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# THE COMEDY GAZELLE



# ABOUT THE GAZELLE

When I first moved to Chicago, I was immediately struck by the level of talent in the scene. "Fuck, she's good," I thought as I watched Kristen Toomey annihilate a sold out Laugh Factory. *Why haven't I heard of her before?*

It's a question I come back to often, and a major problem here. The city's bursting with household-name-level talent, but unless you're in the midst of it, it can pass you by.

That's why I started The Comedy Gazelle – to bring outsiders into the heart of Chicago comedy, and to share knowledge that can hopefully make the scene that much stronger. It was also the pandemic and I had shit else to do.

Thanks for your support.

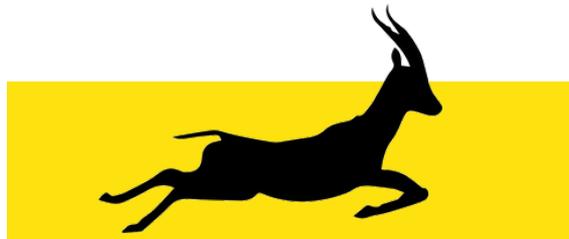
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# INTERVIEW: ADAM GILBERT

*I caught up with the hilarious Adam Gilbert (@adamgcomedy) to chat about all of his recent success. Stinker and I talked JFL, moving to New York, performing at the Chicago Theatre, therapy, and more!*

## How's everything with you? What's new?

Not much, man. I feel like it's been slowing down a little bit, which is probably a good thing after the craze of JFL, the Chicago Theatre, then just moving to New York. Now it's kinda just coasting for a few weeks. That feels pretty nice.

## Has having some of those credits helped you settle into New York at all?

A little of this, a little of that. I don't think anything really prepares you for this city. It's just so fucking huge and there's so many comics. Short answer: I guess it's helped maybe that 1%. Long answer: no, you kind of just have to be here for a while. But it rules; it's a big place.

## This is your first time out there?

I visited before; I did a couple sets right before covid. When that happened, I was like, "Yeah, I'm not remotely ready to move here." Three years later I'm like, "Yeah probably I should just do it and see what happens."

## What happened in those three years that made you feel ready?

I guess I was 25 and I figured I just had a few more years to figure things out in Chicago. This year in January I started talking to a manager, then that JFL audition went really well and I thought there was a chance I got it. Then this room opened up and I was like, "Well, let's just see what happens." Since I got older, I got a little less afraid of failure and a little bit more financially responsible. I'll be 29 next month and I feel like if I lose a sales job or whatever, I won't be bankrupt in two weeks like when I was younger. Then once I got here — this is where you go to be competitive. There's just no comparison. The really, really, good people here just do so much every single night. It's unbelievable. You're competing with literally the funniest people in the world.

## What's that like?

I honestly couldn't tell you at this point cause I'm not passed at all the clubs and stuff. I know [Geoff] Asmus



had to follow Michael Che doing an hour. I've seen Maddie Wiener follow Mark Normand. They just kill it because they have to; the show has to keep going. I think that's one of the biggest things that New York does to you: it makes you better because you just kind of have to be.

## Yeah, they just throw you in the fire.

I did this set at The Stand, just a ten-minute audition spot. I think it went well, but the audition process for every club is so weird in this city. In Chicago, it feels like you kind of just have to be annoying. The Laugh Factory, for example, you show up all the time and you do well when you do get sets and they're like, "Okay." Zanies, it's kind of the same thing. But with New York there's like 15 clubs. Maybe you need a credit to work this club, or if you work this club, you can't work that club. Then with The Cellar and The Stand, you need two references, and you have to audition, then you have to do another audition, then you get passed. It's really strange. I had to follow this guy at The Stand that had been doing stand up for like 19 years. I somehow held my own, but it's still that feeling of "Oh fuck, okay, this guy's, really, really good." I guess that's what I was looking for in New

York. Every week or so you have to follow someone and you're like, "Okay that person is very fucking funny."

