

Edinburgh Fringe 2015: An interview with Tez Ilyas

Ahead of his solo show, *TEZ Talks*, the acclaimed Tez Ilyas speaks to [Tess Pullen](#), about a fresh take on life in Britain and going from civil servant to satiric conversant

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Image: Steve Ullathorne

Tez Ilyas will be found hanging out at Edinburgh Fringe Festival this summer, which he describes as “one great big three weeks fresher’s week for comedians”, for his debut show *TEZ Talks*. Inspired by his life as a British Muslim, Tez will be giving a series of mock-inspirational speeches on integrating into British society, as he recounts stories to help the audience – who he pretends are converts – to take their first tender steps across to Modern Britain as he sees it.

However, whilst Tez might be storming the comedy circuit, having won the prestigious BBC New Comedy Award and having been a finalist for Leicester Mercury New Comedian of the Year, he started his career as a civil servant, after studying biochemistry at university.

When asked about this unlikely transition into comedy Tez tells me he just fell into it after googling some online writing courses and completing a week long open mic workshop. He finds comedy easier than his work as a civil servant because “if you really enjoy something, even if it’s harder than doing something you don’t like, like handing out Argos catalogues”, he claims you don’t notice the strain so much.

Tez found his feet on the stand-up circuit and even won the much-coveted month long Pleasance showcase The Comedy Reserve in 2013. Tez doesn’t believe competitions are necessary but helps to “prove you’re not shit” when looking to get booked while his dream is to be able to eventually tour under his own name.

Labelled “sartorially stylish” by Chortle, Tez is embarrassed by the embellishment and explains he would go straight from work to his gigs, justifying his formal attire. However, he has encouraged this high profile status, modelling himself after Jimmy Carr and commenting that it adds a positive edge of professionalism to his “Tez Talks” premise.

Following his latest video “The Fast and the Fool”, a sketch based on his experience during Ramadan I ask the comedian where he finds the inspiration for his work. Tez cites TV shows such as *South Park*, *The Thick of It* and *Black Adder*, but most importantly believes that the dry humour of the people of his home town Blackburn, and his “cheeky chappy” Dad inspire him most.

There aren’t many British Pakistani comedians on the circuit and Tez hopes that he fills that niche. He wishes to see a greater participation of minority groups on the comedy scene but stresses that comedians shouldn’t feel pressured into talking about race or religion, though he knows that in our current climate he has a lot to say about being a British Asian.

When I asked if he thinks this will restrict his audience Tez told me he doesn’t think he’ll ever be Michael McIntyre but he hopes that people will “give [him] the chance to say what [he] want[s] to say”, and that at the end of the day it shouldn’t reduce his wider appeal because “funny is funny”, saying that “whatever I choose to talk about on stage, be it toasters or Islam, if it’s funny people will laugh”.

Ultimately Tez likes to discuss topics people aren’t necessarily talking about in a unique and insightful way. With his sharp wit and even sharper dress, we can’t wait to see his *TEZ Talks* this Edinburgh festival, to be performed at Pleasance Courtyard from the 5th – the 30th of August.



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