

ON THE TOWN

## BILL SANTIAGO

### Somewhere in middle America this comedic wiz finds the funny

BY ERICA MADSEN

**Have you performed in Minneapolis before?** Many times. I love it. **Do crowds here like you?** Yeah. It's a very weird, weird mix of people because it's middle American and yet it's very progressive. You'll have born-again Christians sitting next to a gay couple sitting next to college students sitting next to a suburban husband and wife sitting to and some very rural folks in overalls - all in the same crowd.



**Does having such a diverse audience make your job harder?** You're aware of the situation and you feed off of the crowd. And then you notice that a lot of them are very politically aware. The range of ideology is huge, so you're gonna offend somebody politically, which is fun. A lot of comedians go to Minneapolis to tweak their act for universality. **Really?** Yeah, I've heard that from more than one comedian. And I think there's something to that.

**Has an audience reaction very caught you off guard?** One time I was at the Mall of America and I asked, "Does anybody here speak Spanish?" And one guy in the front row said, "No, Thank God?" And I was stunned by the reaction because no one had ever been so defiantly monolingual. He was actually thanking the Lord that he didn't speak a certain language. It was weird to me but it led to a great joke, which made it into my Comedy Central Presents special. It seems I incorporate a lot of stuff that happens to me in Minneapolis into my act.

**Besides well-crafted jokes, what makes you laugh?** Anything clever, anything ridiculous, a good comeback, something brilliantly thought out to make a humorous point. Things from my childhood, things that people say. Recently, my father was in the ICU - he just passed away - and we're all standing over him, around his hospital bed. And it's very very very sad. Suddenly I burst out laughing. I don't know why but for some

reason at that moment I remembered the time he took me with him to help him set the car on fire, so he could get the car insurance. It was very inappropriate, but that's what came to me. And he was a lawyer, mind you. Those are the contradictions I grew up with and that's a lot of what fuels my comedy.

**Have you ever upset someone with a joke? All the time, yes. Do you draw off that or do you feel a little bad?** I have said certain things I regretted. But that's better than regretting not having said something. I like to be able to put out my point of view in a way where , if you're following me, my form of thinking, you almost have to agree, at the very least, that it's a logical conclusion, because the logic is nearly flawless--especially if you take into account that we're going for the joke here.

**What's been you're biggest success as a comedian?** The biggest industry success is probably the Comedy Central Presents special, and that just aired and then re-aired. Industry-wise, that's a real feather in your cap.

**I read years ago that you taped copies of your paychecks -- adding several zeros in pencil to the copies -- to your apartment walls, to help channel money into your future. Is that true?** Yes, and I should have used a Sharpie. Every time I get check, though, I'm like, " I know I'm worth another zero. I know it. I'm gonna get that zero."

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CATCH Bill Santiago and his crafty wit August 25-September 2 at **Acme Comedy Company**.