are out for the world to see, I can focus on what the next challenges are. I am free to fly with where the wind blows.

DA: What are some causes you would like to give awareness to?

RK: I donate as much of the little money I have to the BLM Movement, to animal charities, to the Indian COVID crisis. There's a lot of grief in the world, and those who can't speak up are the animals. They are the ones who suffer the most. As the apex species, it is our duty to take care of those without a voice.

DA: Day-to-day, how do you keep yourself prepared when you aren't on an acting gig?

RK: I meditate every day. I write morning pages to check in with myself. I exercise. Eat as healthy as I can possibly muster. I am in an acting gym to keep my muscles flexed every week. I stay limber to be mobile at the drop of a dime. 🌱

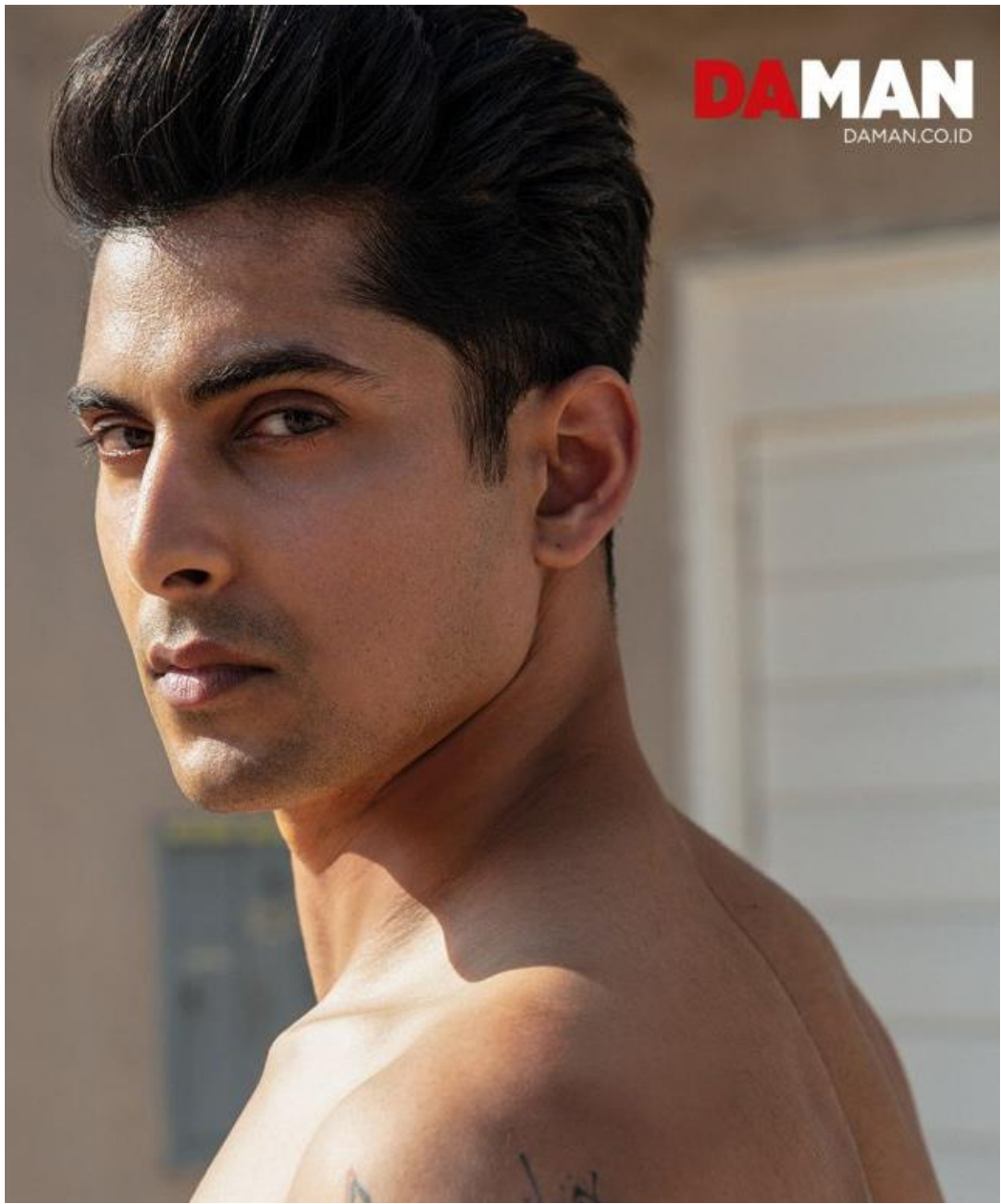
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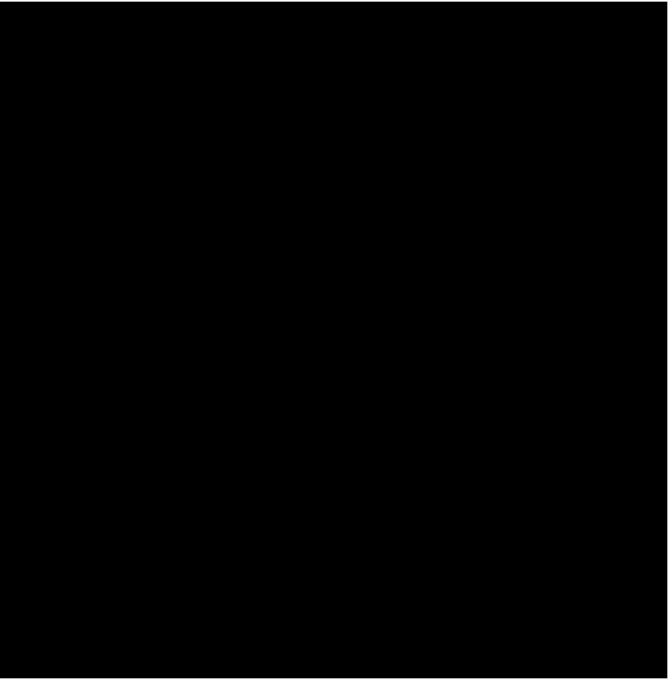
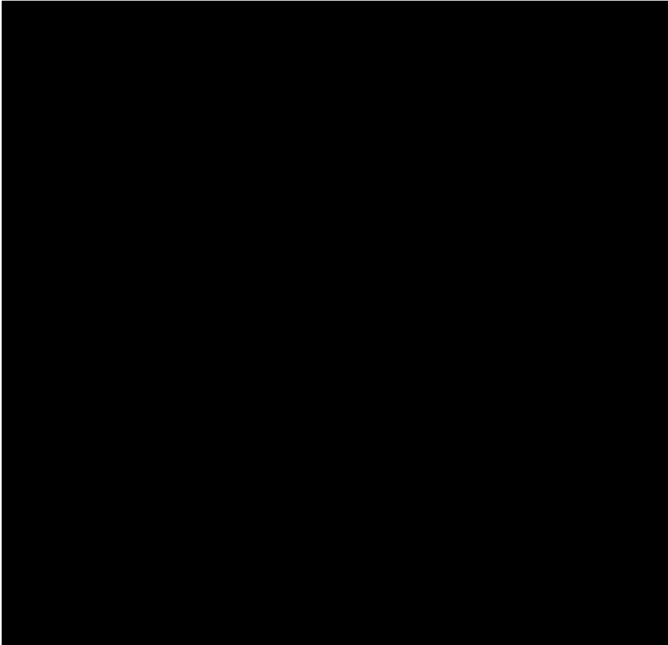


