



INTERVIEW

TREVOR NOAH

*Has there ever been a more auspicious moment to chase after clown cars on the road to the White House? Since bravely taking over for Jon Stewart as host of *The Daily Show* last September, South African comedian Trevor Noah has watched American politics burble into a molten mess of a reality series that even Comedy Central would find too ludicrous to green-light. Then again, Noah did not campaign for the role of satirist in chief; it found him. In March of last year, he was in a taxi heading to an event in Dubai when his manager called to ask if he wanted the planet's most coveted fake news-anchoring job. This, after appearing a mere three times as a *Daily Show* correspondent.*

As Noah said around the time to his friend and early champion Jerry Seinfeld, "I get out of the car, and my legs—I didn't have legs."

Thick skin is what he really needed. The instant the gig was announced, social media cried out with a collective "Who the *fuck*?" followed by a judge-y indictment over a handful of old Twitter barbs that painted the little-known comic as a menace to Jews, Ebola victims and "fat chicks." It didn't help that TV critics held Noah to crazy-high standards: not to Jon Stewart's early days but to Stewart at the glorious end of a 16-year run. But the sharp-suited newcomer, now 32, settled in with polish and intelligence (and without issuing any apologies) and continues to build a following with a young, plugged-in crowd that no longer treats him like Job.

Trevor Noah was born in Johannesburg on February 20, 1984 and survived a lot worse than web controversy. He grew up in the final decade of apartheid with a white Swiss German father and a black Xhosa mother who never married because mixed-race marriage was illegal in that era. Noah spent his early years in

a "whites only" neighborhood where his mom had to pretend she was the maid. (His dad would walk across the street from them "like a creepy pedophile," Noah joked in one of his routines.) After the relationship dissolved, Noah and his mother moved in with family members in the black municipality of Soweto. Experiencing such contrasting worlds made him fluent in a range of cultures and languages, including six South African dialects, English and German.

Noah's dimpled charm and uncanny talent for mimicry led him to acting and a role on a South African soap opera in his late teens. A few years later, drunken friends pushed him to take the mike at a Johannesburg comedy club, and the dare set the stage for a stand-up career. Professional comedy barely existed under apartheid, but Noah blazed new trails, skewering elite whites, government wonks and township blacks alike. Sold-out performances at home led to tours around Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

In 2009 Noah's mother was shot by an ex-husband. Noah confronted the man, who threat-

ened to kill him, prompting Noah to move to Los Angeles. He did not immediately find a foothold there, but in 2012 he became the first South African stand-up to appear on *The Tonight Show*. A year later he was the first on *Late Show With David Letterman*. By the time he debuted as a correspondent on *The Daily Show* in December 2014, insiders knew Noah as a funnyman *sans frontières*. "Be grateful for what you have" is what South African mothers say to their kids, he told Stewart's enchanted audience, "because there are fat children starving in Mississippi."

Contributing Editor **David Hochman**, who recently interviewed Rachel Maddow and Ray Kurzweil for *PLAYBOY*, met Noah after a *Daily Show* taping in midtown Manhattan, and they talked late into the night. "The first thing you notice about Trevor is that he's definitely not Jon Stewart," Hochman says. "He's quieter, more serious, more reflective. Then you think, *Hmm*, maybe that's what we need right now."

PLAYBOY: When you took over *The Daily Show* you vowed to continue the "war on

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN LOWRY**





bullshit” that Jon Stewart began. How’s that going in this crazy election year?

NOAH: Waging the war isn’t difficult. Getting people to join you on that crusade is what’s harder than you’d expect, and not for the reason you’d expect. It’s because a lot of people simply don’t want the whole truth. They want only a mirror of their version of the truth. That’s true not just with Republicans and conservatives. I find that a lot of Democrats and liberals are not ready to hear the truth from their side. It’s human nature to look for people to validate your opinion, and I think people came to *The Daily Show* for that for a long time. But just because you have a love for a candidate doesn’t mean you shouldn’t question them. What is the point of having your candidate pushed to a certain level only to crumble under scrutiny because you didn’t give them enough scrutiny early on? Bernie Sanders didn’t have solid policy proposals, so I pointed that out. “Screw you, Trevor Noah!” Or I made the case that Hillary Clinton panders to whatever audience is listening to her. People are like, “Who the hell do you think you are?” Come on, guys.

