

Andrew Clark: Today we've got someone who's a graduate of the program, or at least a workshop. I can't remember if he did the workshop, or the whole year...

Jason Rouse: I did both. I did the summer workshop, and I learned how to write sitcoms and screenplays, so I signed up for the week program, and by a few days in, I'm like, "There's nothing else being offered to me to learn this variety of skill sets." And when I found out the program had all the things that I really wanted to learn, then I told them I wanted to come for free. *(laughter)*

AC: And it worked!

JR: And it did work.

AC: You got that scholarship.

JR: I did.

AC: And now you're the jester from hell.

JR: Yeah. I don't do a lot of corporate gigs. *(laughter)*

AC: I think everyone was at the Alumni Show, right? So you got a taste of...

JR: Sorry, kids. *(laughter)* It's a fuckin' cruel world out there.

AC: As were our Dean and Associate Dean.

JR: "That's where we spent our money? Fuck!" *(laughter)*

AC: So today, we're gonna talk to, of course you all know him, I'll just introduce him:

Jason Rouse, everybody. *(applause)* We were talking about the business of comedy,

and all that kind of stuff, and also the kind of humor that you're doing. In first year, we just did, today, looking at the origins of standup comedy and the idea of, is there a line, should there be a line, obscenity versus more family-friendly stuff, so we can talk about that too. But before we begin, where did you grow up?

JR: Ugh. Hell. I grew up in Hamilton. I was born in '71, and I stayed in Hamilton up until I was like 21 years old, and after kind of staying up late as a kid and watching *Comedy at Club 54* with Ben Guyatt, A&E's *(An Evening) at the Improv*, and all these different kind of standup shows, and then when I saw *In Living Color*, and Jim Carrey, I thought, "I can totally relate to this process and exercise it." So that put the bug in my ear to move to Vancouver and start doing comedy with Seth Rogen. Me and Seth Rogen started out together, oddly enough, in Vancouver. He went on to make movies, and I'm here. *(laughter)* But yeah, Hamilton definitely, if anybody's been there, it's shaped a lot of how I present myself and do what I do. It's very aggressive, and misguided... *(laughter)*

AC: There are people from Hamilton here, right? At least one.

JR: Well, the hook hand. *(laughter)*

AC: It's a tough town.

JR: It is. You can either thrive in it or leave. It's very difficult to do anything creative. At the time when I was there, there was the one club, and people weren't really open to anything that was art-related. Music and comedy and things like that. It was a

very blue-collar, steel town kind of place. Knowing what the environment was, that's why I left.

AC: And when did you get to Toronto? Because I remember seeing you at a club on Yonge Street. I can't remember the name, it's not there anymore. That would've been late nineties, maybe, or early 2000's.

JR: It would've been late nineties for sure, because after finally getting out of my own way, because when I moved in '93 to Vancouver to do standup, I had no point of reference or approach, just kind of some people I idolized in the business, but they'd already been superstars, so I had to look backwards through their careers, and the thing that rang true was practice. Being in Vancouver, there was very limited amount of stage (time). We were going to Gastown to do poetry readings in between some lesbian flamenco guitar players, and then my friend's doing Hulk-Hogan-getting-fucked-up-the-ass impressions. *(laughter)* So it wasn't really that kind of scene.

On a visit back to Ontario, I realized, by checking out the website, Ontario had this concentration of comedy clubs, and I knew that because there were more clubs, there'd be more of a community I could work within and gain experience. So I came back November of '96, I think, and then I started making my trips to Vancouver probably in '97, and then won the Funniest Comic in Canada in '98. *(applause)* No, it helped me get a green card, that's about it. *(more applause, laughter)* Every goal, every award that you get up here doesn't carry any weight in the business in

Canada. So you just get other opportunities. All those awards and things helped me get from a visa to green card status.

AC: You were also in a documentary series that I did with six other comics, or five other comics. One of the things that happened is that at the very beginning, we had footage of you on the bus going to do a gig at some college.

JR: Yeah.

AC: And you had a book with you.

JR: Thanks for sending the bus, by the way. I appreciate that.

AC: You're welcome. But you had a book where you would write down every gig. Do you still have that?

JR: I have that book. I was going through some old storage stuff at my mother's place, and I don't know what the climate is now, but when I came up, I had the best-case scenario. I moved through the business in a standup medium. I don't think anybody's done it more efficiently or quicker. I went from amateur night to headliner in I think five years or something like that, and I did my first hour special in 2000. So from '95 to 2000, in six years I went from amateur night to having a one-hour special. But I gave up everything. I didn't have a life outside of comedy. So every day was hitting stages, doing ten shows a week, and then a friend of mine gave me a notebook, which I originally was gonna write material in, but you can see how many performances, and how much money was made, and the whole thing. And it's a long, long, long, long process.

AC: Can we show these guys? So this is every single show you ever did.

