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Stand Up

the laughing therapy

By GUILLAUME ORIGNAC
52' and 3x20'

Produced by
Tancrède Ramonet
and Kevin Michel

SYNOPSIS

Thanks to the Internet and streaming platforms that have spread Stand Up internationally, this popular comic art has become the prism through which major contemporary issues are seen: in the abundance and sometimes the clash of identities, a global movement that challenges the established order. Stand up told by its icons: Jamel Debbouze, Blanche Gardin, Ali Wong, Vir Das, Fary and Hannah Gasby.

The success of stand-up comedy can be measured by the growth of comedy clubs in cities around the world in recent years. It can also be seen through the investments of an international streaming platform like Netflix, which keeps producing and broadcasting shows, while scouting for new local talents. All over the world, young people are picking up just an ordinary microphone to laugh at themselves, society and its morals.

The protest dimension of this comic art is also the instrument of an untimely and sarcastic speech, where the most agitated fringe of a society, its youth, gives itself the right to express its moods on its state of health, its palpitations, its dreams and its disappointments. Stand-up comedy is a way of breaking down minds and fixed opinions, to slip in, through its sense of observation and absurdity, new considerations on our social relationships. When talking about stand-up comedy, we are talking about the contemporary state of society.



Global explosion

episode 1

Stand Up

episode 1

Universel language

Half a century of archival footage of stand-up shows an untouched formula: men, sometimes women, alone on stage with a microphone, making an English-speaking audience laugh with jokes in English. Throughout the 20th century, stand-up was an exclusively Anglo-Saxon art form.

But the genre went international notably thanks to trailblazers like the transgender comedian Eddie Izzard, who has been performing on stage for thirty years. At the dawn of the 2000s, Eddie Izzard crossed the borders of the Anglo-Saxon world to play on stages that had remained impervious to the “stand-up tradition” until then. She was a precursor, because, from then on, stand-up, popularized by the globalized streaming platforms, has become ubiquitous, and in all languages.

The conquest

Edinburgh, Scotland, in August. At this time of year, the Fringe Festival is in full swing. Over the years, the event has become a platform for the international stand-up scene. Adrian has two shows in Edinburgh. He is Argentine, lives in Oslo and plays all over the world; London, of course, but also Amsterdam, Stockholm, Barcelona and especially Berlin, which has become in a few years the capital of European stand-up. It is where all of the continent's exiles gather to play in English: Romanians, Russians, Croatians, Danes and even comedians from Beijing.

In France too, countless comedy clubs have opened in the capital. In French, of course, but also sometimes in English – thanks to international stages who feature, for instance, comedians of the Fringe festival.

Poster for Eddie Izzard's
new show, 2022



But the journey now goes both ways. Since stand-up comedy has won over a new audience, American stars now tour across the entire world. In France, over the last two months, Parisian venues have welcomed Dave Chapelle, Chris Rock and Louis CK. Americans are discovering European tours. Conversely, Europeans, like Gad Elmaleh, are discovering America. And all discover the rest of the world.

A weapon for the unarmed

On November 12, 2021, Vir Das performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., mocking a schizophrenic India that “worships women by day, but gang rapes them by night”. Immediately after bits from the show had been uploaded to Youtube, he realized, during the flight back to Bombay, that police officers were waiting for him at the airport: the Hindu nationalist government did not appreciate his satire. Arrested, then released, the comedian was charged with five counts. That being said, the event did not deter him from continuing his career. While he laughs about it today, he admits however: “I was afraid. For a moment, I did think of stopping everything.”

In Russia, the young Ukrainian stand-up comedian Anton Tymoschenko has strong ideas about his craft: “if you are a comedian in the United States, you have the opportunity to end up in a late show. Here, it’s the opportunity to destroy Russia. Ukraine is the best place in the world for stand-up comedy”. This is why, in the Kiev basement bar where he performs every night, he says that “stand-up is my psychoanalysis and my weapon”. On certain days of the week, he introduces young comedians’ sets. Sometimes, the sirens ring. One evening, there was even an explosion not far from the room. “But the audience kept laughing”, he concludes.

For that is also what makes stand-up comedy so internationally successful: it is a voice for those who do not have one anymore. A tenacious, joyful and rebellious voice that only needs a microphone to ring out. A formidable weapon for the benefit of all minorities. A weapon that women have seized to redefine gender representations

Vir Das during his monologue at the Kennedy Center, November 2021



Women on stage

episode 2



Latest news on misogyny

The time when women comedians deliberately made themselves ugly on stage is now over.