PLAYBOY: Any predictions on where the contest is heading?

NOAH: I have no clue. I don’t think anybody has a clue. So many truly bizarre things have happened already, particularly on the Republican side. We might see a last-minute candidate step in. The Republicans could go to a contested convention, which could rip the party apart at the seams. Donald Trump, presuming he continues, is so divisive and so explosive that he can go all the way or else blow himself up. The enthusiasm against him is as powerful as the enthusiasm in his favor. Assuming Hillary is the nominee, people are almost resigning themselves to the fact that she’s the one. With Trump and Hillary, it’s a really strange combination of terror on one hand and ambivalence on the other. And yet, wherever we are in the general election by November, people are going to have to say, “Well, you have to choose *somebody*.” Fortunately, I can’t vote in this country, which helps a lot.

PLAYBOY: You grew up under apartheid. You’ve witnessed hatred, racism, fear and a country divided by disagreement and hostility. It must be so refreshing to live in America in 2016.

NOAH: Ha. We did this thing on the show

where we said Trump is basically an African dictator. We showed clips of him alongside clips of Idi Amin. They were essentially the same guy. But it’s one thing for everyone to lambaste Trump. Every candidate has a right to be crazy. Why don’t we spend more time looking at the people who voted for him? It’s his followers who are truly scary. Everyone makes the comparison between Trump and Hitler. The question nobody seems to want to ask is, Does that make America Nazi Germany? The madmen in history don’t do it alone. What’s important about Trump’s run is that it exposes the layer of hate, xenophobia and anxiety below the surface in America. That can’t be ignored.

The biggest thing I had to learn with *The Daily Show* was that I couldn’t be the anger for people.

Trump’s campaign is fascinating because it threw out all the rules we’ve known about politics. Everyone had the playbook, and he went and changed the game completely. It used to be that you would release attack ads, you would point out the fallacies and people would come around to your message. Trump somehow stayed immune to that longer than almost anyone else. Whatever was thrown at him, it didn’t seem to matter. You show that he can’t be trusted, but people still trust him. You show him stirring violence, but it just makes the crowds cheer louder. He branded himself early on as the candidate who represents angry people, and that has given him a huge foothold.

Those who tried to play Trump at his own game—Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio—mostly lost. He

has picked them all off like a short-fingered assassin. People tried to meet anger with anger, and it failed every time. But then, if you don’t go after him directly, you look weak or out of touch. John Kasich never went after Trump. Ben Carson never went after Trump. Look where they are now. This is a popularity contest. This is a reality show. If you’ve watched any reality shows, you know the quiet people get knocked out very early in the race. The loud people are the ones who make it to the end. Donald Trump reminds me of Richard Hatch from the first season of *Survivor*. He came on, caused chaos, got naked, formed a few key alliances and walked away with the prize.

PLAYBOY: If Trump is Richard Hatch, who does that make Hillary?

NOAH: Honestly, I think a lot of people are hoping Hillary will be Barack Obama. She has said herself that her presidency will be an extension of Obama’s legacy. What’s interesting about Hillary is that she’s really versatile. She knows when to be a little tougher. She knows when she needs to be more human. She also responds to the forces around her. She saw that with Bernie Sanders, certainly. Bernie has done something beautiful in that he has inspired young people to believe again. Hillary recognized that, and she adapted. New York City mayor Bill de Blasio said the reason he waited so long to endorse Hillary was because he wanted Bernie to push her until she was addressing income and equality, and eventually she did. She has adopted a lot of Bernie’s ideas

and rhetoric, and I think that has rounded her out as a candidate. She could take it all the way.

PLAYBOY: What would it mean to have Bill Clinton back in the White House?

