

The Hot Seat

Small talk with big people

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Aasif Mandvi

The *Daily Show* pundit dishes on how to fake it.
By Sarah Bruning

In his regular gig as a talking head on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, Aasif Mandvi relies on biting sarcasm and irony to comment on world news. His new film, the cooking comedy *Today's Special*, takes a more heartfelt approach to humor. Mandvi cowrote and stars in the flick, basing it in part on his Obie-winning play, *Sakina's Restaurant*. We chatted with the actor to get his perspective on Indian cuisine and the prospect of online dating.

In the movie, you look pretty comfortable in the kitchen. Did you grow up cooking much Indian food?
I grew up eating a lot of Indian food. I didn't cook as much. Whenever I cook Indian food, I cook with my cell phone to my ear and my mom on the other end of the phone, giving me instructions on how to do things. I learned very well how to fake

cooking like a sous chef, you know? I did learn how to chop and how to slice, but mostly how to make my body look comfortable in that world.

What was the most important lesson you learned about faking it?
[Laughs] The best way of faking it is to have a body double.

Did you have a body double in the movie?
I had chef Kevin Patricio's hands at one point actually replace my hands.

Who's got prettier hands?
Kevin would say he does, but they took photographs of my hands just to see if we could match his hands to mine. And I saw those pictures, and I would say mine. My hands are definitely beautiful.

What was the first Indian dish you learned how to cook?
I think it was just the simplest rice. You think that rice is really easy to make, but I completely screwed it up.

What happened?
I just ended up with this watery, gooey mess. I think I got all of the percentages wrong. I had to call my mother, and she was like, "Okay, let's start from the very beginning..." We figured it out, but I was actually having a dinner party and ended up having this gooey pile of mush, like, 15 minutes before everyone was going to show up.

If you were whipping up today's special, what would it be? Rice?
It probably would. And people would be like, "This is terrible! Five courses of rice? This is the worst feast ever!"

You don't think you'd ever try opening a restaurant?
Maybe sometime in the future, I would. There's something very communal about it. It's about people coming together and eating, and there's something awesome about that. That's what the film is about—creating community through food.

Would it be like Tandoori Palace in *Today's Special*?

I love the concept that there is no menu, that the chef just makes whatever he makes. I think that if I had a restaurant, I would just do that.

"My poor parents have been trying to find me a nice girl."

Your character's mom seems pretty pushy about him settling down and finding the right person. She even scours dating websites. Have your parents ever tried to set you up?

Oh, sure. I mean, I'm Indian, for God's sake. There are very few people I know whose parents *haven't* tried setting them up. My poor parents have been trying to find me a nice girl for many years.

If one of your *Daily Show* pals set up an online dating profile for you, what do you think it would say?
I would never trust anybody at *The Daily Show* to set up an online dating profile. It would be completely humiliating.

Would you trust them to set you up with someone?
No. Most of the people I'm working with are trying to find their own ladies if they're not already married.

You wouldn't trust Olivia Munn?
Olivia Munn? Maybe. Okay, you know what? I take that back, maybe the women. None of the guys, but I would trust maybe Sam [Bee] and maybe Olivia.

What kind of person would you hope that they would scope out for you?
Someone that would be fun, attractive, funny and had eight fingers on her left hand, which is a fetish that I've always had. If you can find that woman, I'm all hers. She's all mine.

Why the eight fingers?
You are relentless! [Laughs]

Somebody dextrous?
Yeah, exactly. A lot to work with.

Today's Special opens Fri 19.