

Can't get enough Joe

By Bethel Caram and Neil Potter

Neil and I like to interview people over a little food and drink. We alternate between our favorite hubs around town. This time we sit down with writer/performer, Joe Schiappa at Starbuck over coffee & lemon cake. (Neil hasn't gone a day in ten years without a Starbuck's coffee. Once, while visiting his parents in Virginia, he almost had to go without which resulted in an epic meltdown that is still talked about at family gatherings. In 2014 he promises to find a support group.)



Neil: We'll let you see this interview before we put it up. We don't want to destroy your career.

Bethel: No offense to us, but I don't think we have that kind of reach.

Neil: Your parents will read it, Joe. That's two hits...

Joe: My wife, Brandy, will read it.

Neil: 3 hits.

Bethel: You're right, we could do some damage.

Joe takes a sip of his coffee and then confesses that he doesn't actually drink coffee. Now we're getting to the truth...

Neil: Did you know that you were going to be a comedian early on? I mean you went to a college that had a lot of comedy connections.

Joe: Yeah, I went to Emerson College which had a lot of comedy. I was very into movies and TV. I had a grandfather that had a stroke and my mom needed to get him out of the house. So we went to the movies a lot. He liked the Disney cartoons.

Neil: This is all in Connecticut?

Joe: Yeah, where I grew up.

Neil: Did you perform in high school?

Joe: Yeah, I did plays. I had my own theatre company in high school.

Bethel: What was it called?

Joe: Eclectic Theatre Works.

Bethel: And was it?

Joe: No, the least eclectic, just a bunch of white kids.

Neil: Did you direct stuff?

Joe: Well, I found a copy of *Prelude to a Kiss*, a Craig Lucas play.

Bethel: It's a fable, right?

Joe: It is a fable and it had body switching in it which I really enjoyed.

Neil: Love body switching. Bethel and I have a body switching sketch.

Bethel: No, we don't have a body switching sketch.

Neil: But I've always wanted one.

Bethel: (ignoring Neil) Why do you like the body switch up premise?

Joe: I guess it's a wish fulfillment that kids can act like adults.

Neil: Have you EVER written anything *without* a body switching premise?

Joe: No, never...I've switched it up with cats, dogs, gerbils....

Bethel: That would be a great writing specialty.

Neil: If you need a body switch up script, go to Schiappa. I also see an app.

Bethel: So you produce this show when you're like sixteen...

Joe: Yep. We rented a theatre, my mom put up the money. We sold tickets and paid a lighting guy. I convinced all these kids to do it- people I knew. Second year we did a bunch of one- acts. That's when I started writing plays, really sketches, like five - minute things.

Neil: Your focus then was on performing AND writing? Was that an ok question, Bethel?

Bethel: You're making him uncomfortable. Sorry Joe.

Joe: Back then I would have said both but I've always enjoyed the writing part.

Neil: Did you have t-shirts that said, " Eclectic Theatre Works " ?

Joe: Now that I think about it, a girlfriend in high school gave me a mix tape called, " eclectic mix " and I was like, " that's a cool word ", and we took the name from that.

Bethel: It may have been a bad name, but at least it was meaningful.

Neil: Were you encouraged by the response coming back at you from that theatre company? Something coming back that said, " I'm pretty good at this ?"

Joe: I think at that point.. back then .. I gave less of a shit what people thought.

Bethel: I think that's true for most people. I call it youthful arrogance.

Joe: Totally. I'm pretty sure that my production of, *Prelude to a Kiss*, was terrible. There was a whole row of older people who left at intermission. I didn't care back then... but now it would kill me.

Bethel: You have a Youtube section on your website and there is a Spanish speaking man talking about his hair and doing cocaine. What's that all about ?

Joe: Ok, so a friend sent me this funny video of this guy. I guess he's the equivalent of an inner city drug dealer, but in Spain, and I was like, I'm 'gonna re-subtitle this. It has like 700 thousand hits on Youtube but everyone hates it because the English and the Spanish don't match up and they keep writing nasty comments. But the people who get it, love it.

Neil: Can't you select, " no comment " ?

Joe: But that's not fun for me.

Neil: The picture on your website... were you going for, sexy?

Joe: Yes, sexy. No, I chose it because one, it makes me look skinny, and two, this woman, Mindy Tucker, who takes these great pictures of comedy people took it.

Neil: So you went for sexy over funny?

Joe: Yeah, I'm like Eddie Murphy when he was singing.