Swim trunks by Rupert & Buckley









VOL. 24

RUSHI KOTA

**RIGHT NOW IS VERY GOOD TO BE
PEOPLE LIKE US**

A CONVERSATION



I HAD A DIFFERENT UPBRINGING FROM THE REST OF THE COMMUNITY

➔ GROWING UP



"I grew up in New York. I came to America when I was eight. And then, midway through high school, I got transplanted into New Jersey.

I went to West Windsor High School South, which was weird because the school had no walls. So, you know, coming from a school where you must go through a metal detector and a full-body pat-down to going to a school where there are no walls here was an experience. After I finished high school, I went to college in Long Island and had been traveling and living in the different parts of the East Coast before finally coming out to the west coast.

➔ MOVING WEST



He is settled into the west coast culture with his wife now. "The first two years being in LA has been a challenge for sure.

Eight years into it, my wife and I love it. It is just the laid-back attitude of all of it. It was hard to adjust to it at first," reveals Rushi. Rushi and his wife have adjusted with the west coast vibe. If they want to go to the beach on a Monday, that is cool for them. Going to fancy restaurants in their sweats is also a cultural change they have become pro at. The SoCal vibe is cool, but NorCal was way more easygoing, Rushi agrees.

➔ AMERICA



Rushi was born in South India (in Hyderabad), so coming to America and restarting all over, including repeating third grade, must have created a mental block i

n his mind about his early childhood. He does remember that he could not speak English when he started school in America and was older than the other kids in his class. His mother, separated from his father, moved Rushi and his brother to New York in Queens. While growing up, he was not around a lot of people that looked like him. He was exposed to Korean culture first. He met the first south Asian person way into high school.

