



The last laugh

AFTER HOSTING PANEL SHOW *SPICKS AND SPECKS* ON AUSTRALIAN TV, COMEDIAN ADAM HILLS FRONTED *THE LAST LEG*, AIRING HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2012 PARALYMPICS IN THE UK. THE PARALYMPICS ARE LONG GONE, BUT *THE LAST LEG* CONTINUES

WORDS | GISELLE WHITEAKER

When did you realise you could be funny?

I was the polite kid in class. I did my homework, rarely spoke out of turn, and did what I was told. But whenever I got the chance to speak in front of the class I did everything I could to make them laugh. [At] high school at the farewell ceremony, one boy got to make a funny speech about the teachers. That speech was all I wanted to do. When it came time, I gave a ten-minute comedy routine about the teachers. At the end of it my aunt turned to my mum and said "He could be a comedian."

What was your first comedy gig?

My first comedy gig was July, 1989 at the Sydney Comedy Store. I did a very average five-minute routine. A few months later I went back and completely died on stage. It was awful. But I kept going.

What do you consider to be your 'break'?

I think my career has been a series of 'breaks'. In Edinburgh a lady ran up just before my show and asked if she had time to go to the bar. I said I'd get her a drink while she found her seat, and I walked on stage with her drink. Turns out she was a reviewer, so I took her pad, wrote my own review, and told her to

relax and enjoy the show. She gave me a five-star review, and my entire season sold out. You've just got to take every opportunity, look out for the little breaks, and enjoy the ride.

How does stand-up compare to television?

Stand-up is more liberating than TV. I can wander on stage, say what I like, when I like, for as long as I like. TV is more regimented – if I have a funny idea I have to run it by a producer, rehearse it, plot it out. Live TV combines the best of both, however the adrenaline hangover is immense. For two days afterwards I feel like I've been hit by a truck.

When did you know *The Last Leg* was a hit?

We had no idea if anyone was watching. We worked out of the Broadcast Centre at the Olympic Stadium and had no contact with the public. It was only when my co-hosts, Josh and Alex, went out to watch an event that they were mobbed. When we started receiving tweets from the Paralympians, though – that was when we felt like we had really succeeded.

Do you hang out with your co-hosts?

We write the show the same way we deliver it – sitting around a table making each other

laugh. The day before, we go off on our own and come up with more things to say. We don't see much of each other outside of the show. It is important that we are excited to see each other on air. What the audience sees is three guys getting together every week for a chat.

How do different audiences stack up?

Here's how I compare audiences around the world: imagine if you were to say "Hey everyone, I've got a joke". Australian audiences react with "Oh really, you reckon you're funny do ya? Go on then, do your best." English audiences are more like "Oh, well it would be rude not to listen. But make it quick, I've got things to do." Irish audiences think "Quiet everyone, the man's got a joke. And when he's done, I've got one as well." Every city is different, and these are generalisations, but that's how it feels.

Does comedy translate across cultures?

Every culture has a tradition of comedy. I love the idea of the court jester, whose job it was to make fun of the rulers to the amusement of the public. Clearly, different cultures laugh at different things. On the other hand, *Mr Bean* proves that visual comedy is universal. Sometimes funny is just funny. ☺