Bethel: Three biggest comedy influences?

Joe: Chris Elliot....I liked his TV show, *Get a Life*. I thought that was different. I always liked the *Adams Family* and the *Munsters*, shows like that. I watched a lot of TV as a kid. I liked the shows that had the form but then were different in some way. The other one I liked was the Ben Stiller show on FOX.

Neil: The sketch show?

Joe: It was different with the short little movies and everything. And it was the first time I saw Bob Odenkirk and David Cross. I think Mr. Show also had a big influence on me. Current likes are Portlandia and oh, Key and Peele- they are funny AND really good actors.

Neil: Ultimate comedy hero, if you could have anyone's career? Are you a young Jud Apatow?

Joe: No. I like The Reno 911 guys.

Neil: The State?

Joe: Yeah, I like The State but Tom Lennon and Ben Garant in particular. They write movies, are in them, **and** they direct them.

Neil: So let's talk about your new show.

Joe: Not sure I can talk about it.

Bethel: So, we can't promote it in this interview? You're like the opposite of a publicity whore.

Joe: I can say it's a new cable channel webseries that will come out in 2014.

Bethel: Ok, for now...let's say that.

Bethel: If Joe 2014 could tell Joe 2013 any bit of advice, what would it be?

Joe: Where did Joe 2013 go?

Bethel: It's a new year, Joe 2013 is gone. Give him some advice.

Joe: I'd say, don't do unpaid interviews.

Neil: Now what would Joe 2014 say to Joe 2005?

Joe: I would tell him to stop eating so much pasta.

Neil: Did you get into comedy to get laid?

I have never done an interview with Neil without him asking that question and what is about to follow.

Joe: No.

Neil: Wait, when you say you write for TV, do the pants just come right off?

Joe: No. I don't think people know what that means. I think a lot of people still don't know that TV is written by people!

Neil: At no point did you want to be a star to get girls?

Joe: In high school, maybe, but really I was just into plays. I was really the nerdy – Rushmore- type.

Neil: Do you have a go to date?

Joe: Go to date?

Bethel: If we went back in time... like how did you meet your wife?

Joe: Blind date. We went to a diner for omelets.

Bethel: That's sexy.

Neil: Oh you downplay the date?

Joe: We hung out for awhile and then we made out after we saw that Will Ferrell movie, *Stranger than Fiction*.

Bethel: That's like, less exciting than fiction.

Neil: Omelets and a movie?

Joe: I think there might have been the first date stroll.

Neil: Did you walk ahead of her?

Joe: Yes, and my, "go-to bit" is that we talked on walkie-talkies. I use to use CB's, but nobody has them anymore.

Neil: Walkie-talkies, sounds fun. Bethel and I are going to try that on *our* first date.

Bethel: Joe what are you most proud of?

Joe: My triplet girls: Amanda, Gretchen, &.....

Neil: You sold them in Mexico, right?

Bethel: IN YOUR CAREER, what are you most proud of? I should have been more clear. Forgot what I was up against.

Joe: Improving, I think that's what I'm most proud of. Getting better. These days I get excited when I know how to fix something.

Neil: Do you plan to move to LA?

Joe: Possibly. I think I'd like to build a little bit more of my own boat here... although I probably know more people in LA than NYC these days.

Neil: Wait can we go back to that phrase, "build your own boat" ...

Joe: People say that all the time.

We like to end all interviews with obscure and meaningless questions. Neil taps his play list on his Iphone and What Makes you Beautiful, by One Direction, begins to play.

Neil: Ocean or River?

Joe: Ocean.

Neil: Suburb or City?

Joe: City

Neil: One Direction or Jackson 5?

Joe: One Direction.

Joe starts to justify this but gets cut off by Neil.

Neil: When you are eating out alone do you embrace it or act like someone is joining you ?

Joe: Act like someone is joining, of course.

Neil: TV star or film star?

Joe: Film

Bethel: Do you have a New Year's resolution?

Joe: Yeah, stop spending so much time with Jim Belushi.

Neil: Thank you Joe Schiappa, thank you.

Joe Schiappa is the creator of Truth or Dare which premieres in 2014 on MTV (other) . He has written for MTV's Money from Strangers and Silent Library. He performs as one-half of the improv duo, Nathan & Joe which can be seen in various venues around NYC. And, he has been a teacher at the PIT (Peoples Improv Theatre) since 2007. To check out shows and classes at The PIT go to : www.thepit-nyc.com For updated schedules for Joe check out: joeschiappa.com