NOAH: That would be interesting for everyone, because we’ve never seen anything like it. He’ll be the first gentleman. Maybe he’ll be giving tours of the White House and showing people around. Maybe he’ll be advising on policy. There are so many maybes, it’s impossible to know. What we do know is that he’s very smart, he’s very involved, he’s very informed and he loves talking to people. With Hillary in the Oval Office and Bill overseeing the Easter egg hunt in the Rose Garden or whatever, they could be quite the power couple.

PLAYBOY: Nobody really talks about this, but

since this is *PLAYBOY*, we can ask. Do you ever imagine what their sex life is like?

NOAH: No! I don’t imagine it. Never. It never crosses my mind. But if I had to guess, I’d say there’s probably not much happening. Studies have shown that the sex life dramatically drops off for everyone, especially high-income, high-net-worth individuals who work hard. With these two, I don’t think it’s like, Saturday night, 11 o’clock, “Hey, Hillary, wanna watch Netflix and chill?” [*laughs*] We live in strange times.

PLAYBOY: How does the United States look to the rest of the world right now?

NOAH: Insane, pretty much. But the whole world is changing. Certainly on a political level, we’re in uncharted territory everywhere you look. I mean, you see these fringe parties coming up in Germany, France and South Africa; that’s because you’re dealing with parliamentary systems for the most part. In those systems fringe parties don’t get anywhere. The difference is, because of the American system, there is no alternative. You have two parties, and the winner takes all. It’s been designed to make the strong stronger, but nobody ever anticipated that the strongest person would come from the outside. Trump could win his little ball of support and that could be it.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of angry people in America. There’s anger, there’s hunger and there’s fear, and there will always be somebody who taps into those anxieties to further a narrative about who to hate and who to blame. Trump has been truly masterful at that. The Chinese are taking our jobs. Mexicans are rapists. Muslims are out to kill everyone. If you’re feeling overwhelmed or broke or disenfranchised and someone says, “It’s because of that brown guy over there,” you go, “Hey, let’s go get the brown guy.”

PLAYBOY: Eight years with a black man in the White House does not appear to have eased tensions around race.

NOAH: This is hard to explain to white people, but the thing about race is that you can’t turn it off. If you’re black, you are constantly black and that blackness is always affecting you in some way or another. That’s a tough conversation to have, because it can be subtle. It’s often very small things, but they pile up. Cab-



drivers don’t pick you up. It happens to me. Or you go into a corner store and get followed, or people say things about you. It’s often not blatant, but it’s entrenched in the system. Over time, it might change, but if you’re black in the United States, even after two terms of President Obama, you still feel black.

I think the benefit of a movement like Black Lives Matter is that people have seen the influence they can have by actively getting out and doing something about ending the silencing of a voice. It has been a fantastic proponent for new



conversations about race, which is amazing.

PLAYBOY: You and Larry Wilmore notwithstanding, late-night TV is a pretty white place as far as hosts are concerned. That extends to the writing staffs on most shows. Even now, Hollywood remains an old boys’ network.

NOAH: I am very conscious of that. We put out a call for new people to be on the show not long ago. Around 95 percent of the people who responded were white and male. We wanted diversity. But when we went out and asked some comedians why they didn’t audition—black comedians, women—they said they hadn’t heard about the job. Word hadn’t reached them. A lot of the

time Hollywood jobs come through networks or through friends who have worked together, so it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you’re not in that circle, you can’t get in that circle.

PLAYBOY: Should African Americans be as scared of the police as people say they should be?

NOAH: I think black people haven’t been scared of the police as much as people make them out to be, so much as they are...what’s the word I’m looking for? They’re enraged. They’re disenfranchised because the police have been shown to not protect and serve all parts of the population equally. It’s scary: Imagine if you lived in a world where every time you told someone something happened to you, it was met with disbelief and doubt, with people taking everything you say with a pinch of salt.

