

Interview: Dave Foley and Jameel Kahn hit THE STRIP.

Written by Dave Howard



he kid in the hall has befriended the new kid on the block.

Jameel Kahn, a first time director out of 2nd City, was fortunate enough to score “Kids In The Hall” alumni Dave Foley for his debut, “The Strip.” The indie comedy is based around the lives for five guys making the best of working at an electronics store in suburban Illinois.

Crackpot Press sat down with the duo to discuss the differences between Filmmaking and Improv. Working with a broken foot and how one maintains a long career in the business of show.

So you got your inspiration to work from working at Radio Shack?

Jameel: I think someone heard me say that once and it got all blown out of proportion. I only worked their for about three weeks and my experiences were quite boring. I didn't base any of the characters on it. Three weeks was there long enough to know that working retail is like. I knew it was boring.

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Dave: You really don't get into the details of it for about 30 years.

Jameel: (laughs) Radio Shack did make me choose an electronics store. It was based on sketch I had done with Cory Christmas, (who plays Rick) the bald guy. We choose the electronic store.

What were the challenges of taking a boring job and making it funny?

Jameel: I think boring is funny. People can relate to the boredom. A lot of people have worked retail, they know what it is like and they already know the characters. What I think is funny about those boring jobs is a lot of people are excited about them and how seriously people take it. I think that was fun to work with.

How did the two of you hook up to make the movie?

Dave: Well, first of all, we didn't "hook up." I just got a call from my manager telling me to "Check out these guys in Chicago. They have a good script and they seem like decent people. So check out the script." My manager is a decent guy, so I trusted him.

Dave, you broke your foot a day or two before filming. How'd that happen?

Dave: I was in the swimming pool with my daughter. I went to move a shade umbrella to shade my daughter and the 40 lb concrete block landed on my foot. My toes did everything except what my doctor calls "exploded." The whole front of my toes. I had to calmly get my daughter out of the pool my daughter out and back in her playroom, get on the phone and waited for my wife to come home to find me bleeding to death in the bathroom.

Every work through an injury before?

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Dave: Not that bad. I had done a movie where I tore the ligaments on both sides of my ankle.

Jameel: He was in a lot a pain after every take the first week.

Dave:Nooo, the whole thing. And for the movie I did after that too.

Jameel: Yeah and you were chasing vampires in that one.

Dave: No.. I WAS a vampire. I'm all over the vampire genre now. So basically anytime you see me walking in the movie I am re-breaking all of my toes.

Jameel you have a background in improv, were you a big “Kids In the Hall” fan?

Jameel: I was definitely a huge “Kids In the Hall” fan. I was a bit younger, sorry David,

Dave: yyyeeeeeaaahhh

Jameel: I was in high school or maybe even in middle school then.

Dave: or in utereo...

Jameel: So getting Dave was a fantastic.

A lot of folks who come out of IO, Second City or UCB have a hard time transitioning

their ideas from the stage to the screen. This is mostly from the audience being MIA. What challenges did you have to overcome?

Jameel: I wasn't a full time improviser. I was in Film School and I wanted to be a writer. I took improv to become a better writer and I think it helped me. I really liked doing improv.. and was "okay" at it. So I think having the background in film and screenwriting made it a little bit easier. I tried not to make a sketch movie. No one would have heard of our sketches to begin with so who would have gone to see it.

How much of what we see is script and how much is improv?

Dave: It was mostly the script. There wasn't much need for improv. The script was well written.

Jameel: Ahhhh. Thanks.

Dave: There was a little minor ad-libbing basically around the script. There was a little talking over each other and playing loose with it. It was a very tight schedule, so it doesn't give you a lot of time to play and "find it."

Jameel: There is some improvised stuff in there. All the day players are improvised. The thing is that once you start improvising, the takes get really, realllly long and they don't necessarily match. I learned that in the editing room that (improv) was a big mistake.. Maybe in the deleted scenes we will have some of that good stuff, stuff we improvised. There was some really funny stuff but it wasn't part of the story.

Dave: A lot of the shoppers are Chicago improvisers like.

Jameel: That's pretty improvised. And Al Daniels was fantastic.

Your character seems really secure in himself in work but not at home. As an actor do you have any personal experiences you can draw from

Dave: Glenn has all of his security is pulled out from under him. I guess so or maybe not. I've never had any.. when I was a child my Dad was a construction worker .. and an alcoholic, so there was some insecurity there. I had some shitty jobs.. oh sorry.. “unpleasant” jobs and then I had acting. I'd like to have the security that comes from having a big hit movie that would be nice so I doesn't even involve working anymore.

Didn't you have security working on Kids In The Hall?

Dave: We were almost canceled every season. In fact, part way through the first season we were told we were canceled. We were told during a dress rehearsal so then we got drunk and had a really good time. That happened like with every year. Even with “Newsradio” we thought every year we were canceled. We did a series finale every year.

What is the secret to the longevity of Kids In The Hall?

Dave: We find each other funnier than we hate each other. We are always find each other a little funnier than we find each other annoying. It's been 25 years that the “Kids In the Hall” have been working together. That's a long time. It's disturbing to me that Monty Python only started 15 years before us. I used to think that Monty Python was WAY, WAY before us but they were only 15 years.

Were any of the characters based on real people? Take, for example, the douchey wanna be actor Rick Shrewsberry?

Jameel: Cory Christmas,

Dave: He's a real guy. Cory's great, isn't he?

Jameel: He was a friend of mine, we did improv together. I wrote a character specifically for him where he would be an obnoxious salesman. He'd never acted before but we make each other laugh and I knew I could make him funnier with my words. "I'm gonna make you funnier." I told him "electronics store" and now some version of that is somewhere in the movie. The scene with DVD customer is a sketch. The original sketch like seven minutes long, it was really long but we liked enough. He's a corporate manager at AT&T now.

Dave: He got a real proper job. His wife is not keen about him becoming an actor.

Jameel: Absolutely. We were going to do it even lower budget than we did. I didn't have much directing experience going in but I'll know a lot more going into the next movie. I had envisioned people for the different roles but Cory just stood out. I had specifically wrote it for him. Actually, the "Avi" character was one that played in certain sketches. I bumped my ego for Frederico (Dordei). Who did a great job. I altered the script for him.

Is there a thin line between acting and improv?

Dave: I mean Cory was great. I had no idea Cory wasn't an actor when we started working. I thought he was hilarious. I mean here is this seasoned improviser from Chicago. He's probably gonna go to Saturday Night Live, ya know go that whole route. I thought he would be the next Jack Black. He's got that kind of energy to him.

Jameel: The communication is different. I had worked with improvisers not actors. It was a little different to communicate with them. They come from a different space. An improviser has an idea of what the scene is going to be and what the goal of the scene should be, how to make the whole thing funny and work and play off of that. I think an actor comes from an approach of their character. So it took a while for me to learn how to communicate with them and get the results. But they can both be funny and they can both do drama. It's just how to get to them. Some people are method or whatever..

Dave: I am all about the details of my character. I spent just two, three months just working on my backstory.

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Jameel: I wasn't there for that.

Dave: No.. LOVE that.

What's is next for both you?

Dave: Me? Just the onward slow decline. The march of age, the loss of bone mass. You?

Jameel: I know, I'm going to be thirty soon. I've got another script we will be shopping around soon. It's about a guy starting a game show school. It's about his life. Once a year he does a game show and does nothing the other 364 days of the year., he coasts through life. Funny game show stuff and a cartoon..We could use Dave again for something.

Dave: I hope so.

Jameel: Game Show host maybe.. You're a little too old for the main character.

Dave: Why'd ya have to say that?