

Gabe Nolasco Interview

[Gabe Nolasco](#) is a stand-up comedian, writer, actor, and podcast producer that resides in Las Vegas, Nevada. He is a Richmond, California native who is half El Salvadorian and half Mexican. Late last year, I had the pleasure of interviewing him and getting to know him. Nolasco has been doing standup for 14 years. In his act, he talks about personal experiences and things he notices. What sets him apart is his witty comments and manner of delivering lines.

One thing that piqued my interest in Gabe Nolasco is simply the fact that he mainly works in Las Vegas, which is a place where most people do not affiliate with the art of stand-up comedy. Besides stand-up comedy, he does a radio show-like podcast and writes for media projects, specifically sketch comedies as well as commercials.

Here are the interview highlights with Gabe Nolasco.

KG: Considering that comedy in San Francisco is bigger, why did you go to Las Vegas?

GN: I moved to Las Vegas maybe in '08. Like, from '08 to 2014 I was out here being a comedian. Being in Los Angeles was not the best place for me to be. I was just getting into a bunch of problems, so I needed a change of pace, a fresh start somewhere else. I just flipped the coin and came to Las Vegas.

I started meeting some great people, so I stayed. I ended up going back to the Bay. I wasn't done; I took comedy seriously, I was like, "Let me go back to San Francisco, comedy is booming out there." I stayed there for another six, seven years. Vegas just started calling me back, man. It's cheaper. A lot of working comedians were coming to Vegas, and it was booming again. There is more club work, we are not far away from LA, we are not far from Arizona. So, I just want to work that belt. So I'm back in Vegas.

KG: How is Nevada's humor style different from other states, when it comes to the audience and comics? Like, how a New York comic's style is different than one from Boston.

GN: The strip has everyone from the east coast, Midwest, Canada, like from everywhere. So, you get to perform for that mixed crowd—old, young, different races, and whatnot. That kind of makes you try to work in general; you know? If you are in San Francisco, you are doing a bunch of "I take Muni" or "BART" transportation system stuff like that. Nobody knows what that is, unless you live in the Bay Area, right? So, being in Vegas, you kind of just have a broad material that is going to touch everybody.

KG: Do you like that challenge? Have you always worked with your material that way?

GN: I have always liked the challenge of being able to change gears. If I'm in New York, I will do some New York-ish stuff, kind of like things that I have seen, while I was there; San Francisco same thing, you know what I mean? When I'm in Vegas I'm doing casino material, gambling, talking about the pool parties—the people out here, the locals, and pretty much everyone else. It gives me the sense of, "Oh right, what do you have for the people here?" What is different that I can bring myself?"

KG: So, what was your thought process when performing in that private event to make the jokes relatable?

GN: Be self-deprecating. One show we did, almost everybody was retired, so I poked fun of them as much as I was poking fun of myself, you know what I mean? I was like, "This is what it looks like when you are struggling." For the people who are sitting like kings, just making fun of them and they were loving it. They were drinking wine. I was making fun of them for not having the pinky up like, "This is how much wine you guys drink. You guys just don't have the pinky up anymore?" You know what I

mean? (Laughs) Like just grabbing the bottle and go, so just teasing and being in the room. Asking everyone what they did for a living and making fun of that.

KG: That sounds like a lot of fun.

GN: Yeah, it was a fun time.

KG: So, now that you live on the Strip, do you enjoy being on the road more or do you like staying in one club all the time?

GN: It's both I would say. You can get stagnant being in the same club because of how much wiggle room I have for new material. Being on the road has that feeling that you are bringing something back. So, I'm always keeping it live, so if I'm here, it's good to workout, good to challenge, and there is always a different audience. But, if I'm on the road, it's a different feel of work. I feel different than just being in one place. I'm home now, but it's time to go hit some other cities to see if what I did at home works there. And then if I happen to work on something while on the road, I can bring it back home.

KG: I do feel like one needs to be built to be on the road, don't you think?