JR: This is every show I did. Every single show I did from '96 to 2001. So I was doing an average of thirty-plus spots a month for two or three years, because I wasn't really a...some comedians really sit down and really write out their material and bring it up like that. What worked for me more efficiently was to have bullet points, perform them, and record them and transcribe them, and then start doing my editing from that, and improvise ideas and things like that. This is how long it takes, if you're lucky. And then you're fucked. *(laughter)*

AC: Did you always migrate towards doing humor that was...we just talked earlier about doing casinos, and what that's like for you now. Did you always migrate towards doing humor that people call dark humor, or whatever? Was that always your thing, or did you migrate towards more mainstream kind of comedy?

JR: If you look at my *Comedy Now* in 2001, it was an hour of television-friendly (material). There was some stuff, some blue humor peppered in within that, but the majority of it was very clean, and that was kind of what I had to do at that time, and then when I started making more trips to Europe, I moved to England for five years, and found that it allowed me to exercise ideas and expressions that I couldn't really do in North America. It was still kind of European and artistic in general, a little more progressive in thought. So I was doing more European rock festivals and stuff, and all over Europe, and then doing fringe festivals, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which if you're interested in the arts at any level, it's Mecca for comics. Definitely, if you can't afford (it), because to do the Fringe, you're looking at about a \$30,000

investment to do it, but there are other options, like the free Fringe, where you can do it where you can pass a hat around at the end of your show, which a lot of people do because it is so expensive, and I don't know if you've seen the Canadian dollar lately, but it's horrendous. I'm working for fruit.

AC: I remember one of your jokes from then, the 2000's, about getting caught smoking. Remember that one?

JR: Yeah, I do a bit where I'm talking about being raised in a strict home with parents, and my father caught me and my brother smoking, so to punish us, he took one of those big Cuban cigars, and then he made us suck his cock. *(laughter)* That would keep me out of Nickelodeon. *(laughter)*

AC: That's some of your TV-friendly material.

JR: That was the joke. It was a weird thing, because it was such a fuckin' weird time. The executives and people who had money invested in this had come to me in between, because we taped two shows, and somebody had bombed so bad. Russell Peters was my warmup act for that taping, and because the show had gone so poorly from the previous performer, they wanted to reschedule my taping. And I said, "Look, I've been collecting e-mail addresses and sending out notices and getting people to come out to see specifically what I do. I'm going on. I'll improvise, and then you can change tape," and I did the show. I don't know if that answered your question, I tend to ramble. This is the first time I've been outside in weeks.

(laughter)

AC: As a comedian, you kind of bridge the two areas. '95 to 2004 or so, TV is still the dominant thing, and there are gatekeepers. I remember seeing you at Just for Laughs, and the guy from Comedy Central's there, and (he says), "Hey, great, we're gonna..." There were still people who, if you got them to like you, then something's gonna happen. But then everything shifts, and we are where we are today. There's still TV, but there's a lot more opportunity, it seems, for standups now than there was, say, ten or fifteen years ago. You've performed all over the world, right?

JR: Yeah, I've performed comedy in probably fifteen different countries, from Slovenia to Johannesburg. I've always looked at my career as a global thing. I never wanted to be a Canadian comic, I just wanted to be a really good comic. So I looked at the world, and especially being in England helped me, and allowed me to start looking at more broad...that five years I lived in England was very, very good for my muse, to say the least. Being in an environment where you're with a bunch of crazy people doing cool shit all the time, who aren't really in it for a big movie or a sitcom or something like that, it was always about doing cool shit on a higher level.

AC: Who were some of those people you were working with?

JR: Well, I lived in a madhouse. I don't know if you guys remember, there was a big kind of comedy group called Corky and the Juice Pigs, and Phil Nichol from Corky and the Juice Pigs was my roommate. Matt Kirshen from *Last Comic Standing*, a really short English fellow, maybe a few seasons back. And an Oxford graduate, Nick Doody. On Bill Hicks's *Live From Oxford University*, he gives the opening introduction. And a magician comedian by the name of Carey Marx. So these were all

my roommates, and you can't help but do unconventional things with creative people in those environments. So it was just constantly like that. It was just cool shit all the time, and I found people really wanted to push boundaries and things like that.

AC: And is there a big difference between, say, English audiences and Canadian audiences?

JR: Yeah, like any place you go in the world, different countries have their own politics, and certain subject matter. Like, I bomb in front of Dutch audiences. I die, because Dutch people are not shocked or impressed by anything, because they just saw somebody get fucked by a horse on the way to the club. *(laughter)* You know what I mean? There are cum shots all over the place there. I didn't wear open-toed shoes in Amsterdam, I'll tell you that. *(laughter)* A lot of the crux of what I do is (stuff) that people are uncomfortable with, and Dutch people are very comfortable with who they are. So that was a tough one.

AC: So you think the more of a divide there is in the culture you're playing in, the better for you?

JR: Yeah, I wanna do, like, an Islamic house party. *(laughter)* I think that's my audience.

AC: What are your top three countries, then?

JR: Top three countries? Oddly enough, I'm second in ticket sales, under Jerry Seinfeld, in Denmark, of all places. So places like Denmark, mainly Scandinavia, so

Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, are the places I do more now. But I think maybe in a year I'm gonna go to Poland and Germany. I haven't been there yet. As you can tell by just Googling, people always go, "How do you get these gigs all over the place?" I go, "English comedy, Nibia," click. "Oh, they're doing an English night, and they have a comedy festival once a year, and you can submit to it." And you can get in these international festivals simply by knocking on somebody's door. Send a Youtube clip, a resume, and some references.