Continue reading at next page >



REWRITING THE STEREOTYPE

By MKaul

Rushi Kota is no stranger to the world of movies and shows in Hollywood. Rushi Kota is in the new Netflix Award Winning, and Global hit show "Never Have I Ever," created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher. Kota plays the role of Prashant in the series. Most familiar to fans as Dr. Vik Roy on ABC/Shonda Rhimes hit drama "Grey's Anatomy" and "Grey's Anatomy B-Team" nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding short form Drama/Comedy this past year.

Kota's mother brought him to America to achieve the American Dream. America was where he learned the value of perseverance and hard work. Kota has set out to break ethnic stereotypes in Hollywood and be more than just his skin color. Kota chose a traditional career path in Automotive Engineering at SUNY Farmingdale, where he double majored in Industrial Management Technology and Business Administration. After two years of vigorously pursuing acting in New York, Rushi was accepted into Harvard University's MFA program for acting, following that up with a residency at Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theater School in Russia.

I DON'T FIT THE STEREOTYPE

➔ NOT INDIAN ENOUGH



While looking for roles, Rushi is not getting stereotyped. He explains, "Because I don't fit the stereotype. My agents have been outstanding in that they

get me out in front of the most varied auditions. That is also because the feedback I was getting was that I wasn't Indian enough for Indian roles. Then, I wasn't American enough for the American parts. And that was very frustrating. But I don't think I get stereotyped as much as other people."

➔ TELUGU MOVIES



We had to tell Rushi that Devi's reaction to his character Prashant in *Never Have I Ever* was precisely how each one of us felt when we saw him on the screen in the show.

"Right now, just English. I used to speak my native tongue, Telugu, but I understand it better. When my mom and my brother start communicating aggressively in Telugu, since I have not spoken it in a long time, it takes me a second to recalibrate and talk if I have to," reveals Rushi.

Is there a hope that he might get cast in Telugu movies, then?

Rushi is unsure if that is something he will look at his time in his career.

➔ BACK TO THEATER



Does he think of getting back to the theater? "I don't think I can go away for three months to do anything at all. The theatre is not back up yet. New York is slowly getting back.

They will focus mainly on getting the people who didn't have jobs for the past year and a half to get them because they need them more. I don't think I'm going to focus on any theater right now," clarifies Rushi.

What is Rushi looking forward to now? Apart from *Never Have I Ever* Season 3.

"Yeah, season three is coming out. Hopefully, I have a job, though I don't know yet. That's where I'm with the rest of the audience who are watching the show. Depending on the choices they make for Kamala's story, they might call me, or they might not contact me. I don't know. I'd be sad if they don't."

Continue reading at next page >

Coming from an Indian family, we presumed that he might have had familial expectations to choose stereotypical Indian professions (like a doctor or an engineer).

He says, "I had a very different upbringing from the rest of the Indian community. My mother, who has been stellar support, was also very eccentric in her way. Her propensity to value happiness fueled her to push me towards the acting side of things. She knew I wouldn't be happy going the traditional route, even though I got my bachelor's and undergraduate in a conventional education (Rushi is an Industrial Engineer). She knew that acting is a way for me to live all of these different lives- to play a doctor, play a lawyer, play a spy, whatever, you get to do that. So, honestly, my mother pushed me into this profession, which was nice. Yeah, I don't think most parents do that."

Rushi continues, "In our community, everyone is worried about the kids getting into some graduate program. Everyone has got to be at the top of their class. And the pressure is crazy—the pressure to perform and excel. I understand the immigrant mindset that pushes our community to pressure our young ones to steal all the sweet and sour."

The creator economy has changed everything. Young people are making more money doing YouTube videos or being Influencers on Instagram.

We wanted to understand his journey as an actor and how he has evolved over this career. Rushi graduated in 2009, right around the whole housing market crash in 2008. He could not find a job and had to live back with family in Jersey after he graduated college. He started commuting to New York, trying to audition for acting opportunities. A friend of Rushi's suggested that he should get headshots, get on actors access, and backstage. It took him a year to book some work, and that's how he had to struggle to make his way into a highly competitive vocation.

As he started to get work, he started looking at the vocation of acting very seriously. He spent around six months studying with a coach to read and understand Shakespeare. He learned songs, put together an application, and started applying to the top five programs for acting.

Rushi got into Harvard for a Master program in Fine Arts and Acting and relocated to Massachusetts for two and a half years

I'M JUST HAVING FUN PLAYING ALONG

➔ NEVER HAVE I EVER



What is Rushi looking forward to now? Apart from *Never Have I Ever* Season 3. "Yeah, season three is coming out. Hopefully, I have a job, though I don't know yet."