A time that goes back to the sixties, when Phyllis Diller was the most recognized female stand-up comedian. Her television shows mostly featured her mocking her spindly legs topped with improbably colorful and baroque outfits. She laughed, made faces. Much later in her life, she would point out the irony: Playboy magazine had the idea of putting her on the cover and finally gave up when it turned out during the photo shoot that she was in fact very seductive and graceful, once the comical paraphernalia was put away. Diller's experience was then that of many women in stand-up comedy: to make the audience laugh, you needed to make them forget you were beautiful.

Becoming a woman (with laughter)

The French comedian Blanche Gardin addressed the theatrics of it all in a fierce way in her last show: "Being born a woman does not make you a woman. Me, I became a woman the day I got fingered by a married man". And the apparent clash between her outfit and her words gives rise to a strong idea: femininity does not have to be associated with modesty.

"If the stage is high, can I still wear a miniskirt? I always have the feeling that if I dress too feminine, my jokes won't work," says German Freddy Gralle, filmed backstage at the Fringe Festival. And she adds: "Meanwhile, men are always dressed in the same jeans and the same T-shirt."

Men making others laugh had always seemed self-evident. But for women, it was not a given. Blanche Gardin agrees: her role models were mostly male, for whom telling the crudest truths was always a birthright. She had to make room for herself both in stand-up comedy and in France.



Blanche Gardin
during her show
"Je parle toute seule", 2017

A turmoil of identities

episode 3



Stand Up

episode 3

Hannah Gadsby
Winner of the
Fringe
Festival, 2017

Down with tradition

2018 : Netflix met en ligne sur sa plate-forme le spectacle d'une humoriste australienne confidentielle, Hannah Gadsby. Le spectacle, intitulé *Nanette*, est paradoxal : au milieu de la performance, après avoir déconstruit le caractère dépréciatif du stand-up, Gadsby annonce qu'elle arrête d'en faire. Et se lance dans une critique vigoureuse du patriarcat hétéro-normé. Le spectacle est un triomphe. Du jour au lendemain, Gadsby devient une des stand-uppeuses les plus reconnues de la planète.



In the offices of the New York Times, journalist Jason Zinoman reflects on the show's phenomenal success: "It completely shook up the stand-up scene. From that point on, people started questioning the kind of performance she was putting on: Was it really a liberating humor? Didn't stand-up comedy produce a sarcastic and humiliating look at minorities? These were new questions, because until now, stand-up had been thought of more as an instrument of expression in the service of these minorities."

A voice for voiceless

Fall 2006 : A new show produced by Kader Aoun and Jamel Debbouze starts airing on Canal +. For the first time in France, stand-up comedy starts taking over television. And with it, a whole generation of young people from the relegated neighborhoods where their immigrant parents were ghettoized: Mustapha El Atrassi tells about it in his last show: "humor was my weapon to oppose the institutions' humiliating violence. It was a magical power." Jamel Debbouze does not dispute this, but still nuances it. This power was above all that of finally being able to talk about oneself, in front of an audience that knew nothing about their lives.

Their references were obviously American. African-American, more exactly. Because stand-up comedy has been, from the sixties until the beginning of the 21st century, an instrument of emancipation for black Americans.

LISTE OF COMEDIANS

Below is the cast of stand-up artists selected for the project and for whom we already have agreements or leads for interviews. We are confident that the below listed individuals will be able to respond favorably to our request.

We do not list comedians of lesser notoriety for whom the editorial stakes are lower and the choice wider.

The French:

Blanche Gardin
Jamel Debbouze
Paul Mirabel
Marina Rollman
Haroun
Fary
Tania Dutel

The Europeans:

Christian-Schulte Loh (German)
Anton Tymoshenko (Ukrainian)
Eddie Izzard (British)
Freddie Gralle (German)
Stewart Lee (British)
Victor Patrascan (Romanian)
Ricky Gervais (British)

The internationals:

Vir Das (Indian)
Hanna Gadsby (Australian)
Oleg Denisov (Russian based in Berlin)
Adrian Minkowics (Argentine)
Igor Meerson (Russian)
Anu Vaydinathan (Indian)
Sam See (Singaporean)

The Americans:

Ali Wong
Wanda Sykes
Mo Welch
Louis CK
Janeane Garofalo
Sam Morril
Daniel Tosh
Stavros Halkias
Aziz Ansari
Whitney Cummings
Tushar Singh

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i-monteil@arteFrance.fr
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Sales Manager
m-cha@arteFrance.fr
Eastern Europe, Africa
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worldwide inflight



FRANKA SCHWABE
Sales Manager
f-schwabe@arteFrance.fr
Germany, Austria, Switzerland,
Belgium, France, Netherlands
Scandinavia, Iceland