**I'm really curious about your experience at JFL. Can you run me through what that was like?**

Yeah, so I did two shows at JFL. I did one in this little black box that was the late show; that one was kind of rougher because it was all industry people. Then the one before that, the big one, was at the theatre and that's the one they filmed. They had a hair and makeup team: one chair a lady would do your hair, one chair a lady would brush up your face. It was fucking terrifying. Caitlin Peluffo was on it, and she was leading us all with these breathing exercises. It was very scary. It was the largest crowd I had done at that point; I think it was 900? There were all these industry people there. Distefano was there - didn't know that until afterwards. But right before the show, everything that really happened at the festival, beside the shows, was at the Hilton DoubleTree. Have you ever been to like a big hotel, business kind of conference before?

**Yeah a few.**

That's really what the festival was. It was a conference that was interrupted with shows. It was packed to the brim with people milling about networking between shows, then at night it was a party. And still people networking. But before I went to the shows, I was trying to find my manager and I ran into Brian Morton, who used to be at Laugh Factory and Zanies in Chicago, and he introduced me to Distefano. It was brief: "Hey, this is Chris." Very nice guy, shook hands. Then flash forward, I did the show and it went really well cause the lineup top to bottom was so fucking good. It was so fun. Everyone in the crowd was really excited; it was great. Pete Holmes hosted and he was really encouraging backstage. I got offstage and was very nervous and hyperventilating. If you've never done that kind of crowd before, it feels like you bombed. We all kind of felt like it. The Chicago Theatre is the only theatre I've done this year, I did three, that I didn't feel like I bombed. The Chicago Theatre feels like it's a show at Zanies. It's so loud and the laughs are right in front of your face the whole time.

**Why did it feel like you bombed at the JFL theatre?**

It literally takes more time for your voice to reach them and for their laughs to reach each other and then to reach you. So, it's just that little bit of a delay. You see people who do theaters all the time and they figure it out no problem. But their act is different from ours because we mainly do clubs. We're used to joke laugh,

joke laugh, joke laugh. In a theatre you do a joke, it takes a minute and then you get a laugh. And the laughs can get bigger with theatres. But it doesn't sound like a normal show. It sounds like the laughs are smaller, but really it's just because it's taking a little longer.

**Did that throw you off at all in the moment? Did you adjust your delivery or anything?**

Not really at that first one. Pete Holmes just brought me up on stage; I was out of my fucking mind. I just wasn't thinking. I was just trying to get through my set. They only gave you six minutes, so I just wanted it to be as tight as possible. Then I got off stage and it was fine. I got all of these messages from Brian: "Distefano wants to meet you" and "He won't stop chanting 'Stinker' at the bar." It's a line in this joke, but I guess it really hit him. So, we met up that night and went over to this really cool show; it was Big Jay Oakerson's nasty show, and he was doing it at like this very classy strip club. We watched it and hung out there, then went to the afterparty. It was a good time. Then the next day we went back to that DoubleTree, shot the shit. My manager was walking me around and she introduced me to George Wallace. He was the best hang of the entire festival by far. I loved him so much.

**I was just watching Hubie Halloween where he's like, "Trick or treat. Smell my feet."**

That's just who he is off stage. He's just an insanely funny old guy. I had this chicken skewer that was really bad that they gave us and I was like, "I don't like this." And George was sitting at this like mesh picnic table. He goes, "Just stick it in the table." I was like, "What?" He's like, "You don't want the chicken stick, they like their table, someone will come get it." Alright! I jam it in. He ruled.

**So how did that all lead to you doing the Chicago Theater?**

So, after that not-as-good-but-I-had-fun-at black box show, I went to the afterparty and I got lost for so long. Cause the afterparty for the whole fest was in this big, closed megamall. I was asking, "Where do I go?" and nobody speaks English in Montreal; it's all French and I didn't know that. I was like, "Where's the party?" They're like, "Ehhh?" So, I walked around forever and finally found it. And it was off the fucking chain, dude. It was insane. There were people dancing, there was a DJ, there was a skylight, you could see downtown Montreal out of this glass ceiling. I sat with Brian and Distefano, and I guess Distefano just started drinking in his late 30s, which is truly bizarre to me. I've been sober for about a year, but I started drinking when I was a teenager like most people. He's going the opposite direction. But he was blacked out and was like, "You're doing the Chicago Theatre and you're doing Tarrytown!" I'm thinking, "This is not gonna happen. He's drunk; it's fine." Then Brian was like, "This is gonna happen." So the next morning I was messaging my manager about it and she was like, "Yeah, I saw him in an elevator; he's very excited." I was like, "What?"

