

# Aisha Tyler: Interactive Awards Emcee Finds Perfection in Imperfections

BY EMILY GORDON

Aisha Tyler is smarter than most of us, and the comedian, podcaster, movie/TV/voice/game actor (her credits include FX's *Archer*, *XIII*, *Babymakers* and *halo: reach*) and host of *The Talk* can induce a dizzying sense of inadequacy. Fortunately, that feeling is eclipsed by the relief she instills that there is hope for humanity after all.

Her "Girl on Guy" podcast (named iTunes' "Best New Comedy Podcast" in 2011) is a frank, profound and ribald commentary on men's obsessions hosted by a "guy's girl" who was raised by a single dad and routinely delights an audience of 60 percent men. Tyler puts it frankly: "I want permission to be whatever I am. Men should be free to be who they are." Her guests are people such as Eugene Mirman, Anthony Bourdain and Reggie Watts. "Girl on Guy"—originally a TV show she says no one wanted—is now in its third season and has surpassed five million downloads.

This is quite a success on many levels, including the obvious. "Overall, there's a huge gender gap in podcasting," Tyler explains. "I'm probably one of the only women in the top 10. I think the dearth of women in podcasting reflects the dearth of women in comedy generally." Of course, she adds, "It's only helpful. Whatever latent biases in the field of comedy lead to women leveraging tech, it still has to be good."

It is logical to compare "Girl on Guy" to Marc Maron's shame-spiral comedy podcast, and Maron has been a major role model. If he has her on his show, she jokes, "He could kill two birds with one stone—a black person and a woman!"

Her original inspiration though, was Chris Hardwick and Adam Corolla's "Nerdist" podcast: "I felt like it was this wonderful informal celebration of everything that was nonconformist about people in this business."

If you need further proof that her brain is firing extra synapses, Tyler has a degree in government and environmental policy from Dartmouth, though she stays away from politics in her comedy: "Political material alienates half your audience. You can't change the world if you're only speaking to half of it." She is a hardcore gamer and plays on the World Poker Tour (not to mention appearing on *Celebrity Jeopardy*). She balances all of this with snowboarding, home brewing, social activism and marriage.

Also, she writes. Her second book is *Self-Inflicted Wounds* (to be published by HarperCollins in July), a collection of "loosely autobiographical" high points from "my life in disaster." It springboards from a regular "Girl on Guy" segment about moments of comic humiliation: "Dave Eggers crapping his pants when he was eight. Curtis Stone streaking drunk through a hotel in Melbourne ... a catastrophe that's their own fault."

She loves the raw danger necessary for good work in many fields, but especially in comedy: "You can't be funny unless you're 100 percent yourself on stage ... messy and sloppy and undisciplined and personal. And the imperfection of it is what makes it perfect."

This is Tyler's first SXSW, and she has anticipated the high that comes from events like ComicCon and E3 with "lots of bodies and



people, where I'm surrounded by my tribe. People want to make fun of 'tall pretty girl says she was a nerd,' but I was painfully uncool for most of my life, painfully nerdy. So I love cons. But I'm not a bleeding-edge technologist."

Her work would seem to contradict this. When it comes to podcasting, she says "I do everything myself ... I built the website, record all the shows, edit them, upload them. I do it myself out of necessity and obstinacy. I don't like it when other people know how to do things I don't." She is also on numerous social platforms but gets the most bang out of Twitter: "You add the most bodies when you're funny. Twitter is so much more viral and explosive."

Of course, Tyler has her tech gripes, too. "I'm looking for a device that will unify everything," she says. "The tablet's not powerful and not flexible enough. The laptop is the best in the world, but it's still too heavy and the battery life is crap ... I also want real voice integration. So when I do an Instagram, I spend 15 minutes revising a caption. I want to say, 'This filter, that thing, go!'"

While she looks forward to seeing what new platforms and toys debut at SXSW this week, she is most interested in an invention that may need a little more time to gestate: "A jetpack with voice recognition that posts to Twitter and Instagram automatically." (Got that, developers?) Tyler pauses: "The real idea I'm not going to tell you, because I'm going to do it myself." ■

**Aisha Tyler will emcee the SXSW Interactive Awards, taking place on Tuesday, March 12 from 6–8:30pm in the Austin Grand Ballroom at the Hilton Austin Downtown.**