AC: What's it like doing comedy for an audience for whom English isn't their first language?

JR: Don't drink before the show. *(laughter)* I did a TV show in Russia and bombed because no one spoke English. They told me they were taping two Russian comedy nights, and then the last night was the gala with international acts. It was a Danish comedian, a Swedish comedian, and myself. And a third of the audience maybe had a grasp of the English language. That was a terrible experience, but most of the time, when you're being booked as an international act, they want you to do well. They don't want you to come and fail. But sometimes the promoters can be also big fans of comedy, and maybe two or three years too ambitious, before the culture and the generations catch up, and now it's localized. People are having... I passed Fluffy, Gabriel Iglesias, in the airport in Oslo. He just sold like 20,000 tickets in three cities or something like that, all via...this is his first tour, off of his internet pull, through Youtube and things. People get famous off a snippet of their act, which can work for you and against you. There are some people who get traction off of...I remember

being at the Irvine Improv, and it was packed on a Wednesday, and they go, "Oh, there's a Vine star here." So they had a massive audience, but when it came to doing the standup, people were like, "What the fuck is this shit? This is terrible." So be careful what you wish for.

AC: Has online stuff been good to you? Is that how your audience finds you?

JR: Yeah, Youtube. Youtube's been very good to me, in the sense that it's allowed, because of my style and the kind of comedy I do, the niche audience can find it, and get to stuff that's more specific to them, not like taking all comedy through what they get through television or what have you. And plus, it's a sad truth, but those clicks, you've got a million likes or followers, you'll get attention, but you gotta have the content too.

AC: You have a green card. What was your experience like in Los Angeles, because you lived there for a while?

JR: Yeah. I'm still there. I'm always in L.A. when it's cold, and coincidentally when it's pilot season. So around mid-January to the end of March is when they do all the casting for TV and film and stuff like that, which is when it's cold in Canada, so it kinda works out nicely. So I kinda hover around Los Angeles and do my showcases and be there for that time.

AC: What do you think about Los Angeles now for comedy, particularly for standup, for the kind of thing you're doing?

JR: Well, the Comedy Store in L.A., I don't know who's been over the border, but that's like the hottest club in the world right now. There's technically, under one roof, three clubs. There are the main room, the original room, and the Belly Room. That is becoming, with Roast Battles and Kill Tony and all these kinds of fringe shows that are coming out of there, plus it's a new age where you look at the lineups...look at the Instagram of the Comedy Store, it's Bill Burr, Louis C.K., Dave Chappelle, Marc Maron, Steve Rannazzisi, Ari Shaffir, Sam Tripoli. It's all assassins, which wasn't the case before, but now, over the last couple years...

AC: It's had a kind of renaissance, because it was sort of considered almost a dark...you mentioned Marc Maron, and he has trepidations (about it). It's like *The Shining*, kind of like the Overlook.

JR: It's very, very, very... it's like going into a museum that's still open to the public. It has all these old...it's haunted. But the history there, it's unbelievable. Just walking those hallways, you see the headshots, and the comedy that's coming out of there right now is awesome. It's cool, it's definitely something to check out.

AC: And in terms of your material, do you think that's something that Los Angeles is gonna want, in terms of...

JR: I've force-fed myself to the industry, year after year after year. There is an element of resistance in the sense that with political correctness and people being so uptight now, they don't want to get into any legal... they don't want to be a part of somebody's blog and have their business shaved. But then, last year I did a

Showtime special with Andrew Dice Clay, so tomato, tomahto. Anybody know who Andrew Dice Clay is? Not very politically correct, but fuckin' hilarious.

AC: He's also a bit of a cautionary tale, because he certainly has a better career than he did, say, ten or fifteen years ago. I remember him at Massey Hall, and he performed wearing a bulletproof vest, because wherever he played, he would get threats. Death threats.

JR: Oh, I love it. Bring it. I get death threats.

AC: Do you?

JR: Yep. Yeah.

AC: You keep changing your e-mail address...

JR: Fuck it. I'll take it.

AC: No, seriously, so who's threatening you?

JR: Well, I had an incident some time ago. There'd been a kid sending me mail for probably, it went from a couple lines to like three or four paragraphs every day for two and a half years, and it progressively became... he was clearly schizophrenic. He thought a lot of the things I had online were directly linked to him, and it was part of his life in some way or another. So he said he was gonna shoot me in the face. There was some stuff in his Hotmail address, so I Googled him, and traced it, and found out he was a student in Hamilton, then found out some information, and when I was at the club that weekend, there was a kid who'd come and sat by himself earlier, before

the show started. I said to my friend Manolis, I go, "Go ask this guy if his name's Mike, and if he goes to school in Hamilton." Manolis came back, and he goes, "It's Mike, I'm calling the police." So the police come, and they come down the stairs, they think it's me. They're gonna fuckin' take me down. *(laughter)* I'm like, "Nooo!" So they go and they search him. They didn't find a gun, but they found a mason jar with this big dead rat inside of it, a big black rat. *(laughter)*

AC: That doesn't sound like fun.