That's where I'm with the rest of the audience who are watching the show. Depending on the choices they make for Kamala's story, they might call me, or they might not contact me. I don't know. I'd be sad if they don't."

➔ RYAN & MINDY



Rushi is a massive fan of Ryan Reynolds.

"I would love to be in a movie with him and have some witty banter while we are shooting and, that would be amazing."

That's where I'm like putting this out into the universe. I want to be in a movie with Ryan Reynolds. "If Rushi could ask for a chance to work with any female actor, he would want to be on screen with Mindy Kaling."

"I think she's focusing so much on the writing. The simple humor that she puts into her shows is magical, and I think being with her screen would be so much fun," opines Rushi.

➔ BOLLYWOOD



What if Rushi had the chance to go to Bollywood. "I don't think so," says Rushi. "Unless I can speak what they wrote in English."

With the advent of web platforms in India, many stories are written, keeping in mind the international Indian audience with English-speaking Indians a part of the cast."

"If that were the thing, I would jump into it. But I don't know that I cannot start learning a new language all of a sudden. I don't want my voice to be dubbed over; of course, as an actor, I want to put as much work into it as possible and be as authentic as possible. And if there were a cross-language production that happens, I would love that."

THE STRUGGLE

"As soon as I graduated, I booked the play out in Sacramento and then moved to Los Angeles. I had our places in both New York and LA, so I was getting much interest from managers and agents in both areas. My first job was at the series *General Hospital*. I got my SAG card while doing a workshop with the casting director. That is how I started. Eventually, I got my reel together, and here I am eight years later."

Rushi is most thankful to his fans for watching and supporting him. "I think a show like *Never Have I Ever* is what we need right now to rewrite the stereotype created for people like us. And it is happening right now, which is so very exciting," says Rushi.

"You know, when I first started, everybody was like, Oh, it is so good to be you right now. And then, five years later, I feel it is right now very good to be people like us."

If Rushi were to advise other South Asian actors now that he has been through the entire process, he would tell them to get out of this business as it is insanely hard to make it in this business.

"I am not going to lie. It is a lot. But the way I like to think about my life as an actor is to have a triangle. It is the most vital structure. You cannot focus all on the acting side of things. You have to have a support system; you have to build that. And you have to have something else that makes you happy outside of acting to bring your joy to the art of acting. And for people coming up, I think, build a solid base, to support yourself outside of acting," advises Rushi.

"If you can do that, then it is going to feel like a hobby at first. But if you can live without acting and support yourself, you can bring joy to your work. I think that is what is essential," emphasizes Rushi.

Deadline just published the news that NBC's fall drama, *Ordinary Joe*, announced Rushi as a member of their cast in a recurring role. Rushi's hard work and patience are finally paying off. We are all rooting for his continued success as he represents the desis with a lot of graceful poise.

RUSHI KOTA | ON NETFLIX'S 'NEVER HAVE I EVER'

BY SHIRLEY JU

Rushi Kota is far more than just an actor, he’s the definition of someone who’s down-to-earth and lives life to the fullest. In describing himself, he states, “I’m pretty sarcastic, I make a lot of stupid jokes. [laughs] And I’m pretty vibrant.”

You may have seen him playing the role of Dr. Vik Roy on the hit television series *Grey’s Anatomy* on ABC, but most recently he returns to Season 2 of Netflix’s hit show *Never Have I Ever*, created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher. Stepping into a deeper role, his character Prashant plays the love interest to a first generation, Indian American girl, who got hitched via an arranged marriage.

Hailing from the suburbs of Queens, New York, Rushi was born to a single mother who moved them to the United States to give her son the best life possible. Of course, making it in Hollywood (or entertainment in general), you need to put in the work, stay passionate, and never give up. After ditching his Automotive Engineering degree, Rushi was accepted into Harvard University’s MFA program for Acting.

Now, Rushi is living the American Dream and doing what he loves, with a goal to break stereotypes in Hollywood and be seen for more than just his skin color.

Flaunt caught up with Rushi via Zoom who had just returned to Los Angeles from Atlanta, where he was shooting NBC’s *Ordinary Joe*. Read below as we discuss his upbringing, biggest influences, when he fell in love with acting, what it meant to be on *Grey’s Anatomy*, breaking down the stereotypes of Hollywood, Season 2 of *Never Have I Ever*, training for a triathlon, love for EDM, fashion sense, and more!

You were born in India but grew up in Queens. What was your upbringing like?

