

The serious comedian

➤ Shaq Munisamy talks to *theSun* about becoming a comic despite her reserved personality off stage

BY JOHN TAN

SHAQ MUNISAMY took many of her loved ones by surprise when she opened up to them about her dream of performing stand-up comedy.

They did not think she would be interested in a public pursuit, let alone make people laugh, due to her reserved and serious temperament.

"I actually am a serious person even when I am drunk," said Shaq, who is known as Shakeela off stage.

"And people get surprised when they come up and talk to me. I am not a conversationalist. I do not know how to do small talk. I am terrible at that.

"But people assume they know me because they watch me on stage. So, I definitely have a

few personalities that I switch back and forth with," says the comedian who is a teacher during the day.

Despite the assumptions, Shaq has proven that she has what it takes to be a comedian.

Since slipping on her comedic shoes, Shaq has won acclaim both internationally and locally for her comedy improv. Her recent win at the Short+Sweet Stand-up Comedy Malaysia event is among her many victories.

Shaq is also one of the founding members of the comedic group Parti Komedi Rakyat (People's Comedy Party).

And even with the current circumstances, Shaq has been busy making people laugh from the comfort of her home with her comedy shows on Zoom.

How did you get into comedy?

I actually started with writing. I joined this writing workshop in Penang where the best five would get to perform at the George Town Literary Festival. I was one of them and after that event, I realised I like telling funny stories on stage. So, I said I would pursue it during my storytelling session and to my surprise, I was approached by someone from the crowd.

They asked if I wanted to join a comedy workshop in Penang. I agreed and joined them. But a year later, I found an open mic event near my house in KL and I contacted the organiser. And he said: "Yeah, just come over." I joined them and from there, our group grew.

What has been a personal highlight since you started?

In 2018, I got to attend the Hong Kong International Comedy Festival because I was a winner of a local workshop competition. It was awesome because I got to meet comedians from all over.

It was almost like meeting your family. Yeah, that was one highlight. I also always find it really exhilarating to perform for people who have never

seen stand up before.

That really gives me thrills. The last one would be winning KLPAC's recent Short + Sweet Stand-Up Comedy award. It was kind of exciting to win an award in a miserable year, but also a bit sad that it was not the usual celebration that it could be.

How is it like making people laugh

via Zoom?

There are pros and cons. This time around, I am more settled but last year was miserable. Because with stand-up, you know a joke works when people laugh and clap. But in Zoom, you do not know because sometimes everyone is quiet.

It is like talking to yourself. But this time around, I am okay as I am enjoying it in the silence of my own home. But I still miss the stage. I like interacting with people on stage and making fun of people. I really miss that.

How do you get inspiration for your material?

Life. I think I entered comedy quite late in life. So, I have lived quite a lot. Like I have travelled and experienced a lot of things in life. I have gone through a divorce and met people from all walks of life. So, my comedy is richer because of my life experiences.

Is there anything you will not joke about?

I am kind of sensitive to who attends my show. I tend to filter some of the things I say, and not make it so crude when my friends attend the show. I guess I am just protecting my image. But in terms of topics, I do not think any subject is beyond making fun of.

However, it is very important to do it smartly. As someone who wants to be in the industry for a while, I am not simply going to say something and get people riled up. So yeah, I do not think any topic is beyond joking as long as it is done smartly.

What are your plans for the future?

I want to be on a bigger stage. Like to have my own arena and talk show. I am not even there yet. So, at the moment, I am currently trying to extend my time on stage. Like every year, I add five to 10 minutes to my own set. This is not the longest time planning, but maybe just for the next five years.



Aside from being a comedian, Shaq is also an English teacher. – PHOTO COURTESY OF PRAKASH DANIEL



Shaq draws inspiration from her own life for her comedy materials. – PHOTO COURTESY OF PRAKASH DANIEL

Shaq during one of her live shows. – PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAQ MUNISAMY