JR: No, it's fine, though. If I spent my whole time being worried about what people were gonna do or say, I'd be consumed by it. I know my intentions are good, and I try to do that through my whole life. If people want to come at me from a crazy place, we can do crazy.

AC: So let's talk about that. Let's talk about your intentions, and then how you go about doing that. These guys got a little taste of it when they were at the Alumni Show, but what's your intention?

JR: Social unrest. *(laughter)* Yeah. I was always a fan of horror movies and things that scared me. I was always shy and introverted, which I still am. I do this, this is a very comfortable and familiar place for me, but dealing with people on a one-on-one level has always been difficult. I have a sister who's four years younger than me, and I was always in awe of her, because she could walk up to strangers and talk to them, and I just couldn't do it. So being in a kind of bubble for most of my life, and being kind of withdrawn, around high school I met a group of guys who shared a similar

kind of upbringing, but really didn't give a shit, and... I don't know if I answered your question...

AC: No, you're getting there. You said social unrest is what you wanted to accomplish.

JR: I like the audience to feel how I felt when I was little. *(laughter)* My friend said, "Your comedy's a lot like being strangled and having your asshole fingered at the same time." *(laughter)* "At first it's uncomfortable, but then you kind of settle into it." *(laughter)* Marco Lappano! Cut your nails! *(laughter)* He's got a wandering thumb, that guy. Yeah, I like people feeling guilty, being outside of their comfort zones, and feeling guilty for what they're laughing at. And because of that, I have to go into a lot of really tragic subject matter, but paint it in a way where people can see that it's coming from a good place. I'm charming enough that they can see it's a kind of wink-wink, nudge-nudge thing. On paper, it looks like a hate crime *(laughter)*, but when it's done... that's why when people tell what I do to other people, I look like a total villain. So you really have to experience it. And some of it crosses over through television and things like that, but it's definitely a live experience. Any good club comic, it's a live thing.

AC: Have you ever felt like you went too far? Because that's something that's thrown around, the line, going too far. Have you ever felt like, "I wish I hadn't done that?"

JR: No. I can't wholeheartedly...you can't have those boundaries. It's disrespectful to the whole thing, if you set up these "what I won't do..." Just be awesome. It doesn't have to be dirty, or anything. Go watch Emo Phillips. Go watch Nick Di Paolo, go

watch Dave Attel. Dave Attel is much easier. He's a blue comic, but his joke structure and his writing ability is, like, Jedi. He's praised and revered by everybody in standup. Back to you.

AC: Alright. And what about the audience reaction? Have you had some angry crowds, some walked rooms?

JR: Totally. Bombed...fuck. Apocalyptic bombings. Three thousand people, I remember that. The Yuk-Yuk's anniversary show was in Ottawa, at the Art Center there. About three, four, five thousand people, maybe. Howie Mandel's hosting it, and there's Harland Williams, Jeremy Hotz, Mike Wilmot, the list goes on and on, Nikki Payne, some alumni from back in the day. I went on after one of my heroes in standup, Mike Wilmot. Destroyed it. And he's like a suit-and-tie, dirty uncle type comedian, and Ottawa, in the Art Center, that was his backyard. I came in, and I may as well have been jerking off with a gun in my mouth. *(laughter)* They were like, "What the fuck?" Because it was theater-type people, but I went up there, coming off the back of Mark Breslin's encouragement in doing clubs, where there's no holds barred, no censorship. Take advantage of that as much as you can, because a lot of the politics and things that you will run into in clubs, where some of you can't swear or use strong language or any of that stuff, it's sad.

AC: So that didn't go too well?

JR: No. I remember I bombed, because I did a joke about having sex with a girl who I thought had an accent, but it turns out she was just retarded. *(laughter)* That's about as many people who laughed in a theater of five thousand. *(laughter)* And the

bottom dropped out. It was bad. I remember walking by Mark Breslin, I was so embarrassed, and Mark Breslin's standing there, and he goes, "They weren't your crowd." And I said, "Oh, thank you." *(laughter)* He gets it. That's the cool thing about Mark. He's a businessman, but he knows comedy. I blame him for where my career is right now.

AC: He certainly encourages transgressive stuff, if you want to use that word.

JR: Totally. I think Mark's another guy who's very introverted, kind of a quiet person...

AC: Bullied.

JR: Bullied. And I think that when he sees me bully a room full of paying customers, he finds some joy in that. I think a lot of the people... the wait staff, and some of the nerdier comics, not the fake nerds that you see around now, but the real nerd comics will come up to me and go, "Man, that was awesome, I fuckin' hate those people." *(laughter)* "Get 'em! Get 'em! Aaaagh!" So I think that's where some of the weight comes from what I do. It's some sort of distorted place of truth, and people will get it, ideally, or not.

AC: I think we should maybe stop; there may or may not be any questions. Are there any questions out there? Any aspiring transgressional comedians? Raise your hands. You're all nice? All right. So tell us, why are you into being transgressional, for lack of a better word? *(to audience member)* Yeah.

Audience member: I, uh...