I came to America when I was 8 years old. And growing up in Queens was really hard. When I first came to the States, I didn’t know any English at all. It was a very confusing time because there were no other Indians around me. As I was growing up I wasn’t Indian enough to be Indian, then not American enough to be American. There was this whole HipHop influence happening in Queens and New York. At that time, I didn’t know who to be or how to be. It was a trip. [laughs]

Biggest influences? Who were you looking up to?

Right now? Let’s see, Ryan Reynolds, Idris Elba he’s dope. Chadwick Boseman, my God. The dude is so nice, so talented. I’ve been listening to a lot of podcasts, Off Camera with Sam Jones. I listened to Kumail Nanjiani, Riz Ahmed, Mindy Kaling. Hearing about their experiences and being able to relate to that, it’s been eye-opening.

When did you realize you wanted to act or fell in love with it?

Right after I graduated from college with my undergrad. I did a whole Bachelor’s in Engineering and said “I really don’t want to do this anymore.” [laughs] I wanted to be a Formula 1 racer.

No way! Is that like NASCAR?

No. There’s Formula 1, then there’s NASCAR. But Formula 1 is the cars that go really fast, so that’s what I wanted to do. That’s what my life ambition was, and I realized how so far away from that I can possibly be. I studied Automotive Engineering.

What was your first big break you would say?

My first big break was *Grey’s Anatomy*. Having the caliber of experience on that show and being able to be on it for more than one season, that was my biggest break.

How did it feel to be on such a critically-acclaimed show?

It was really cool. I think I was one of the first Indian Americans to have a character that was long-term on the show. Learning from all the OG’s who’d been there: Ellen, Chandra, James, Justin, and how humble they all are. Even after that many seasons of being on the show, they’re so very open and accepting. It taught me a lot, they took me under their wing.

What did you learn from Harvard?

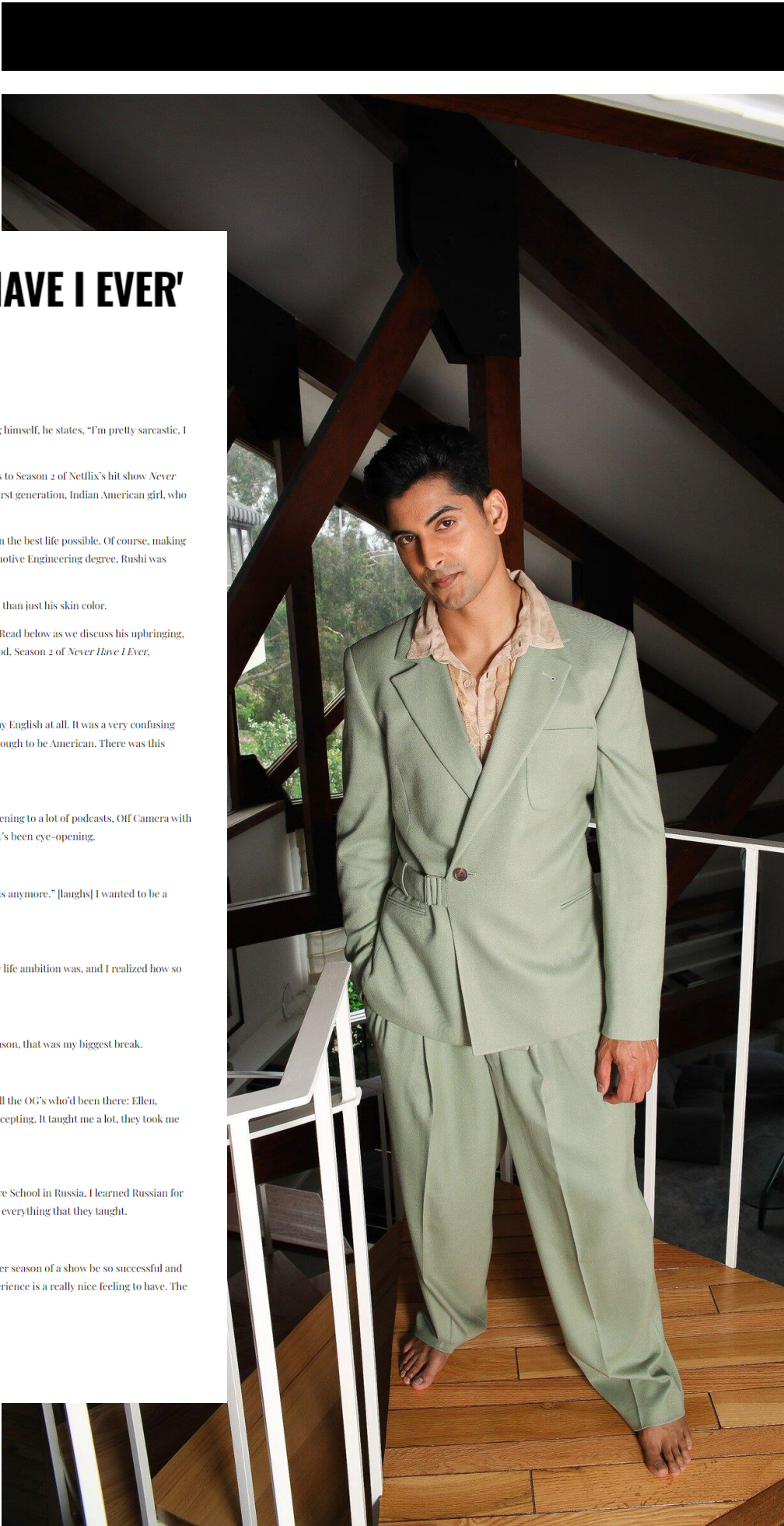
I got my Master’s in Fine Arts in Acting. I did a 2-3 year program there. [Laughs] We did our residency at the MXAT-Moscow Art Theatre School in Russia. I learned Russian for about 9 months. I didn’t know much about acting when I got to my Master’s Program so I was a total open book. A sponge. I absorbed everything that they taught.