Then you go through a period when every video that comes out contradicts the report the police have made, which then makes you question how many of the reports we can believe. So it’s a very tough conversation to have going both ways, because many police feel unfairly judged. Ironically, the way black people have been judged for so many years, with huge sections of the black population being lumped in as criminals—now the same thing is happening to police. Police are going, “There’s just a few of us. Why are you saying it’s all of us?”

PLAYBOY: As you look at what’s happening in the country right now, are you dumbstruck, or do you just feel like it’s comedy gold?

NOAH: I don’t see it as comedy gold, because it’s gotten to the point where there’s too much comedy, and now it’s so ridiculous that it’s not

funny all the time. When presidential candidates are making dick jokes, what are comedians supposed to do? Maybe I’m not as shocked by it because I come from a country where that happened. It got to the point in South Africa where the politicians were making the jokes.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of South Africa, what are your memories of growing up in Soweto?

NOAH: It was weird. We lived how we were living and it felt normal. So many people were born into apartheid that nobody ever dreamed of a time when things wouldn’t be that way. Black people fought for freedom and independence, but I don’t think many of them



could say that they saw a real future where they would be running the country. They couldn't imagine gaining access to the wealth and opportunities of the country.

When you're poor, it's sometimes impossible to picture living any other reality. In Soweto, you live in a one-room house, maybe two rooms if you're lucky. All the adults sleep together in one room; all the kids sleep together in another room. I'm not talking about another bedroom; you have a wall dividing two rooms. There's no indoor plumbing. There would be an outhouse, and that outhouse was shared by four or five different families. If you were lucky, you'd have running water. We had running water but not inside the house. It was shared among many houses.

PLAYBOY: You have a book out this fall about coming of age under apartheid. Was it comedy that got you through the hardest times?

NOAH: You would never think you could laugh about life in a place like Soweto, but there are always funny moments in every situation, and those moments do help you survive. In the book I write about growing up in an abusive household, in a house where myself and my mom were held hostage by an alcoholic stepfather. My mom was shot in the head. That's not exactly the stuff of comedy gold. But even in the darkest, darkest moments, we found things to laugh about. To have your mom come out of surgery with a hole in her face and the first thing she says

when she wakes up is "Stop crying. Look on the bright side. At least now you're officially the best-looking person in the family." I mean, who says that? But that's the family I grew up in. We always found some silly way to get rid of the pain.

PLAYBOY: Your mother converted to Judaism when you were young. Did you have a bar mitzvah?

NOAH: I did, yes. My mom had always been a religious scholar and had studied the Bible. She has taken multiple Bible courses and is very religious. And one day she converted to Judaism. I had a bar mitzvah when I turned 13, but no one came because everyone in my family and my world is black. Nobody knew what the hell a bar mitzvah even was, so it was just me and my mom going, "Okay, now you're a man."

PLAYBOY: You are the first major comedian to emerge from South Africa. Are people just not funny there?

NOAH: We are an industry that's only as old as our democracy. There's comedy everywhere, but there was no free speech. I'm lucky in that I'm a product of my time. A few comedians laid the groundwork for me. I'm the second generation that got to take it to the next level and make it work on a world stage.

PLAYBOY: You've said before that Americans think of Africa as a place where people wear cheetah skins and sit around waiting for UNICEF. Will that perception ever die?

NOAH: I don't think I'll live to see it die, and

With Trump and Hillary, it's a strange combination of terror on one hand and ambivalence on the other.

that's because even if you look at America itself, perceptions die hard. I'm very lucky in that I've traveled to all 50 states, doing stand-up. I remember I was heading to Tennessee and people told me, "That's the home of the Klan. Watch out." But then I got to Nashville and had the best time of my life with the most wonderful people. If people don't see the nuance of their own country—and this happens everywhere—I can't expect them to appreciate the nuance of Africa.

PLAYBOY: What was your first impression of the United States?

NOAH: I was like, I've never seen so much choice in my life.

PLAYBOY: What do you remember?