JR: Unbutton your shirt and look at me. *(laughter)*

Audience member: I don't know, I think there's this line, and we were talking about it in class, this line that gets drawn, and I think that people that say that something is...

JR: That's *their* line.

Audience member: That's what I'm saying...

JR: They're bringing their own politics to the fuckin' shit, and you gotta leave all that shit out the door. It taints everything. You should be able to hear, fuckin', the most heinous things, and prolific all at the same time, regardless of your politics, and you can leave. Most of the time, the clubs will give you your money back, or tell you to go fuck yourself. But don't come to the party and ruin it. Do heroin. *(laughter)*

AC: Well, that's interesting, because if we had asked that question even ten years ago, a lot more people would've wanted to be transgressional. That was the starting point. Do you think it's changing?

JR: I think over the last little while, people have become oversensitive and stuff, but I think that things are gonna bust. I don't know when it will be, if it's gonna be a global catastrophe—catastrophe? Thank you, DeVry. It will change the axis of it, because I think people are just getting fed up. If you just look at Donald Trump, how could that even be? But people are so fed up with oversensitivity that they've gone so extreme now it might bite them in the ass.

AC: Do you think the standup boom will bust? Right now, standup has boomed. I remember the last boom, and it busted pretty bad, and many people got out.

JR: Yeah, and I think the people who got out were shit. The benefit of that boom, and potentially what we might be in right now, is that a lot of guys (say), "Well, I'm gonna go live in Australia for a month, because I can go do comedy there." It wasn't geared to state-to-province kind of stuff in North America. It's more so everyone's got their own trends. When I first went to Finland, I was the first English-speaking standup comedian to perform there, and now they have five comedy festivals.

AC: And do you have a favorite Finnish comedian?

JR: Yeah, Ismo. There's a guy who's in L.A. now, great kind of Mitch Hedberg, Steven Wright-esque. His name's Ismo K... I can't remember (*Ismo Leikola*). I sent him, Laugh Factory has me on their list, I sign up for spots every week. The Improv and the Laugh Factory, if you're a paid regular, you'll get an e-mail every week, and you'll check off your availabilities, and they sent me a newsletter looking for international comedians. I sent it to a guy in Norway, a guy in Sweden, and a guy in Finland. Ismo got in Finland and won, won the whole thing, and now has just taped a Netflix special at the Laugh Factory like last week. So again, it's an international thing. But yeah, Ismo's great. Magnus Betner, out of Sweden, phenomenal. Most of these guys are good in English, and...that's the worst, too, is these fuckers, they speak like three or four different languages. You find out how ignorant you are. And they're good in both languages, and have way more diction and grammar...ugh, bastards. Education! I was deprived in the city of Hamilton, I was raised by wolves. (*laughter*)

AC: So you did high school, and then you came...what made you decide to come to Humber? You did the workshop, and then...

JR: Yeah, the workshop. I never finished high school. I think I had taken some sort of adult education program as a last attempt at some sort of decent low-level job or something. I wanted to know the mechanics of different things like film and TV. When I came here, I was already, I think I'd already won a Gemini award, so standup was something that was always the main thing in my career, but I really wanted to learn how to put my own ideas on paper and get them to people who'd pay me for them.

AC: What was the first thing you sold? Was it your *Comedy Now*, or something like that?

JR: Yeah, *Comedy Now*, and I wrote on some stuff. I'm writing with Bobby Lee right now, he's gearing up for a new special or something, I think for Netflix. My own ideas, I think I wrote some stuff for *Buzz* back in the day, with Mr. Moe and Daryn Jones. I don't know if anyone remembers that.

AC: What's Bobby Lee like to write for? He's got a pretty out-there...

JR: Bobby's nuts.

AC: *(to audience)* Do you guys know Bobby Lee? *(audience answers in affirmative)*

JR: Yeah, Bobby's crazy. Bobby's also very professional, very goal-oriented, very ambitious, and it's easy, because all you have to do is put some structure around that tornado that is Bobby Lee. So Bobby will go off on some tangents here and

there, and those end up being some really good structured ideas and bits and stuff by the end of it. Bobby's always putting his stuff out there, and he'll grab your dick while you're talking to him. *(laughter)* You can ask him.

AC: One of the clichés for comedy is that the guys who are dirtiest offstage are the nicest on... the dirtiest onstage are the nicest off, and vice-versa.

JR: Bill Cosby is a rapist. *(laughter, Rouse makes air-raid siren noise)*

AC: But do you find that people expect you to... I remember when you were starting out, you were very disciplined, and completely studios about your comedy. Do you find people expect you to be sort of the Sam Kinison, sex, drugs and rock and roll thing offstage?

JR: There is *tons* of that. How do you think I keep my girlish figure? Cocaine and coffee, kids. It's a very...I get up, I sleep for six hours, and I get up. I have to be very self-disciplined, because if I have idle hands, I'm off doing self-destructive shit consistently. So I have to really police myself, and set deadlines for myself so I'm liable, and if I don't do them I'll look like an idiot. You don't want to be embarrassed for lack of professionalism and stuff like that. So that allows me to be onstage and be completely insane, because I've done all the other stuff, so it allows me to do my shit.