GN: Yeah, it definitely has that feel. For instance, when I went to New York a couple of months ago, it was go and go, jump on a train, hit this. And it was like, the whole feeling of excitement of, "You are done with this set, go to the next one," I was jumping around doing seven shows in one night. I was feeling like I was getting stronger. By the fourth show I was like, "All right, I'm going to do this different." So, you have this set and come back to your hometown and now you have a nice 10-minute chunk to rotate on the weekly or whatever. The shows I have keep it fresh for me.

KG: So, this is something that I have wondered about. How do you keep it fresh for yourself? You have got to make yourself laugh too.

GN: Right, right. I think it's the emotion in that joke. If I'm talking about breaking up with my ex, I want to tap into that, and make it feel like it just happened yesterday even though I have told this joke for years, I'm like, "My ex-girlfriend had everything I ever needed. It sucks we broke up. She had everything I ever needed, that's because when we broke up, she robbed my ass." So, it's telling the joke, and making them feel like I'm still being hurt by it.

KG: I get what you mean. So, I'm guessing that really happened?

GN: Yes. (Both Laughing)

KG: So, on the subject matter of crowd work, I recently found the clip of one of your sets and was able to see your trademark of being witty. In the joke, you talk about the time that a lesbian couple approached you...I feel like I'm butchering the joke. (Laughs)

GN: (Laughs) That really did happen one time. I was at a bar and these two girls walked up to me, we were hanging out, talking. "Oh, you are Mexican," and I was like, "Yeah," then she said, "We love what you eat." I always get that, "Oh, you are Mexican?" I'm sure they were trying to relate but I got kind of bothered by it and they realized it bothered me. She then goes, "I'm sorry, did I upset you? Was that rude of me?" I said, "Yeah just a little bit. It was a bit weird," then she goes, "Sorry, my girlfriend and I didn't mean to upset you," and I said "Girlfriend? Like you guys are together?" She was like, "Yes, we are lesbians," then I go, "That is awesome because I love what you eat." Right? It was gold and they laughed too. They were just like, "That was funny, that was good." That was the wittiness coming back with it.

KG: Is this something you were always able to do, even before doing comedy?

GN: Yeah. Being the youngest out of my brother and cousins, they would make fun of me. My siblings would just start bullying me. I was scrawny. I was the littlest one. They would come up and pull my ears and call me big ears. I was forced to come up with something. I would be like, "Look at his shoes," or "What is wrong with that haircut" and whatnot. They would make fun of me, and I'd be like let me come back now. It was something I had to work on. Just to kind of tap into it, if not they would keep messing with me.

KG: So, avoid giving them power. Is that how you handle hecklers? I'm sure you do get a lot of hecklers, right?

GN: Yeah, I try not to give them too much power. The way I handle hecklers is that I know they want to say something, but I just shut them down, like, "Oh ok, that is really cool man, thank you," and then go on with my material. If I had more time, like if I was doing an hour set, I'd be like, "What's up with this guy?" Just exercising that banter, in the sense that I have to exercise that, especially on stage. If somebody is going to say something, I have to win. I have the stage, I have the mic, so I have to win. There've been times that I've lost. Early on in my career, I was doing a show and I was going back and forth with some guy. I was a little intimidated. Bigger black dude with a gold tooth. It was in the hood, so my mind was like *Uuugh, I'm here by myself, he has all his people here*. We were going back and forth, and I was joking about him reading a book or something. I don't remember too much, but I do remember when he started walking up to the stage he goes, "Hey, how about you give me my towel back?" I thought *Uh oh what is going to happen? This guy is huge, right?* And I go, "What towel?" He said, "The towel I let you borrow when you came to this country so you could dry off your back." And everyone lost it. Everyone went crazy. I was about 4 years into comedy, so I was kind of stuck. The host comes up, grabs the mic, and started roasting him for me. Anyways, fast forward, after the show the guy comes up to me and said, "Hey bro, don't ever let me win." He was like, "I know you were a little intimidated but that doesn't matter, this is comedy. You have to win. You could have come back at me and say something about me getting off the Amistad boat or something." He was giving me stuff. "Tap into it. Don't back off. Just because I was coming onto the stage, it's your stage, it's your area." I realized that was true. Now, you open that door. I have to know you. I'm not going to say anything super-offensive that's going to have the crowd against me. I've gotta have them on my side.