NOAH: Walmart. That place absolutely blew

my mind. I had never seen anything like it. Seventeen different types of milk. Twenty-two kinds of laundry soap. It is a land of unimaginable abundance, though it wasn't a complete surprise. You get a sense of the abundance when you watch American television. Just the fact that everyone in sitcoms has a house with an upstairs area is astonishing. A house with a second floor? As an African kid, you're like, Hey, who lives this way?

PLAYBOY: As you developed your comedy, who was your biggest influence?

NOAH: I watched a lot of Bill Cosby. I love Dave Chappelle. But I specifically remember seeing Eddie Murphy's *Raw* on VHS and thinking, Holy shit! The guy from *The Nutty Professor* does stand-up? It was a complete awakening for me because I was starting to do stand-up myself. Eddie is incredible. The honesty, the precision, the talent, the skill. Everything he executed was perfect. His impersonations. The way he walked across the stage. His command of the audience. Eddie watched my stand-up once, which was enough for me to go, I can die now. That's all I need in life.

PLAYBOY: What about up-and-coming comedians? Who's the future of comedy?

NOAH: Michelle Wolf is hilarious and outrageous. She always makes me laugh. A lot of people don't know her yet, but they will. You can see her on *Late Night With Seth Meyers*. If you look on YouTube or Vine

or Instagram, there's a guy named King Bach. He's huge online, but people don't know him in the streets. He does short-form sketches. He's a very funny actor who, because of social media, really made something for himself, carved a path, which I admire.

One of the things I love about America is there's so much comedy. There's the alt scene with people like Kumail Nanjiani. There are the hipsters, who have a very different style of comedy. There are the mainstreamers. There are black comedians who cross over and do well with white audiences. There are a few white comedians, like Gary Owen, who do particularly well in the black scene. Just look on YouTube. They're all there.

PLAYBOY: It seems technology is changing

everything about comedy. You no longer need to join the Groundlings or book a set at the Comedy Store to find an audience.

NOAH: Technology is great for the industry. Comedy is a form that works wherever people are funny. There are people who do comedy shows in the back of a van, in a bus, in a venue, in a small room, a giant room, theater, hall, church, restaurant, phone booth, and all you need is a tiny handheld device to record yourself doing it. When you go to a place like the Edinburgh Comedy Festival, you see all those things happening all over the city, and you realize that comedy is one of the most versatile art forms we have.

YouTube has opened that up completely, and you have Snapchat and Instagram and other vehicles as well. But I think these formats will come and go. The important thing is that young people get to express themselves to an audience directly rather than looking to the gatekeepers to let them in. At the same time, the audience is expanding in ways that were unimaginable only a few years ago. Think about the fact that you used to have to be 18 or 21 to get into a comedy club. Now there are 10- and 12-year-olds who know Mitch Hedberg and Louis C.K. and many more obscure comedians because, again, it's all just part of the deluge of information available on your device.

PLAYBOY: How did your social media habits change after old tweets of yours surfaced that some called racist, anti-Semitic and sexist?

NOAH: The irony is that people had to go back five years to make a judgment about who I am today. We live in a world where you need to form your opinion about someone instantly. Ever watch the Grammys and read Twitter at the same time? Before the first presenter even appears, someone is already going, "Worst Grammys ever." It's not a 24-hour news cycle anymore. We live in a 24-second news cycle. I guess the lesson is: Some people will always want to take you down. If you say something silly, it can blow up. But also, it passes.

PLAYBOY: How much do you and your writing team focus on creating material that will go viral online?

NOAH: I don't believe in working toward a moment just to have a viral moment. I believe in doing what you love and if a moment reso-

lates, it resonates. *The Daily Show* is different in that it is not all about sound bites and tiny moments. That is a fact of the show that I have to accept. But I won't lie: It's nice when you get a moment that goes a little viral. I'm always surprised at which moments take off, to be honest. I create each moment equally, and when one element hits, it's often foreign to me. Lindsey Graham came on the program and was one of the most engaging guests we've had. We played this game of pool where if you missed a shot, you had to give Donald Trump a



compliment. That got a lot of attention. Trump tweeted insults at us. I would have never wished for Michael Hayden, ex-director of the CIA and the NSA, to come on the show, but honestly, I had some of the best moments with him.

