

"Hell Date" Comic Has Serious Goals

Contributed by Crystal Dickey
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Education, leadership interest Keedar Whittle

It's 7:03 a.m. in Los Angeles, as comedian Keedar Whittle yawns periodically. Brief inward breaths are soon replaced with a wafted but slight drawl courtesy of his hometown Atlanta, along with a seemingly inherent sense of humor.

"I've been doing comedy all my life. To say that I was a class clown would be a negative connotation because I was always an honors student. But I was always getting in trouble for talking and trying to make somebody laugh."

Driven by his calling to "reach the masses," the biology major and Norfolk State University graduate, started as a science coordinator for three independent middle schools. Whittle flirted with the acting realm in his stage debut in the production of G.R. Point, and after winning several awards he decided to move to New York to study theater and further develop his acting craft.

His performances in New York regional plays and stand up comedy paved the way for the opportunity to tour with and open for comedian Finesse Mitchell, who is currently a relationship columnist for Essence magazine and author of the book "Your Girlfriends Only Know So Much." Soon after moving to L.A., Whittle appeared on "Saturday Night Live," Nick Cannon's "Short Circuitz" and recently shot a comedic webisode entitled "The Untold Adventures of Lewis and Clarke," which is one of Fox's first test series for the online division.

He cites Don Cheadle and Will Smith as his influences, because of Cheadle's versatility and Smith's edge. "Before I started acting, I didn't watch much TV, but I was watching and I saw this guy [Cheadle] and I was like 'man he's good' because he's done theater, TV, and film," Whittle remembered.

"I also admire Will Smith because he showed me what can get you to where you need to be," he adds. "He made people show all their teeth and went from being on TV to sitting on the floor of a train station [the movie "Pursuit of Happyness"]."

The educator/actor/comedian is a star on BET's "Hell Date," the number one show in the network's history, on which actors turned daters act out the worst-case blind date scenarios that encompass being smothered, a target for swingers, baby momma/father drama, crazy, and deranged company that is revealed as a joke by devil-costumed little people.

Whittle describes his experience on "Hell Date" as 14 episodes of "pure fun."

"I went on a website called actorsaccess.com and ran across a posting that read 'looking for nice looking actors that can act well' and I said hey, that's me," he laughed. "For two or three weeks I blew [the idea] off until I found out the premise of it and that it wasn't a reality show. "Hell Date" is cool. I went to work to play jokes on people."

Though Whittle has decided to fully embrace acting and comedy, he plans to use his success from the stage, TV and big screen to fulfill his passion and desire to serve as an educator and leader.

"Education is my calling in life. I could've stayed and taught but I believe my calling is also to reach the masses, because we all listen and can all still learn. Acting is cool, and now I have a platform to stand on."

Whittle recently took part in six different sessions or panel discussions at schools throughout the Atlanta public school system that covered image, the use of the N-word, females in videos and the baggy pants law in Atlanta.

He has also created the Funny as Hell tour, which unlike many other comedy tours plans to provide the funny as well as serve as a platform for other philanthropic efforts. The tour utilizes the comedy clubs' alliances with other organizations to stress three main aspects that include community service and community unity.

"In comedy it's like a bag of chips, one day you're gonna go stale, so our goal is to stay relevant. The Hell Date comedians get 40 to 50 requests to do things so I said why not bring all of the comedians together and do a tour. Because I went to an HBCU, I believe in service so we're going to promote HIV and AIDS awareness, touch on Lupus, and other issues that affect the black community."

The comedians also plan to host comedy competitions at high schools in the regions where they perform. The comedian's three to five minute set will be posted on the tour's Myspace page, where people can vote for the funniest comedian and the winner will open up for the tour's DVD taping.

"It [the tour] promotes community unity by allowing a school or whole city to stand behind one person," Whittle said

Whittle will make his silver screen debut in a popular football movies spoof entitled "The Comebacks," in theaters Oct. 19. "It's a small part so don't blink. Don't be there on time, be there early," he jokes. "I might be in the bonus features more than the movie."

His advice to aspiring actors and comedians is simple. In order to be successful you have to take the time to learn your craft and lean on faith.

"I can't tell you what higher power to believe in but find one," he insists. "In this business you can't do it by yourself."

"It ain't safe in these streets," he teases. "I'm 6'6" and black and you know Hollywood's little."

Kedar Whittle can be reached through his Myspace page www.myspace.com/keedarwhittle or through the tour's page at www.myspace.com/funnyashelltou.

Crystal Dickey writes for the Panther at Clark Atlanta University, where this article first appeared. To comment, please e-mail Black College Wire.

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