#### **You thought it was some drunk bullshit.**

He wanted to do it. Then after I moved here, we did the Chrissy Chaos Podcast, which is in Pete Davidson's old apartment in shitty, shitty, Staten Island. I went there. I just had some mushrooms in my pocket and gave them to him. Then that clip kind of popped off. Then yeah, did the Chicago Theatre.

#### **Nerves wise, how did that compare to doing the JFL theatre? Were you like, "Holy shit this is even scarier?" What was going through your mind?**

The nerves were pretty bad, but I'd say they weren't even as bad as Tarrytown. I think I kind of got used to it and was more excited. But the inside of the theatre is several floors. There isn't just one green room in the Chicago Theatre. So I was just kind of running all around getting some nerves out. But once I stepped out there, that was the most fun. That was awesome. I can't really describe how good that theatre felt compared to any other theatre. It's just so packed out, and acoustically it's perfect. It rules.

#### **Didn't [Alex] Dragicevich perform there recently too?**

Yeah, he and my friend Brad Wenzel and Asmus were all talking about it and the way they described theatre shows sounded more like the Chicago Theatre. They were like, "Yeah it's gonna be easy; don't worry about it. Just take your time and have fun." When I opened for



Chris in Tarrytown in upstate New York, it felt like the JFL thing where they kind of like me, but it's fine. I got through it. But the Chicago Theatre felt like easy mode, where you could just have fun. Their advice was just enjoy it, but I had just done those other theatre shows so I was like, "But I didn't just enjoy it! What the fuck is going on?" Then I did it and was like, "Ohh!"

#### **What advice would you give to someone doing their first theatre?**

Chicago Theatre? Just fucking live it, baby. Pick a place to sign your name and go have fun. If it's Tarrytown, New York? You're gonna be okay. Either way, take your time and have fun. Especially with the Chicago Theatre. At the Chicago Theatre you get to take your time, at Tarrytown and JFL you have to take your time. Does that make sense? Chicago Theatre turns your face around. I was like, "Hey guys!" "YES!! YEAH!!!" It was like that.

#### **I wanted to ask you about your comedy. I see you perform and everything is so polished. It's not just the jokes, but the movements and the vocal inflections —**

I don't know about that. You're too kind.

**No, I'm serious. But I'm wondering, when you're working through a joke and building your act, how much attention are you paying to the small little details beyond the writing?**

I wish I was better at writing; I got terrible ADD. I'm trying. I swear to God, I'm gonna try to write today. If something makes me laugh, I kind of try it out. This comedian I really love that I used to work with in the Midwest, Tim Northern, was like, "Let a joke take you places." And that really stuck with me. I also grew up watching George Carlin and Eddie Murphy and they're both very physical. People don't really think about that. I think with Eddie Murphy they think about the bravado and the impressions, but he's very physical. Carlin especially; he puts his entire movements into everything. And it's not to distract; it's to be in that headspace. I guess that's what I do it for: to embody it and to be in the moment with that material.

**And are you thinking, "Oh this movement would enhance this if I did it this way," or is it just naturally how you're delivering it?**

I think it's a little column A, a little column B. The illusion of stand up is that this is the first time I've even thought of this thing. "How did you come up with that? You haven't tried that 150 times on stage this month!" But you have. It's so much of a science, right? You try things and they work and you keep them. Then you try things that don't work and then you change them. It's a lot of trial and error, I guess. Then the other job is trying to make it feel natural. Which I try to do, but who knows.

**Earlier you were talking about not being ready for New York. Did you also feel like you were missing some sort of skill? Or what do you think got you to that next level?**

I guess we kind of have to go back to when that trip happened. It was a month before my dad died and I was drinking like a monster. I was trying to get sober for the first time, then he died and I was blacking out more. Then COVID hit and I was just destroyed. My first CYSK was supposed to be that April. I was supposed to do Laughing Skull Fest. It felt like my entire career came to a halt, so I drank like a motherfucker. Tried to get sober again, then I kind of started getting back into comedy and everything shut down again in late 2020. 2021, I started doing shows again, the Lodge became really big in Chicago and I started drinking even more there. I had a big breakup – that wasn't due to my drinking – but I fell down and hit my head and was like, "Okay, I gotta get sober." Then the next six months, that was my focus. I was sober and actually enjoying writing and

performing again in a way that I wasn't for a while. I started talking to my manager from a shitty little bar show or something. I started posting clips and they got a lot of response. I think that self esteem kind of kicked in more, like, "Oh, okay. I'm not terrible at this. I can do okay." Then I learned this room in New York was gonna be available and it took me like two weeks of talking to my therapist – therapy really helped me. I'm realizing a lot of my "am I ready for this" is a lot more personal than just stand up. It was a lot more "am I ready to make this change?" I thought about it and was like, "Fuck it, let's just do this and try."

