



# Making it in New York the Argentinean Way

By: Adrián Minkowicz

## ARGENTINEAN COMEDIAN

Hola, as the sub-title says I'm an Argentinean comedian. I'm also a playwright, actor and theater director. As a hobby I'm a corporate lawyer. It relaxes me. I will tell you about that another day. Today, we will talk about my comedian personality.

Long story short, for a couple of years I performed stand-up comedy in every club in Buenos Aires. After that, I won a comedy competition that allowed me to have my own stand-up comedy show of one hour in Avenue Corrientes, the "Broadway" of Buenos Aires, in 2007 and 2008. When I finished with my show, I had the opportunity to perform in an important venue in Madrid. That gave me the chance to tour my show in Spain and perform in Spanish national TV.

I was quite happy but I needed a new goal. Bigger than anything that I had done until that moment. My next challenge was quite clear. I wanted to perform in the heart of the world of comedy: I would perform in New York. I just had a tiny problem. I wouldn't be able to perform in my mother tongue. That's Spanish.

I'm sorry in advance for those of you that are offended by my clarification of what language we speak in Argentina. In my defense, you wouldn't believe how many people think we speak Portuguese or Cantonese there. The latter ones also think that Argentina is in Asia. Anyway, from now on, I would have to learn how to perform in English.

## THE HEART OF COMEDY

Any comedian or civilian that has been to New York can tell you that the city is the world's heart of stand-up comedy. Even if you've never been there you know that. The amount of clubs, comedians, and audiences are proof of this. Many clubs in the city have shows every day of the week. We cannot say that about many cities in USA or even in the world. After thinking the matter for a little while, I took a plane. We Argentineans take planes to travel long distances. Not horses. Again, sorry for the offended ones.

I arrived to United States last October. At the beginning I stayed with my cousin, his wife and daughter in New Jersey. It was a really nice time even with two hours of commute to the City every day. The time on the "NJ Transit" train, going to New York, gave me a daily opportunity to write and work

on my material. The hardest trip was going back since I was always taking the last train at 1 am from Penn Station and arriving 3 am half awake, half dead. From the station I had one mile and a half to arrive to the house. Sometimes I walked. Sometimes I used a long board. Again, no horses.

After some time I rented a studio in Harlem, 116th between Malcolm X Blvd and 7th Avenue. That was also a great time for me since I liked the neighborhood and, at the same time, I was working in the Upper East Side and I could arrive to work in 30 minutes, taking the Subway 2 or 3 and the 86 bus Crosstown. Hallelujah!

## LANGUAGE

In order to perform in New York it is essential to have a killing five-minutes set. If you have fifteen it's great. You need at least five. I was used to change some words to perform in another country. In order to perform in Spain, I had to change between forty and fifty words of my one hour set in order to be understood. Not only slang, but normal words as well.

At the beginning, and preparing myself to perform in English, I tried to translate my set from Spanish to English. 90% of it didn't work. Sometimes because the words that are funny in one language aren't funny in the other, sometimes because of the subject. The strongest reason was the audience's perception of my comedic persona.

The perception that people have of me in Argentina, Spain and United States of America is totally different. In the first one I'm a national. In the second one I'm an alien where the nationals know the Argentinean type very well. In USA, I'm one more inhabitant from that big vast land that it's located south of Texas. No, not Mexico. There is more down there.

It was clear that my observational material could work from time to time, but in relation to my personal material, I had to start from scratch.

## THE WORLD FAMOUS COMIC STRIP LIVE

On December 20th I had a shot at the "Lottery Show" of the "The World Famous Comic Strip Live". The show is a show-audition where four or five comedians perform. A panel of three professional comedians, the manager and one of the owners of the club gives you feedback and roasts you in the meantime, and the audience will choose a winner by applause. The show is streamed live on the Internet. I had a good set and at the end of the show I tied three times with a female comedian. Richard Tienken, one of the owners of the club, untied it in my favor. That could have been the end of my New



York adventure and I would have been extremely happy about it. It was only the beginning.

From that moment on I was scheduled to perform three or four times per week at the "Late Night" show of the "Comic Strip", now having performed fifty times in a little more than three months, as well as appearing in the club's main show. It was an amazing opportunity that I couldn't have done without the support of the owners of the club, Bob Wachs and Richard Tienken, and the manager of the club, J.R. Ravitz. I know that a lot of comedians have to wait long time to have an opportunity to perform in a club like the "Comic Strip". I feel privileged, moreover taking into account that I'm a guy just starting in this business. Even if I have some years of experience doing stand-up in Spanish in Argentina and Spain, at that time, I had only a couple of month's experience of performing in English in the United States.

Lucky me, people seem to like the material that I tried during those months, my accent and the language that I speak (in the way that I speak it, I don't know if we can still call it "English").

There wasn't a time when I wouldn't be nervous waiting in the Green Room. At the same time I felt that it was an honor to be there, in that legendary place, waiting to hear my name, where so many legends have performed and still perform.

In this New York experience what amazes me the most is how fast, each time that I hit the stage, the fear is replaced by joy. I am where I belong.

*Adrián Minkowicz frequently performs stand-up comedy in Argentina and Spain in clubs and TV, and he is a regular at "World Famous Comic Strip Live's" "Late Night" show in New York. Adrián co-founded the theater and dance company "Human Works" based in Belgium where he writes, directs and performs. His company regularly tours in Europe. He is also a corporate lawyer. adrianminkowicz@gmail.com. Contact me in twitter @adrianminkowicz and Facebook!*