What’re you most excited for with Season 2 of *Never Have I Ever*?

So Season 2 is out, it came out in July. Again it was a global phenomenon on Netflix, just blew everything off the charts. To have another season of a show be so successful and tell these really authentic stories of people of color, especially in America, and have it be so relatable to everyone and everyone’s experience is a really nice feeling to have. The show got picked up for Season 3, which is huge. Hopefully I still have a job waiting for me. [laughs]

I’m pretty sure you’ll be good right? [laughs]

Yeah that’s what I’m hoping for.



What does it mean to be breaking down the stereotypes In Hollywood? How true is the character to your own experiences?

It's a very important time for people of color to be in Hollywood right now. The change is happening right now and it's been happening. We've been seeing it happen for a very recent time, the past 3 or 4 years has been aggressively shifting. There's been a huge call for diversity on and off the screen. Finally, we get people of color really getting to tell their story. It's really a good time to be people like us.

It's really fun because we don't have to play our set race. We don't have to just play only the Indian guy, or only the Chinese guy. We can branch out and do other things, and Hollywood is finally acknowledging that. The noise is so big out there that they're like "yo we gotta give these people a shot."

How is it working with Mindy and Lang, the creatives of the show? Fondest memories on set?

Just having the opportunity. Especially working with Lang, I haven't gotten the chance to work with Mindy as much. It's really fun to be on set and everybody is so appreciative of the fact they get an opportunity to do that. Lang is so wonderful, she's easy to talk to. She's directed the last episode of Season 2, it's just so easy to work with her. She gets it. She's a total actor/director.

What's your favorite episode from this season?

My favorite episode would be where Prashant and Kamala finally have their very intimate moment and they kiss. That'd be my favorite episode, there's been such a build to that then it just happens. There's so much nerves, chemistry and energy. All of that is very visible in that episode.

What do you feel when you act?

I feel a lot of joy. When the adrenaline's finally pumping, that's my happy place. I finally get to live in the unknown. That's when I know I'm really in the moment.

How does it feel to be nominated for an Emmy with *Grey's Anatomy*?

I think they made our show to fit a category, and it fit that category. It was the best short form of drama or comedy that's specific for prime time. I did get nominated for an Emmy and I was very happy. Oh my gosh, this never happened before. We shot 6 mini episodes and to be a lead in that and even have that, whoa that's really cool.





I know you like to workout, how often do you workout?

I workout 6 days a week. [Laughs] Right now, I'm training for the Nautica Malibu Triathlon that's benefiting The Children's Hospital of Los Angeles. That's happening.

Are you excited or nervous?

I'm actually pretty nervous. Last month I felt really fit, and this month I've been traveling back and forth from Atlanta. I'm still training as hard as I possibly can until the triathlon, then I'ma let all go. [laughs]

Who do you listen to when you workout?

I listen to a lot of EDM. A lot of David Getta, that's my jam. Axwell, David and Morten, Afrojack. Oh yeah, Alesso. EDM's great. I'm seeing RÛFÛS DU SOL in November. My wife and I, we jam out to RÛFÛS DU SOL's set in Joshua Tree on youtube. There's one part of it, it's literally like they're calling the aliens. It's so cool. [laughs]

The aliens?!

Yeah. If you Google "RÛFÛS DU SOL, Joshua Tree" on YouTube, their whole set comes and they set this up in Joshua Tree. There's this one part to their set and they're all vibing out, the lights are going. It honestly sounds like there's aliens about to land. [laughs]

How would you describe your fashion sense?