AC: And do you still record your act and transcribe it?

JR: Yes. When I'm gearing up for television, I'm moving to New York later this month to start my process of auditioning for *The Tonight Show*, so I have to start over. I have to start from scratch. So I'll come up with the ideas and premises that I want to

reveal to that audience, which is a television audience. I'm not gonna go in there and do my suck-my-dad's-cock joke in my audition. As much as that might get a laugh, and it's good for my ego, the audition's gonna lead to nothing. So I really have to sit down and meticulously go through all the bits and pieces of material and start transcribing it.

AC: And why do *The Tonight Show*? It seems obvious...

JR: To blow everyone's minds. I just do things... I auditioned for "The Nasty Show," I think seven years in a row, and couldn't get on, and then when I moved to England...for some reason, when you move out of the country, people tend to take you more seriously. Even if your skill level's the same, or if you've gotten a little bit better but not significantly better... I don't know what it is about Canadians being in Canada...I just had a stroke. *(laughter)* It seems like you need to get over the wall before somebody will actually validate you. You can go on and have a decent career in Canada, maybe the best-case scenario might be a Ron James or a Gerry Dee, Nikki Payne might be another one, but for whatever reason, even Just for Laughs, which is a Canadian business I'd like to think, we're always the last to be picked, always the last. And dozens of guys who are very good comics within the country fall by the wayside, because they just don't really go anywhere to get recognition.

AC: Did you make a concerted effort, then, to get your green card? That was always on the...

JR: That was it. I was no fool. It was like, make it in New York, you can make it anywhere. It's a real thing where you've gotta put your craft in the World Olympics,

and New York City's a hard city to live in with a lot of talented people. So if you can do it in New York...which meant I needed to build a bridge there, so I started looking into visas and things like that, and I cornered Jeremy Hotz on a treadmill at a gym, and I was like, "I gotta get out. How did you...?" So I asked some questions about what awards and things like that that allowed me to contact an immigration lawyer, and start that process, which took \$15,000 and almost five years of paperwork. Because I was living in England at the time, I had to duplicate a lot of the paperwork I had, fingerprints, I had to get a chest X-ray for TV, criminal background checks, fingerprinted, signed photos, stacks of press and letters and stuff. Any press that you might have, hold onto that stuff. Start filing it away for your career, because someone's gonna ask to see it one day, and you're gonna need to have that in hand, rather than going, "Hey, remember that article you did in the student newspaper ten years ago?" You don't want that.

AC: *(to audience member)* Yep.

Audience member: How much of your standup do you post on Youtube?

JR: A lot of it. Most recently, I've been going through old drives and things like that, so my website has probably 95% of everything. Because it's so niche, I had to kind of corral everything into one spot so people could kind of get through all the different things like Youtube and Instagram and all that shit...

Audience member: So it's all old bits, or bits that you still do?

JR: There's some stuff that I've brought into the shows occasionally. When people come that haven't seen me, and they want to see some stuff I've done before that I'm known for, I'll kind of pepper that in.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, yeah, right here.

Audience member: Would you recommend posting...

JR: Not at this stage, you know what I mean? Canada's a great place to make mistakes. So you can go and work your craft in obscurity, off the grid. So until you've got something worthwhile...but what do you want? If you've got a five-minute clip on there, do you have the other thirty minutes of material that's gonna allow you to get a booking? Or are you just showing off half-heartedly?

Audience member: Would you say it's worth it to tape, though?

JR: Always tape yourself. I have hundreds of hours of video and audio tape. Always tape yourself. And because I was such a visual learner, I found...for five years, I carried a little Handicam over my shoulder to all the clubs and set it up and videotaped (my sets) and sat at home with my notebook and watched. And then I started realizing, "OK, some of this stuff isn't working." I faced the video camera on the audience to get a little more of a perspective that I could look at outside of myself. I did a lot of looking down. You gotta be aware. That stuff about, "I'm fuckin' dirty, they don't get me," it's a copout. It's bullshit. You're completely unaware of what you're doing, and you're using that as an excuse. "They just don't like dirty shit." No, I can watch Doug Stanhope for two hours, and hear the vilest shit.

AC: Is there a city you'd recommend... *(to audience)* Oh, sorry, did you have a question?

Audience member: Yeah, I wanted to ask: I know every person has their own way of cataloguing their material, but what would you recommend...I write my bits. Do you like having an idea and then you go home and put it in format? How do you...

JR: Yeah, what I'll do is, I usually have either a small notebook or, at the least, my iPhone. Then I'll sync it to, there's a good program called WriteRoom. A couple of books I'll recommend by Steven Pressfield called *War of Art* and *Turning Pro*. Those really allowed and helped me to retune and refine some of the ideas I had about my career and my business. But a notebook, and then I just come up with some bullet points, just a loose outline. And then I'll go up and perform those, record them, at the least audio, but if I'm working on something with some physicality to it, I'll videotape it. And then just create a folder for yourself, and put it in. And then you can come back to it. Some ideas might really take a life, and fit in with something you've developed down the road. But everyone comes up with their own process. Whatever works for you. Really what it comes down to is everyone will find their own thing.

