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Golden Gilson

After killing at Just For Laughs, Gilson Lubin spikes up his career

By GLENN SUMI



GILSON LUBIN headlining at Yuk Yuk's Downtown, through Sunday (August 29), Thursday and Sunday 8:30 pm, Friday-Saturday 8 and 10:30 pm. \$10-\$17. 224 Richmond West. 416-967-6425.

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For a guy who recently made a big splash at the Just For Laughs Comedy Festival, Gilson Lubin is looking pretty relaxed. "I'm having fun," he says quietly, over a coffee in the NOW Lounge before his headlining gig this weekend at Yuk Yuk's Downtown. "It's been a good year. But I think it's over now."

More likely, it's just about to begin.

Lubin walked away from the high-profile Montreal festival with a development deal from Spike TV. In the inaugural Spike The Mike competition, he beat out nine other comics – who had each made noise at the fest – and now gets to create and/or host a new show.

"First off, I need cable to find out what kind of shows they have," he says, beginning a humble little bit that feels like it's been developed in the few weeks since his win.

"I hear they're edgy. I'm not that edgy. I hear the demographic is a lot of guys from their late teens to 35. Those guys beat me up a lot, so I don't know if they'll listen to me. I'm not much of a leader. I'm the kind of guy who says, 'Well, if that team wants to win and we want to win, why don't we try to find some sort of agreement? Cuz I'm not going to fight them.'"

Maybe not, but these days people are fighting over him.

"I had no clue how many agents and managers I had until I won this thing," he laughs. "A cousin called and said, 'Have you told them to call me?' My family wanted to see my contract, and I was like, 'Grandma, you don't understand!'"

It's not like the win came out of the blue. Over the past three years, while honing a clean act that draws heavily on his wide-eyed introduction to North American-style racism after moving to Toronto from St. Lucia at 11, Lubin's racked up an impressive resumé.

In 2002, he won the Laughs Across America and Las Vegas Comedy Festival contests. Last year he picked up the best newcomer Canadian Comedy Award before taping his own Comedy Now special. Currently he's part of the Sunday Night Live sketch troupe the Sketchersons, which is helping out his acting chops. He's got his eyes focused more on dramatic film than TV.

He's come a long way for somebody who was evicted from his apartment in 2000.

"That was the lowest point," he recalls. "I was being evicted. I was couch-surfing every night. I had to decide whether to pack it all in and move back to St. Lucia or do something with my life."

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Winning a scholarship to the Humber College Comedy program kept him afloat, boosted his confidence and introduced him to friends like fellow stand-up Linda Ellis.

Trying out material at Kenny Robinson's All-Black Comedy Night helped make him find his voice.

"The Nubian show has the toughest crowd. It forces you to find out who you are in a second," he says. "You can go up there and put on a hat and try out an accent, but after the first boo you're back to your true self. You can go to an all-white audience and lie about things, but black people know you."

One of his first stand-up experiences opened his eyes to cultural stereotypes.

"I had this great rush of energy and hung out after the show. This guy comes up to me and I figure he's going to ask me some questions. Instead he wants to buy some weed. True story. Hell, I wouldn't know the first place to find weed."

Lately, Lubin's developing material that's a bit more personal, no matter how painful.

"It took me a while to find the humour in, say, having bad credit as a teenager or my dad getting his car repossessed," says Lubin.

"The thing is, people can't feel sorry for you while you're up on a stage telling it. If it's real, they'll relate." □

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