

The Most RACES Show on Earth!

I Have a Dream. You Have a Laugh

By Jessica Kenny

OK, so a Filipino, a black guy and a white guy walk into a bar...

No. This isn't going to end well. Let's leave the jokes to the professionals.

Like Neil Bansil. He may "sound white" on the radio (which people always told him), but he's not. He's Filipino-Canadian-American and he's going to change how you feel about race.

But first he's going to make you laugh and, apparently, laughter can end racism. Or at least that's the hope of Bansil—the funny bone behind The Most RACES Show on Earth.

Racism is the pink elephant in the room that gets treated differently for being pink. Diversity exists in our beloved South, but it's latent and divided. "I was giving out flyers on King Street," Bansil describes. "That night at Tasty Thai it was all Black people. Every other bar? All White. There's no animosity, they just don't relate to each other yet."

Enter Bansil stage left—and seven of his friends with backgrounds from everywhere (ex: a Polish-Peruvian-Canadian)—ready to get them to relate. Every comedian will be doing 8-10 minute sets about their culture(s) from their perspectives, and also jokes that have nothing to do with race at all. "That'd be a boring set," adds Bansil. "Everyone's doing their best stuff. It's the funniest show because it's non-stop laughter from everybody. It's an ab workout, and you're learning at the same time."

Making the show hilarious was Bansil's only objective when he created the show in Toronto seven years ago. Soon, he was selling out 2100-seat theaters and getting interest from famous comedians and television networks. He took it to New York, and then to Atlanta. After getting married and moving to Charleston last June, Bansil decided to take a risk and pitch his show to Charleston's 9th Annual Comedy Festival. "Who needs this show more?" said Bansil. "A place that's already multi-cultural, or the South, where there are cultures, but they're not together?"

They will be together two nights this weekend in, ironically, The American Theater. Playing in Charleston is a new risk for Bansil, who doesn't know: which theater, the number of tickets sold, or who's coming. "I'm nervous!" laughs Bansil. But he's confident in his production. "I'm good at bringing people together. That's my job. And if no one comes, I'll just take really close-up pictures."

Bansil isn't a stranger to racism; he's had some cruel things done to him. But he chooses to make light of it by turning it into material for his stand-up: "Everywhere I go, people think I'm Chinese. I went to Chinatown in Toronto with a white friend. They brought our order and gave my friend a fork and knife, but they gave me chopsticks. That's ignorant, just because I'm Asian, doesn't mean I know how to use chopsticks. Frickin' Pizza Hut. And I just ordered a soda."

Bansil just wishes he could see a more direct benefit, so he donates to anti-racism charities. "I want to help," says a momentarily serious Bansil. "Maybe we're indirectly ending racism, but we don't say that. It's about getting everyone in the same room. They look around, realize they're all laughing at the same things, and say, 'Wow, this is really cool.'"

OK, got it: What do you get when Filipino-Vietnamese-African-Jamaican-Polish-Peruvian-Jewish-Canadian-Americans walk into the American Theater?

A damn funny show.

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