Audience member: What's one piece of advice you'd give to someone who's trying to get into a comedy career?

JR: Standup, or just in general?

Audience member: Just general advice.

JR: Work with people that deliver. You'll find a lot of people have a lot of great ideas and no follow-through, and that's like quicksand, especially if you have a goal and an idea in your head. Surround yourself with likeminded people who have the same cause. Comics are fuckin' lazy, and always have excuses. The gossip I'm sure you've seen over the year, the he said/she said bullshit. This is not a team sport. You don't get a jersey, you get herpes. *(laughter)* Lapanno! Old Barnacle Bill down at the glory hole! Don't look at me!

AC: What are good cities to start out in right now? Is Toronto one of them?

JR: Yeah, Toronto most definitely. I'd say this is the best city in the country right now to be doing it in. Vancouver and Toronto, that's really it. You've got your New York and your Los Angeles. Toronto's baby New York, Vancouver's baby L.A. And they're both close to the border. I'd recommend, especially living in Toronto, you can get a return ticket for New York for a few hundred bucks. Go and stay there. Check out the scene. Be a fly on the wall. Start making those relationships.

AC: What about...*(to audience)* Oh, sorry, go ahead.

Audience member: I was just gonna ask, given the whole PC nature of a lot of the shows that are happening now, are there places you won't do anymore, like colleges? I know there are a lot of comics like Seinfeld and Chris Rock who won't do colleges anymore.

JR: I don't get asked to do things like that anymore. I've been around enough that people know what they're gonna get. There are no real grey areas. So that doesn't

come up very often. With the stuff that's online, people know very quickly yes or no with me. But earlier in my career, I didn't know until I did it, and it was like, "We don't want you back. Like, ever." *(laughter)* "Stay away from my family."

AC: Well, yeah, college shows traditionally were more progressive, if you want to use that word, or alternative, or counterculture, or whatever. Now they still are, but that counterculture is rejecting that standup thing, that's the counterculture.

JR: I had won Campus Comedian of the Year, and then my work slowed down after that. It's a weird thing in this country. Every time I've gotten to a level of success where I was acknowledged by the industry, I had to change gears. I thought I was gonna go into a television series from a Gemini Award, which you'd think, if you won an Emmy in the United States, you'd go on to have a series, but it forced me to move to England. 'allo, Guvnor!

AC: How did you get your working permit for England? Did you go on a work holiday?

JR: My grandfather was born just outside of Manchester, so that allowed...

AC: Where?

JR: In Grimsby. It's a fishing town. I've never been. It's a dump. These guys in the back know what I'm talking about. *(to audience)* Have you been to Grimsby? Are you English?

Audience member: Me? No. I'm just from Grimsby.

JR: Oh. Grimsby, Ontario?

Audience member: Yeah.

JR: That's a shithole. *(laughter)*

AC: So because of having a grandparent of British origin...

JR: Yeah. A lot of comics, I guess maybe early 2000, like Craig Campbell, Tom Stade, Sean Cullen, Mike Wilmot, had been going over to Europe, and I was like, "Fuck, I want to go to Thailand, and do shows in Hong Kong and Dubai and Doha."

AC: Have you performed in Dubai?

JR: I have. Dubai and Doha. The Barang show got cancelled because a bomb went off. That was in 2007, I think. I was gonna go do a gig in Israel, in Tel Aviv, and there was a bomb, so they cancelled it.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, yeah, John.

Audience member: I was just wondering, have you ever worked with Jerry Sadowitz?

JR: No, I haven't.

Audience member: He's one of my favorites.

JR: Yeah, he's a legend. I worked with, talking about madmen, like Phil Kay and stuff like that, and Simon Munnery. I got to meet the late, great, he wrote a great book called *I Stole Freddie Mercury's Birthday Cake*, what's his name...Malcolm Hardee. He

did the naked thing on Just for Laughs, with the balloons. He was like Iggy Pop and Hunter S. Thompson. He used to run this legendary Sunday night show where it was like *Road House*.

AC: I remember, is it the same guy or a different guy who did *Moosehead's Nocturnal Admissions* at the Edinburgh Fringe years ago? It culminated with him naked with a firecracker up his ass with "That's Entertainment" playing over it?

JR: That's another guy. He lives in, like, Zimbabwe or something on a farm. Yeah, I worked with him. The music festivals in Europe that do comedy have been doing it probably for ten, fifteen, maybe twenty years, and they have like 90,000 people at these rock festivals, and then they have these cabaret tents. They'll do six hour shows, variety shows. You'll see a burlesque guy, a guy who swallows a chainsaw, then a comedian, and then they go on and on, and everyone's on drugs, and it's awesome. *(laughter)*

AC: On that note, what is the difference between Canadian audiences and British audiences? Is there one?

JR: Oh, you know, it varies. You go to Newcastle, and Portsmouth, and like I said, especially in England, each city has their own kind of class system, and there's so much you pick up on with people's dialects and where they're born. So the football politics in Liverpool is different than Manchester's, so you don't know. I never look at it as being in the country. I read the room, and see how I can navigate and bring what I want to do to them. I don't really look at it as a country-to-country thing. I

make my material as travelable as possible. I don't do a lot of current events or politics and stuff.

