

STAND-UP GUY - NUYORICAN FUNNYMAN TACKLES SPANGLISH IN A RIOTOUS ONE-MAN SHOW

(Now a Comedy Central Special)

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New York Post

Posted: 12:00 AM, December 7, 2005

In his twenties, Bill Santiago had a thriving journalism career - he worked full time at the San Juan Star and freelanced for papers like the New York Times, Washington Post and the Miami Herald- yet somehow he couldn't help feeling unfulfilled.

So the Puerto Rican funnyman decided to chuck it all to pursue his true calling - standup comedy - and it's a decision he doesn't regret for a minute.

"Even when it's tough, it's worth it," he says. "It's just amazing when you make a connection with the audience. People relate to the material so strongly, they treat me like family."

Santiago's about to reach a true milestone in his career - he'll be taping his first special for Comedy Central next week. The program, a shortened version of his one-man show "Spanglish 101," which he's been honing across the country, for the past few years, playfully explores the subject of biculturalism.

"Spanglish as a phenomenon has become entrenched in our culture," he says, "I turn on a baseball game and I can't tell it's an English or Spanish broadcast. You can hear the (English-language) announcers saying stuff like 'Alex Rodriguez says *adios to la pelotah!*'"

The 32-year-old Santiago was raised in The Bronx, the son of a lawyer.

"I grew up eating welfare cheese," he recalls. "Not because we were on welfare, but because a lot of my father's clients couldn't afford to pay him in cash, so he would let them pay with whatever they had. It was like a kind of Puerto Rican wampum."



Soon you'll be able to "checkout" Santiago on Comedy Central. He tapes his first special Dec. 17th at the Hudson

Catch "Spanglish 101" Saturday night at the Laugh Lounge, 151 Essex St., between Stanton and Rivington Streets (212) 614-2500. @ 7 pm, \$25

Comedy Central taping: Dec 17, Hudson Theater, 145 W 44th, between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, @ 8 pm. Call (888) 258-0661 or go to www.catv.com for free tickets.