**Can you talk about how therapy helped you specifically? I know it's more than, "Okay I just go there and talk about my problems."**

Tyler Horvath really convinced me to get on therapy. He was like, "Yeah it changed my life." It just completely killed so much anxiety and self-hatred. That mixed with quitting drinking changed my fucking life. My therapist made me realize how much anxiety I had that I thought was just depression. I probably have a little bit of depression, but it's mostly just so much anxiety. She kind of gave me the mental tools of like, "Hey, this is what I'm feeling right now and it's okay. Let's think about why we're feeling these things. Should we be feeling those things? And how do we deal with it?" Even just having that reassuring voice helped so much with stuff that was holding me back in life.

**It sounds like a lot of self-awareness of your thoughts.**

Yeah, and in New York I think you need that. This place doesn't give a fuck if you're here or not. This place doesn't need you. Get the fuck outta here! But it's going alright, man. I'm pretty happy.



# **BONUS: Adam Gilbert's Top 10 Chicago Comics**

**(In no particular order)**

**1. CHRIS HIGGINS**

**2. MARILEE**

**3. JUST NESH**

**4. MARTY DEROSA**

**5. JOE EAMES**

**6. MITCHELL POTTS**

**7. CALVIN EVANS**

**8. OLIVIA CARTER**

**9. CAMERON GILLETTE**

**10. JARRELL SCOTT BARNE**

# ART: STUTI SHARMA

"This photo essay is a loving tribute to my friend, comedian Remy Guzman. I met them five year ago at a popping open mic they ran in Pilsen, at the old La Catrina Cafe. Something about them drew me, and we built a friendship quickly. Remy and I share similar immigration and family histories, the same understanding of comedy's necessity to bring humor to all situations, and passion for social justice and the movement.

When I had to make a sudden move out of a rough home situation, Remy opened their spare room and our bond grew. Not only did they open their home to me, they brought me into their community and gave me a queer space in Chicago to find myself in after I lost my way.

We started mornings together talking about our weird dreams or crushes, cooked for each other ("Mexico vs. India" was a running feud over whose cuisine won that day), watched Avatar while sharing lunch together, had each others' backs in protests during 2020, listened to each others' parents give life advice to us during dinner, reminisced over old loves and new loves, shared all the hopes we had for ourselves as artists, laughed over each others' baby photos, almost signed a commercial that could've been our big break but then had the rug pulled out from under us and then made a big joke out of it, gave each other feedback on our jokes and scripts and poems, got each other and our friends out of depressive ruts by filming sketches together, sat on the stoop and smoked together, gassed up one another's outfits, reminisced over our old music and discovered new music together, went on biking adventures at the peak of the pandemic, as two poor immigrant kids finessed a system to get as many free meals as possible, fought and fell apart like dramatic teenage girls and came together and made up like brothers in a 2000's Ben Affleck/Matt Damon movie. In Remy, I found what it means to have someone who will always stand by you and understand you. Someone who can hold your joy and relief when you just got a job that you were hoping for; someone who can hold your grief when you need to cry over your family after watching Jerrod Charmichael's new special together.

Pictured here is Remy over the years through their many transformations that I am so honored to witness. The picture with the three folks has David and Moni, our homies and creative collaborators and people who bring so much beauty to everything they touch. And the friend in the picture on the porch with the rain is Ezra, our homie and one of the most brilliant and kind creatives and people I know. Please stay tuned for Remy and Ezra's most recent project coming out soon- it is a hilarious, romantic short film. Follow Remy at @realfreshshrimp on IG to keep up with this project, as well as their upcoming shows."





**THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO  
MADE THIS POSSIBLE.**

**HAVE SUGGESTIONS?  
WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?**

**DM US @COMEDYGAZELLE**