PLAYBOY: How much rivalry do you feel with your late-night competitors?

NOAH: Because I come from the world of stand-up, I realize that success is a cycle. People rise and disappear, they succeed, they miss, they return. As competitive as it is, you learn to celebrate the success of your peers because you know how hard that cycle is. I remember when I first came to America, Amy Schumer

was running around doing comedy clubs. She was funny, but she was nowhere close to where she is now, and I loved what she was doing. Then you see her hit her stride, and it's beautiful. There's nothing more fun than seeing a comedian come into their own, especially if you've watched them on the rise. So for me, it's Amy Schumer, it's Jerrod Carmichael, it's Hannibal Buress, it's Michael Che. It's people where I go, Man, we are the class of now.

In late night, I think every host will tell you the same thing, which is that we don't have time to focus on what other people are doing. We're too busy making our own shows. Obviously I see occasional clips of what Stephen Colbert and James Corden and Jimmy Fallon and the rest are doing. But the only person I have time to watch regularly is John Oliver, because he's on Sunday evening and I'm free to watch. I loved what he did with Donald Drumpf, for example. That was amazing. John for me is an inspiration because he shows me the possibilities. Before him I didn't believe a foreigner could do a TV show like this in America, and I love him for that. Had he not taken over for Jon for a few months and then gone on to host his own show, I don't know if the network would have said, "Okay, let's give Trevor Noah a shot." It seems less crazy to have some random African guy host the show after some random British guy has hosted his show successfully.

PLAYBOY: Many people think Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show* played a role in getting Obama elected in 2008 and 2012. How much influence do you feel you have in this presidential race?

NOAH: Oh, I haven't earned any influence yet. That's something you work toward. Jon had that effect on Obama's rise because of how long and how hard he had worked and what he had been a part of. What people forget is that the first few years of Jon's show were barely a blip on the radar. I'm still in the blip stage.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever call Jon and say, "Dude, remind me again how you do this?"

NOAH: No. Never. I mean, I talk to him sporadically, but it's about random things. The last conversation we had was about stand-up. I wanted to know if he was working on a new hour. How's the set going? Any fun jokes? That



was literally the conversation we had. That's not to say I haven't had moments of anxiety about *The Daily Show* or needed guidance. I was terrified in the beginning, and I still have some sleepless nights. Are you kidding me? There are nights here and there when I go, Shit, what do I need to do? What am I doing? Where am I going? Because I love what I do and I believe in giving it my all. But I don't let that consume me.

PLAYBOY: Who has given you the best advice?
NOAH: Jon said, "Don't listen to anyone. Just make the show you believe needs to be made." Jerry Seinfeld was supportive long before I got the show. That helps in general with confidence.

Louis C.K. said to me, "Regardless of what happens, don't forget to enjoy every single moment, because you can never get it back." He said, "One day you'll go, Man, remember that time when no one believed in me? Remember that time when no one thought what I was doing was good? I didn't take the time to enjoy and savor that moment." Amy Schumer just looks at me and goes, "Fuck it, have a good time."

PLAYBOY: What do you do for fun, by the way?

NOAH: I love boxing. I ride bicycles. I love roller coasters. My dream is to go on a tour and bounce around to every great roller coaster in America. But I'll settle for another ride on T3 at Six Flags. I love the feeling that you're going to die even though you know there's no chance of being harmed.

PLAYBOY: What are you listening to these days?

NOAH: I'm listening to the new Kendrick Lamar, *untitled unmastered*. I'm listening to the new Rihanna. I listen to Otis Redding almost every day. He just makes me happy. I like the most recent Justin Bieber. You may not like him; you may not like how popular he is, but don't deny his talent. The guy learned to play musical instruments, worked on his singing, worked on his dancing, worked on his social media. That's why he is where he is.

PLAYBOY: How about TV? Do you binge much?

NOAH: I do. I watch *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, *Broad City*, *Nathan for You*, *Billions*. I just finished watching *The Bachelor*.