KG: You have a podcast and make your own short films, am I correct?

GN: The Podcast is [NOLO RADIO](#), where I talk for a good 20-30 minutes and that was another thing about COVID. I was not able to perform, so the art and expression had to go somewhere. I started reading and working on how to write scripts and not only that but I also dusted off my turntable and started getting back to DJ'ing. DJ'ing was something that I used to do when I was like 14, just a teen, and then comedy took over. Back to *Nola Radio*. I talk in a podcast style and then I take a break and play music. "Check it out, here is the mix of the week," and I'm talking and doing shout-outs like the radio. As for the sketch stuff, I have been fortunate enough to link up with this group called [Sinner Studios](#) out of Las Vegas and they are as hungry as I am. But they are also really diligent in the sense that they gave us the exercise of writing sketches, making sure they are funny, making sure they make sense, coming to the weekly meetings, and pitching them. It's like they are working with us, "Hey this is what you guys have to do." It's not just, "Hey this week we got some cameras, and start filming something." No, no, no, it needs a structure. That forced me to figure out how to write sketches, figure out how to write a script, and I'm still at it.

KG: I looked at some of the sketches you made and watched [this sketch](#). Did you only act or were you also heavily involved in the writing?

GN: That was before figuring out script writing. That was more, “We have a camera. We are watching *Strange Addictions*.” We would think, “Would it be funny if I was addicted to.... you know?” And then it was, “Yo! We should film it.” We have these cameras or whatever and that was the early-early stages of me thinking of sketches or trying to figure it out. I wish I would have kept it going more back then, but it’s fine cause now I’m still learning with Sinner Studios. They are pushing me to deliver more stuff.

KG: Well congratulations on that too. I watched [this commercial you are in](#), and how did that come about for you to get that role?

GN: Same thing with the Sinner Studios, they have a contract with [a weed dispensary](#) out here in Vegas, which has their own strain of medical marijuana that they are working on. Also, they were looking for people to make content, commercially. So, me and my friend, Chris Clark, who is another strong comedian, were just sitting around and said, “What if we did this” – but we still had to sit down and write the beginning scene. In the interior, we are sitting on a couch playing video games...blah, blah, blah. Chris said, “Yo! Can you roll it up?” and then push the weed tray to roll it up. The camera pans in, and I’m like, “Yo, yo, yo! I can’t roll it up because my hand has Cheetos on it.” And the whole thing is, “Yo, yo.” They liked it so much that they wanted to collab and make a *Yo! Pre-Rolls*. That was a homerun for us, cause they loved it!” Being in Vegas, all the weed ads are more like pretty girls and men at the gym. “Come to so-and-so dispensary.” Which is kind of, that’s cool I get it, it’s Vegas, but what about the normality of it? I don’t know how to explain, but the people who like to smoke weed here and there – people like us. (Both laugh) I can’t relate to the guy with the chic chin. That is not going to make me want to go to that dispensary. All the hot chicks selling edibles and vapes and whatever in so-and-so dispensary is like, “Mmh.” That is not going to make you want to go.

KG: You do speak Spanish, right?

GB: Yes, I do.

KG: Have you ever done standup in Spanish before?

GN: No, but I have been invited. There is a show out here every other Sunday, they do Spanish-speaking shows. Sometimes I try to tell jokes in Spanish to see if I can work that muscle. Maybe for starters, I should transfer all of my material to Spanish and see if it delivers. I do want to do more shows (in Spanish). Lately I’ve been looking at which venues have Latin-based comedians. Before I had thought, “I just want to do comedy. I want to go anywhere, everywhere, I don’t care where it is, or who is there. I want to do comedy.” Now I’m looking at it like, which show in LA has all Latino-based comedians? Which festivals can I hit to link up and network with more Latino-based comedians? That is a new thing for me. I’ve been trying to squeeze into that system, trying to work with more Latinos to see how that is. I think we need more of that.

KG: Why the interest in more Latino-centered shows?