My fashion sense is fitted clothes. Sometimes very military style, like combat boots. What I'm wearing right now, my pants have pockets on the side. They're all tapered towards the leg, also loose.

Any goals for yourself at this point in your career?

Yeah. I'd hope so. [laughs] To land a season regular on a network show, that's what I'm hoping for coming up. Have enough credits and experience to take me there, to do an action-comedy all in one. Something with some butt whooping in there, but also a lot of dialogue and characters who are broken trying to figure themselves out. That'd be a goal of mine. I'd also like to put on some weight. [laughs] I want to get to 175, I'm at 160 now.

Do you eat healthy?

I do, I think that's the problem. I eat really healthy and I workout a lot so I'm burning a lot of calories. In order for me to get to 175, I actually have to be eating even more. I don't know if my mouth can handle all that. [laughs]

That sounds like a great problem. [laughs]

No it's not! Because I'm a hard gainer, it's pretty rough.

What're you most excited for this year as the world opens back up?

I'm excited for this show *Ordinary Joe*, it premiered on NBC. My character comes in Episode 5 and he stays until the end of the season. It's very different from what I've played before. It's set in this political landscape, even though the show's about Joe who's made all these different choices and follows the path of the choices he's made. I'm excited for this new character that's so very different from me.



‘Never Have I Ever’'s Rushi Kota Is Hollywood’s New Indian American Heartthrob



The “Grey’s Anatomy” veteran is keeping busy with a new show on NBC, but he has his eye on the bigger picture. (Photo courtesy of Netflix)

Atlanta’s famously sultry weather isn’t for everyone, but actor [Rushi Kota](#) is more than happy to turn up the heat. “In L.A., there is absolutely no humidity,” Kota laughs on Zoom from his hotel room. “So my skin, my hair and everything feels very plush.”

After spending over a decade in show biz, he’s had plenty of experience perfecting those effortless good looks. Although he’d previously dabbled in modeling, Kota first started acting at the insistence of his mother, a fact that baffles him even now. “I don’t know why she pushed me into it,” says Kota. “We were broke—my car got repo-ed, her house was getting foreclosed and I couldn’t find a job.” But Mama Kota must have had some inkling of her son’s future success. He’s in Atlanta to shoot the new NBC series “[Ordinary Joe](#),” but he’s best known these days for appearing as Prashant in [Mindy Kaling](#)’s Netflix hit “[Never Have I Ever](#)” and as Dr. Vik Roy in “[Grey’s Anatomy](#).”

Although his “Grey’s” role made history as the first long-running Indian American character on the beloved medical series, it’s Kota’s turn as Prashant that’s most memorable, particularly after the coming-of-age drama’s tumultuous second season. (Spoilers ahead!) As biologist Kamala’s dreamy arranged boyfriend, Prashant proved that he had a heart of gold in his first appearances, but by season two he seems less than fully understanding of his girlfriend’s endeavors in her male-dominated workplace.



“[He’s] there to serve the story, but I didn’t want him to be looked at as someone who’s not supportive of someone’s dreams,” says Kota, right. (Photo courtesy of Netflix)

That evolution didn’t sit very well with Kota, as he admits he feels a sense of pressure to portray Indian American characters in a positive light. “Because this is [one of] the first times you’re seeing an Indian American [with] an accent as someone who’s attractive, smart, a complex individual, I struggled so much with playing him a certain way,” Kota says. “[He’s] there to serve the story, but I didn’t want him to be looked at as someone who’s not supportive of someone’s dreams.”

Luckily, Kota had plenty of help from a real-life female scientist—his wife. As a cancer researcher, she’s even done some academic work at his on-screen girlfriend Kamala’s school, CalTech. “I consulted [my wife] on it, because she’s dealt with all of this political drama within the science field, and she still does,” Kota says. “It was nice to have her support. When I was feeling a certain way about it, that meant a lot to me.” Now, he just hopes that Prashant will be back to redeem himself in season three. The chemistry between Prashant and Kamala is electric, and with a romantic rival ([Utkarsh Ambudkar](#)) thrown into the mix, there’s ample opportunity to explore another love triangle in the Netflix show.

But Kota has much more than that on his agenda. He also plays campaign manager Sai in “Ordinary Joe,” which premieres today, Sept. 20 and follows the three different potential lives of an “ordinary Joe” fresh out of college. Kota says that while he’s learning more about his character as he goes, he’s excited to explore Sai’s edgier side, explaining, “There’s a certain way he talks and walks, and it’s really fun to jump into that. It’s completely different from everything I’ve done.”