PLAYBOY: Any fanboy crushes?

NOAH: Charlize Theron. Not just because she's South African. I think she is aging

majestically. She's so beautiful. Jennifer Lopez as well. Does she even have an age?

PLAYBOY: No doubt your dating life has improved since getting the show.

NOAH: Things are good there. I have a girlfriend. But yes, you definitely get more attention all over the place. You suddenly become a little more good-looking, a little funnier to everyone. Remember, though, that I had some level of notoriety for a very long time. It just moves from place to place. I mean, don't get me wrong, getting the show was huge because I understood it was going to change my life forever, and it has. American fame takes everything up a level. Seeing your face all over New York City—

I had a bar mitzvah, but no one came. Nobody knew what the hell a bar mitzvah even was.

no one can deny that's an insane experience. It's New York fucking City. It's the Sinatra song. It's Jay Z. It's Beyoncé. You can't deny what it is and how weird it is, even though many people still don't know who I am. But put it this way: I'm very lucky in that if this had been my first experience of fame, I probably would have caved. I would have crumbled. I would have gone mad. You can't go from zero to *The Daily Show*.

PLAYBOY: So many comedians get caught up in drugs and alcohol. Have you struggled with that?

NOAH: No. Never have. I've never smoked pot. I've never smoked, period. I was never drawn to it. I'll have a few drinks occasionally. Sometimes I regret the fact that I missed that era, because that's what comedy was all about at one point. Comedians were rock and roll. Now you

go to a comedy club and comedians are ordering kale salads and telling you about how they're going to the gym in the morning, which is really interesting to see, because comedians were the first ones who switched over. All comedians used to be drunks and drug addicts. You'd hear about a suicide in the community every single week, and that has slowed down dramatically, which is fantastic.

PLAYBOY: It is often said that pain is the source of all comedy. There's the need to have people laugh at your jokes, the need for validation. Is that part of who you are?

NOAH: It's part of most comedians. It's our dark bond. We all carry the heavy burden of depression in a different way. We all deal with it in different ways. For most of us, our therapy is on stage. I meditate. I exercise. I always try to aim toward the light in life. I surround myself with positive people. I move toward positivity. I try to find the things that help me quell that voice in my head. It's one of the reasons I love Kevin Hart, who was the first guest on my show. Comedy was associated with skepticism and a general pessimism for so long, but Kevin came in with positivity, and he still does. Look at his Twitter. He's eating right, working out, adding value to people's lives. I'm glad for his success because he shows there's another way to do it.

PLAYBOY: Does earning more money make you happier?

NOAH: Ironically, I'm not necessarily making more money as host of *The Daily Show* than I was before. I was doing very well for myself as an artist, as a businessman, as a performer. So it's not a lifestyle change for me. Mine is not a Cinderella story.

You know, it's good to have enough money. I like to splurge on friends and family and people and charity. I like watches. I guess growing up with a Swiss father will do that. I don't buy expensive watches, but I like unusual ones. I have a Hamilton Jazzmaster Face 2 Face, and there are only 888 of them in the world. I love the fact that it's a watch whose face flips over to another face, which makes it two different watches in one.

The biggest thing I have learned in America is that it is expensive to be famous here. You have to pay for things. You have to pay for bodyguards. You have to pay for a driver. You have to pay for a publicist. You have to pay for

a stylist. I never used to understand the stress around those things. I never experienced that, and I still try to not experience it. I tell people, "I have a stylist at the show, but if I go to events, a lot of the time I dress myself." I'd rather give the money to starving children. So if you see me dressed really trashy somewhere, know that some kid somewhere got a meal.

Honestly, having possessions gets boring. At some point, you have all you can have. I completely understand why Bill Gates is working to eradicate malaria. Yeah, he can own 10 Bugatis, but so what? He can drive fast in a straight line. It's much more exciting to fix problems, education, help children. Maybe it's my African perspective on the world.

PLAYBOY: You have a keen ear for language. What are your favorite Americanisms?