GN: I think it’s time for me to embrace that. To embrace that scene, to make more noise for us, to put more Latinos on the map. We are there but we would prefer each other even more if we all got together to see how we can work with each other and make things grow.

KG: So, to make a stronger Latino presence?

GN: Correct. To have a stronger Latino presence and to be able to work with more Latinos. Making more noise comically and publicly for more people to come see us. We are all different in a sense. I haven’t tapped into talking about how I’m half Salvadorian. There are Salvadorian comedians out there. There are a bunch of comedians talking about their dads who are strong strict Latino Mexican dads. “Vete a trabajar! (Start working!).” My dad wasn’t like that, he was more calm, collected, and his humor was

witty, so I want to show that not all Latin dads are strict and hard loving. My father is hard loving, but he didn't have that strictness in him like that. He was more passive, or he would make you think. For instance, I had him look at my car because something was wrong with it. And he goes, "Oh, you have one of those cars that don't run on oil. I go, "What do you mean? All cars need oil," and he goes, "Well then, why don't you put any in this car? Because the car has no oil." (Laughs) So, it's a different wit.

KG: So, generally speaking, there aren't that many Latino comedians? Or there just aren't enough venues? What's the climate like?

GN: When I started in San Francisco there was a strong handful, maybe 10 comedians that are Latinos, or maybe less. I came to Vegas, and there were maybe one or two. I'm sure L.A. is where it's at. I should have gone to L.A. to tap into that. But that's what it was in the years of doing comedy. I was wondering, "How would it feel to do a show for all Latinos?" An all-Latino crowd. I'm trying to find that now. I haven't been around that and I think that's why, in my whole career, I have not been around a strong Latin presence. I want to tap into that demographic.

KG: That's crazy, I did not know there was such a small number of Latin comics.

GN: Yeah. The comedians of the Bay Area said, "Oh, we need to do a show together," and there were only around six of us that thought that we should. I'm sure there were more, but San Francisco is a big scene. The people I was around that were working heavy were like, "Yeah we gotta do the show." Unfortunately, it never happened, because everyone is busy, everyone is doing their own thing. That doesn't mean it can't happen.

KG: Why do you think that is? My guess is that part of it has to do with the culture where a lot of people don't see a career in the arts.

GN: Yeah definitely. The benefit of the doubt. When people come from a different country, a hard-working country, they come to this country to work and that's the mentality. We have to work to survive, we have to make money, so how are you going to make money? Unfortunately, some of the jobs we take are back-breaking jobs, so the generation above us tends to start pushing that on us. They are always told, "Oh, you have to work. You have to work hard." For the men, they really are *machistas*, so they are like, "Oh! Look at your hands. Your hands are so soft. Go grab a hammer boy." That's why they motivate to be strong because that's how they grew up. Now, things have changed. It's interesting how when you are following your passion or doing something artistic, the same uncles and relatives that were telling you to go work construction or go do something start telling you, "You know what? I used to like playing the guitar." And they see that you are progressing on something, so they are like, "Don't stop what you are doing." It's hard for them to understand cause they are like, "Is that how you make a living? Telling jokes?" They don't get it. "Where is the pension? Where is the money? How are you paying rent?" They don't understand you can live off your art.

KG: So, I'm guessing your family was not completely supportive? Or they were?

GN: Not entirely supportive. Just recently one of the older cousins was like, "So, how is your hobby?" No, it's not a hobby. I mean it started as a hobby, but now it's actually a career that I'm making a living out of. I can't blame them for not understanding because all they understand is to wake up, shut up, go to work, clock in, and clock out. They made that comfortable for themselves. For us, it's like we are artists and I don't expect you to understand my art. It's equally hard to get up on stage and write your stuff to follow your passion as much as it is for them to get up and go to a 9 to 5. In that sense, it's still work.

KG: So, what is the plan for Gabe Nolasco in 2023?

GN: Oh man, I'm right now writing at least three sketches a week. I'm always working on something. The plan is more sketches, more work, more clubs, more festivals. Just keep it moving. I'm working on more material. Just keeping fresh, keeping alive.

KG: Again, congrats on all three. Thank you for the interview.

GN: Thank you, thank you.