

Shazia Mirza

COMEDIAN, 28, LONDON

Women from my community don't have as much of a voice as white women. That's the reason I did stand up, because I didn't have a voice.

There's nothing more endearing than being yourself. I've been in the closet for a lot of my life – as a secret entertainer. My parents came here from Pakistan and were desperate for me to be a doctor and marry a nice Muslim man. Becoming a science teacher was a compromise, but I couldn't keep it up.

Edgbaston is the only place I can have a holiday. Asian people are not very good at having time off, but at home I can have a really good rest because my mum makes me food.

Science is overrated. The kids I taught had no interest and neither did I. They would literally climb out of the window while I was talking. I had D'izzee Rascal in my class. Have you ever tried to teach someone who is rapping? But it's good preparation for stand up. 'Miss, you're shit', 'Miss, you're really boring.'

I could do with a servant. Next month I'll be the first-ever comedian to tour Pakistan, and am thinking I could import a young boy – 16 or 17 – to England to be my servant.

I used to wear a hijab until I began to wash my hair more frequently. Then it became a waste of an 80-quad John Frieda haircut.

Women like Helena Kennedy keep telling me I'm courageous. They come up to me after gigs and go, 'You are such an amazing woman.' I haven't discovered a cure for Aids or saved anyone's life.

I want to be great at comedy. I've struggled to do what I want to do and now I want to be great.

Audiences are confused when I tell them I'm a virgin. Most people in the room can't remember what that means because they lost it so long ago. I see them trying to digest the information. 'How? Why? Don't you want to?' I can see those questions going through their heads.

They have better shoes in America. I buy shoes wherever I go. I have 500 pairs. I even have to keep some at my parents' house. They take it as a sign that I'm getting married soon.

You can have it all, but not all at once. My singing teacher, the late Glynn Jones, taught me that. He taught all the greats, Elton John, Shirley Bassey, Annie Lennox. Then he got me. I lied to get lessons with him, told him I had a recording contract. I was rubbish, but one day I was waiting outside and heard someone who was worse than I was. It was Caprice. I found that encouraging.

Why do dark-haired women still bleach facial hair? They look like Father Christmas. Every time I go into Boots I see those big tubs of Jolene that my mum used to use in the Seventies. I've had moustache problems before, so now I have laser treatment.

Touring in Holland, I shared a flat with black American comedians who were smashed the whole time. Courtney G brought back different women every night. He had black night, where he brought back only black girls, then Chinese night. I moved out when he said he was having Asian night.

You become a greater comedian by being more honest and pushing boundaries. I'm inspired by the Peter Cook sketch where he dressed up as the Pope. I'm planning to dress up as a mullah in the future.

Usually psycho-freaks ask me to marry them. They ask via my website, having never met me or spoken to me. Often they are American.

The idea of professional celebrities, like Abi Titmus, is weird. I went into HMV and I saw an Abi Titmus pole-dancing video. Like, I'm really going to buy that, set up a pole in my living room and get dancing.

My mother is on another planet. She set me up on an arranged date with a man whose chat-up line was 'Are you a virgin?' Then he asked me to prove it. I just had the free dinner and never contacted him again.

My best gig was at a gay club. Loads of men screaming to get me back on stage. They understand what it's like to be the underdog. They think I'm Liza Minelli and want to marry me.

People aren't talking about you as much as you think they are. When I realised that I stopped giving a shit.

Interview **Lucy Siegle** Photograph **Richard Saker**

Shazia Mirza performs at the Leicester Comedy Festival Preview Show, 21 January, De Montfort Hall, Leicester (0116 233 3111)

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