NOAH: Rah, rah, rah.

PLAYBOY: Come again?

NOAH: When Americans try to show you that they're keeping up with what you're saying in a conversation they say, "rah, rah, rah" as in "right, right, right." Which is the weirdest sound to me. You go, "Make a right turn at that corner" and they'll interrupt with "rah, rah, rah" to speed you along. When I first heard it, I was like, What's going on? Then there's the suggestive nature of a request. "So do you want to go ahead and pass me that water?" That's such a strange way to say it, instead of "Please pass me the water." "Do you want to go ahead and turn the lights on?" What do you mean? Is that a request or a command? What if I *don't* want to do it? You could have just asked me to do it. It's strange quirks that I pick up on. I've also had to monitor myself with some South African words and phrases. People here don't really understand the word *ag*. It's an exclamation. "*Ag!* What a nightmare!" Also, *esh*, as in "Where's my phone? *Esh!* I left it at home."

PLAYBOY: So do you want to go ahead and walk us through the process of putting together *The Daily Show*?

NOAH: Wake up at seven. Spend a good 10, 15 minutes meditating, just taking time to prepare myself for the day. Then I'll read the news, as much of it as I can. It's usually *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*. It's BuzzFeed News. It's The Skimm, which is a daily newslet-



ter that pulls together the most interesting reads of the day. I'm a big fan of Vox and everything Ezra Klein is doing. I really love German Lopez. I love Rachel Maddow. I'll do a bit of a workout just to get the body moving, and I'm at work by 9:15.

We've got a big team. Making TV every day is a very tough job, so there are about 100 people helping in various ways. Around 20 of us will gather in the morning to figure out what the show is going to be. We talk out all the possibilities, and then I make my decisions based on a few things. Number one, is it interesting?



Number two, is it funny? Number three, do I have something to say about it? That's what I look for. You know, Lindsey Graham saying the choice between Donald Trump and Ted Cruz is like being shot or poisoned, you're going to run with something like that. I always go, What would I share with my friends? Because that's the way I see the audience.

PLAYBOY: What adjustments have you made along the way?

NOAH: I had to learn that I couldn't manufacture anger. I couldn't manufacture outrage. I understood that a lot of people looked to *The Daily Show* for their catharsis, but I think a

lot of people maybe also got lazy in that they stopped fighting for change. Jon was very good at articulating a feeling for many people, but I think we also evolved into an age of couch-place activism, where people just sit on their couch and hashtag. Whereas where I come from the idea is that you go out and you do something about it. The biggest thing I had to learn very early on with *The Daily Show* was that I couldn't be the anger for people. I had to find an audience in the same place that I was in. I had to find the things that interested me and the things I found

funny and had to believe and still have to believe that there are enough people like me who will experience the world the way I experience it.

PLAYBOY: You spend less time actually sitting at the desk than Jon Stewart did. Is that intentional?

NOAH: It's funny. In my head I go, I didn't work all these years to get a desk job. I sat because I was told that it was the format, because that's what everyone did. Then one day I stood because I was like, This is who I am. This is what I do. Standing up is how I got here.

PLAYBOY: You continue to do comedy on the road even with your busy schedule.

NOAH: I have to. Stand-up is where I live. Stand-up helps me articulate my point of view. Stand-up helps me exist in my purest form, and that is talking to people, sharing and discussing ideas. I try to go out every second weekend. Honestly, that's where I feel alive. I get to relax. I get to explore myself, and I get to see America, which is very important to me. I find it weird to live in a place and comment on a place but have a level of ignorance.

More than that, it's easy to get caught in this world between you and the camera and random reviewers. You have to remember what human beings are. If you live in an echo chamber, you run the risk of believing you know everything when in fact you know nothing.

PLAYBOY: If the show ended tomorrow, what would you do?

NOAH: I would pick up my U.K. tour where I left off. I would go back and carry on touring Australia. I would go and do my shows in Germany. I would do more shows in South Africa, maybe start some TV shows somewhere else. As long as I'm doing comedy, I'm alive. ■