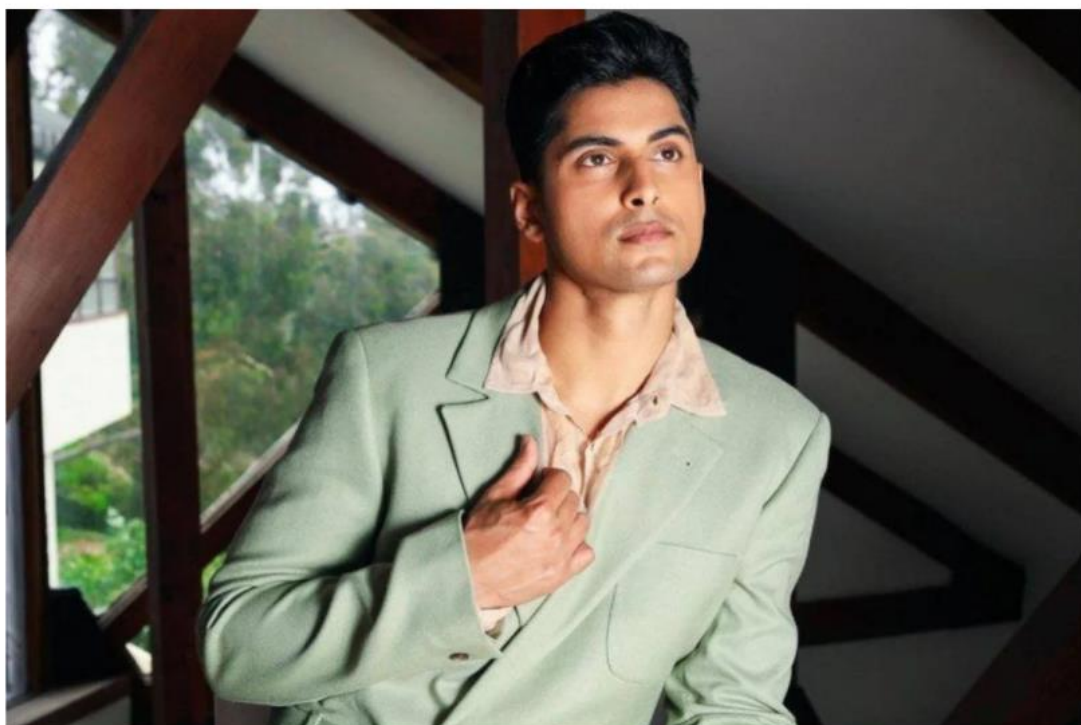


He’s still got plenty of different roles left to explore. Kota reveals that he’d love to appear in a [Ryan Reynolds](#)-style action comedy someday, describing his dream role as “anything where I can drive a car really fast, shoot some guns and say sarcastic things.” And thanks to the success of films and shows like “Never Have I Ever,” that possibility doesn’t seem too far out of reach. “We’re seeing South Asian representation, and Asian representation in general blossom,” he says. “Hollywood is finally seeing that there’s an audience and they’re finally moving Asians out of these stereotypical roles and giving them an avenue to succeed. And it’s just going to keep getting better.”



Q&A | Meet Rushi Kota, the heartthrob of Netflix's *Never Have I Ever*, ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* and Nickelodeon's *iCarly*: 'finally I don't have to play my skin colour'

- Before he was Kamala's love interest, Kota once contemplated a career in Formula One racing and even studied automotive engineering before switching gears to pursue acting
- Kota talked to STYLE about breaking Hollywood's ethnic stereotypes, his formative roles in *Phobias* and *Useless Humans* – and his last-minute lockdown wedding to wife Reeshelle



Since playing Prashant in Netflix's *Never Have I Ever*, Rushi Kota has blown up as a heartthrob of the series. Photo: @mitchstonephoto/Instagram

Rushi Kota stars as Prashant in *Never Have I Ever*, the smash hit Netflix series created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher. On one hand, the show is a lighthearted and often hilarious coming of age drama, but on the other, it has been praised for its representation for Asian Americans.

Kota sat down with *STYLE* for an exclusive interview to discuss race representation, his sudden shift from studying automotive engineering to a career on the screen, why the internet blew up over his role as Kamala's love interest – and his lucky lockdown wedding to real-life wife Reeshelle.



It's really nice because I finally don't have to play my skin colour



In addition to playing Prashant in *Never Have I Ever*, Kota has also played a wide range of characters, such as Dr Vik Roy on *Grey's Anatomy*. Photo: @alexbluedavis/Instagram



Kota recently made an appearance on *iCarly* as Luke Tyler. Photo: @rushikota/Instagram

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