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A conversation between comedians usually turns into an exploration of the necessity for comedy in a constantly changing world. Al Prodiges proved the perfect comic to have this discussion with.

Al's list of comedic achievements is truly impressive and his chosen profession has taken him everywhere, from Fouriesburg to Abu Dhabi. An active participant of our club circuit and an in-demand corporate MC, his CV includes being the only non-Canadian to progress all the way to the final 8 of the Yuk Yuk's Great Canadian Laugh Off in 2007 and participation in almost every auditorium comedy event in South Africa.

It comes as no surprise to find sincerity and courage are two elements he regards to be of utmost importance in comedy.

His first performance was inspiring and his second dire. It's an addictive combination that has hooked many a prospective comedian. The interaction between comedian and audience can best be described as a relationship. The greatest pickup line in the world won't necessarily work the second time around and an audience differs from evening to evening. Your first and foremost obligation is to insure they remain in stitches, however challenging the room is. Therein lies the reward and as Al jokingly states: "We're seriously damaged people... The comic's reward is the fact that he gets attention, positive reinforcement... Not always sure what developmental stage we're stuck on, but it's pretty much pre-pubescent!"

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Comedy is the expression of personal opinion for entertainment purposes. "The comic is given license to express some of people's vulnerabilities, some of that nasty dark side that we mutter under our breath." It's the revolt of the little guy who's thinking; "I should've said that." The comic gets the opportunity to do so on his behalf and it emboldens both parties involved.

The value of comedy in the current South Africa is clear. Al feels that the comments made by our comedians are perfectly socially and politically relevant to where we are now. Bearing in mind that we come from an environment where we were not allowed to make certain sexual and

political innuendoes, we might even swing it too far, but the pendulum will correct itself.

He feels that the most exciting venues are those where people are willing to find and explore their boundaries. To experience a sense of communication and be ideologically challenged.

Al is quick to point out that some pre-conceived notions still exist (aptly termed the Fake Outrage Brigade), but it's the comedian's job to find the chink in the armour and a shared experience that will instil laughter.

It's clear his desire is for South Africans to be proud of their identity and to develop it wholeheartedly. A certain youth leader merely saying the word 'hermaphrodite' becomes funny - the use of language and imagery in South Africa allows for great comedy even if it's at times offensive and nonsensical. We do ourselves a disservice if we dilute who we are and must always talk from our own perspective allowing our voice to come to life. No surprise then that he is the only SA comic directly associated with the Proudly South African campaign.

When prompted about his influences, names like Lenny Bruce, George Carlin and Bill Cosby fly around, but he remains in awe of local trailblazers like Mel Miller and Pieter-Dirk Uys - guys who rewrote the rules. He'd like to think he can also rewrite some rules, but most of the time he's probably telling jokes about his genitals for beer money.

On asking how he thinks local comedy can develop his answer is a very logical one. "Comedy should be seen all over this fair country of ours, especially where you won't expect it or where the dominee might warn against it. The goal is the growth of an audience willing to laugh at experiences we all share."

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He leaves me with great wisdom: "It's a privilege to have that microphone in your hand. Best you use it in a manner so that you can look at yourself in the mirror the next morning!"

Check out [www.alprodiges.co.za](http://www.alprodiges.co.za) for upcoming gigs, barroom poetry and other information.