AC: Have you ever been attacked onstage?

JR: Liverpool. *(laughter)* Yeah. They spit on me, tried to hit me with a shoe. Luckily, the comedy clubs in the U.K., specifically in the Irish Republic...when I first went there, I was like, "What's with all these fuckin' jacked English guys, tattoos, huge, old tough guys," they're gangsters, and they got headsets on. And then I started doing shows there, and I was like, "Oh, they're here for a reason. These people are fuckin' animals." So I've seen people throw glasses, vomit, puking, fighting, crying, fistfights, women attacking each other. And I end up dating them. *(laughter)* And I love them.

AC: Is that the scariest, the English, or is it the Canadians up north, in Sudbury?

JR: They don't have the balls. No one has the balls. Fuck you! *(laughter)* No, it doesn't happen that much. When I see it escalating to that kind of place where somebody's inebriated, and clearly out of sorts, I won't aggravate it to hurt them.

AC: What's your heckler putdown technique? Do you have one?

JR: I usually choke them and put two fingers in their ass *(laughter)*, and then they kind of settle in. It varies according to the situation. The way I do it, I'll leave long periods of silence, and I'm more or less setting a trap for people to interject. And if they take the bait, then I punish them. *(laughter)* For being stupid. Because all the smart people are like, "I'm not saying anything. We're just gonna wait this out."
"You're full of crap!" Boom! Dead girl! *(laughter)*

AC: So that's part of the bait and switch.

JR: Yeah. It's like a venus flytrap. Except I catch pubic lice instead of flies. *(laughter)*

AC: We've got five minutes or so left, if there's another question from the audience.

JR: Who here wants to do standup as a career? Yeah? Now, do you picture yourself being a headliner for Yuk-Yuk's at some point? You'd like to be touring the country doing a 45-50 minute show? Yeah? And how do you think you're gonna do it?

Audience member: Practice?

JR: Practice? Hello? *(laughter)* Is this English as a Second Language?

Audience member: By making connections, and practicing the writing and rehearsal...

JR: Yeah. And you live here in Toronto?

Audience member: No, I live in Muskoka.

JR: You live in Muskoka? Well, you need to...

AC: You commute here from Muskoka? *(laughter)*

JR: He rollerblades here. *(laughter)*

Audience member: No no, I moved here *for* school...

JR: It's good to get out of the park!

AC: I've heard of people commuting, but not from Muskoka.

JR: Look at him go! Go to Hollywood! You can make it!

AC: Here's a question: what's the worst advice you got when you were starting out?

JR: "Two fingers are better than three." *(laughter)*

AC: Oh, come on!

JR: There wasn't really any advice. I don't really ask for advice. Like I said, Jim Carrey was a big influence and catalyst for my career, but then Russell Peters is also, I've kind of just followed his career. When he moved to England, I went there shortly after, and when he went to the States. So I always followed that success path, you know what I mean? It made sense. Follow the fuckin' money.

AC: And you've written, right, with Russell Peters, and you're buddies with him?

JR: Yeah, we've been friends for a long time. Eighteen years now, I think. He's doing great, if you haven't heard. His Netflix special's coming out. Did anyone go to the Massey Hall taping? No? He's really big now, you know. I don't know if you've heard.
(laughter)

AC: But it's a different kind of humor than you're doing.

JR: Totally. I put my writer's hat on when I go into those situations, and I look at some of the key points that are very unique to their personality and their language, and try to build ideas around things that they wouldn't necessarily be focusing on, but are discussed in some of their standup sets, and build off of that. I just build bridges.

AC: We have time for maybe one more question.

Audience member: If you were to do a show overseas or whatever, I was just wondering, how much does it roughly cost?

JR: To do a solo show at a festival?

Audience member: In the beginning, is that what you're doing?

JR: I went over to do the clubs, but then a lot of the countries that I was doing the clubs in would do maybe a weeklong arts festival and stuff like that, so I took what I was doing in the standup club and kind of retooled some of it and rewrote some of it in more of a longer form. The Toronto Fringe would be a good place to look at to see what happens, or the Winnipeg Fringe Festival or Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and start putting together those showcases. Don't wait, don't wait. Do it. Hello?

(laughter) Don't wait. Just do it. Don't wait for anyone to give you the tools to do what you want to do. You've gotta be so proactive and use all these other platforms to get your shit across.

AC: What's your experience been with managers and agents?

JR: I have neither. I've been managing and doing my own thing since 2007. I had big management companies and stuff involved in my career, but I found that what I'm doing at this point, I do best by myself. So I spend a lot of time working on doing everything. Poster design, podcasts, putting photos up, Instagram, Twitter, all these other things, creating videos. I just had a meeting with somebody...have you ever seen *The Chickening*?

AC: *The Chickening?*

JR: *The Chickening*. Check it out on Youtube. It's a Toronto guy. He took the movie *The Shining* and incorporated kind of a very macabre chicken restaurant. So we're talking about doing a Jason Rouse animated series with this almost kind of Tim and Eric-esque animation.

AC: Great. Well, thank you very much! (*applause*)