



It's Nadine's World

Stand-up comic and internet darling, **Nadine Froughi**'s blend of intercultural comedy has helped her build a universe entirely of her own – now she's inviting everyone inside it.

© MARJOLEIN VAN DAMME

When Nadine Froughi moved to the Netherlands, she never imagined she'd end up doing comedy. But 15 years later, the 31-year-old stand-up comic has built a loyal audience both on stage and online. With more than 40,000 followers and a string of sold-out shows, her observations on Dutch office life, cultural mishaps and identity across countries have struck a chord with both locals and internationals. Born in the UK to an American mother and Iranian father, and now fluent enough to pass as Dutch, Froughi knows a thing or two about what it means to exist between cultures. More than anything though, she's funny. Really funny.

I suppose the best place to start is to explain a bit about yourself and where you grew up.

'I was born and raised in the UK, in Solihull, England. I lived there until I was about nine, and then my parents divorced. My mum is from Alaska, my dad is from Iran, but both of them ended up in Scotland as teenagers, and that's how they met. But then my dad moved to the Netherlands, and my mum moved back to Scotland to an island in the Outer Hebrides. If you're a teenage girl with a desire to see the world, I don't recommend it. My brother was always very popular. He was good at sports, everyone loved him, and I was just this kind of weird, nerdy older sister.'

You moved to the Netherlands when you were 16 to study at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Did you find it hard to learn Dutch?

'I kind of learned it by osmosis over the years. I think a lot of it came from my little brother who was born when I was 18. I was watching kids' television, reading kids' books – all the stuff I'd missed. It's honestly the best way to learn a language.'

When did you start doing comedy?

'My main job is in B2B content marketing at a tech company. Comedy started after lockdown because I was very depressed – I spent a lot of time by myself and I didn't really have a hobby. Before, I would go for coffee or drinks with friends, trying restaurants. Once all that disappeared, I realised I was missing something. I saw an ad for an improv class and took it.'

Why improv?

'An American influencer I followed said she met her husband at an improv class. I thought: "That's a good idea." I have yet to meet my husband, but actually having now been to several improv classes, that sounds like a horrible idea.'

'I was worried people would expect me to perform my TikToks live'

When did it stop being a hobby?

'My improv instructor told me I kept trying to force everyone into my joke, and maybe I should try stand-up instead. So like a lot of people, I started doing open mics. I still remember the first time I got paid – €30. I thought: "Money for this? That's crazy."'

Your online comedy feels very different from your stand-up.

'Completely different. The online stuff started because one video went viral. It was about a Dutch person realising they had to order their coffee in English. It hit 100,000 views and now it's around 800,000 views. Since then, I've posted a video every two days. Every time I post something that's not the accent, people don't like it as much, so I try to fit whatever I want to talk about into that. And office stuff.'

Why do you think both Dutch people and internationals connect with your comedy?

'Dutch people can see I understand their culture. It's not a total outsider saying, "Isn't this country terrible?" That's never what my content is. This is my home; I love it here, and everything I make comes from that place. People from abroad recognise their own frustrations and funny moments too. One of the cornerstones of Dutch humour is *zelfspot*. When I first moved here, my Dutch friends used to ask why I talked about myself like that all the time. I'd say, "Because it's funny". They'd tell me, "No, that's a British thing". *Zelfspot* is something a little different from British self-deprecation.'

How have friends and colleagues reacted?

'Sometimes they'll ask, "Was that one about me?" It never is – or if it is, it's about somebody from two jobs ago. Mostly I'm observing things other people have noticed too. I also joke about expats because I'm part of that world. I'm very pro-migration. I'm never saying, "If you don't like it here, leave". But I also can't go to another stand-up show and hear another expat comedian make a joke about Dutch people being cheap.'





Follow Nadine on IG (@lefrough) or TikTok (@nadinefroughi). And don't miss her autumn shows in September and October.

Interview

WHAT'S ON | 41



'I cried a lot during those shows'

What can people expect from your stand-up?

'My current show is called *Daydreamer*. I describe it as a show about delusions and daydreams. It has musical numbers, PowerPoint presentations, and follows all the little rabbit holes my brain goes down. It's about identity, love and the things you don't say out loud. I was worried people would come expecting me to perform my TikToks live. I've seen people do that and it's not fun at all. One of the biggest themes is loneliness, and that's what people seem to connect with most.'

Is loneliness something you've experienced in Amsterdam?

'It was part of why I got into comedy in the first place. I came up against this thing of having people around me but

still feeling lonely, which I think a lot of people experience, especially if you're single. A lot of the people who follow me are new here. Somebody came up to me and said she'd only been in Amsterdam a month and my videos had really helped. I love conversations like that. I hope I'm not scaring people, but helping them understand what they've gotten themselves into. If that helps people feel a little less lonely, I really like that.'

What would you say to someone who's just arrived?

'Be proactive. I think it can be difficult to make friends here, and that's something you have to actively pursue, making friends, dating and building relationships at work. The first culture shock I had was how direct everyone was. I got used to it very quickly because I realised I actually liked it.'

What do you *love* about Dutch culture?

'I love the tradition of treating everyone on your birthday, and the way, as soon as the sun comes out after dinner, >>



everyone goes out for ice cream. People think the Netherlands is cold and individualistic, but I don't think that's true. Community is just expressed differently. My Dutch friends have been incredibly loyal. I've always felt very safe and very welcome.'

What's been the defining moment of the past year?

'Doing *Daydreamer* for the first time in Amsterdam. It sold out, so we added another show and I ended up performing it twice back-to-back. As things had been going so badly in Iran, I decided to turn it into a fundraiser. The ticket money and donations went to two organisations in the Netherlands – one supporting refugees and one supporting undocumented people – because of my own family history. People didn't just come for an hour of comedy. They really connected with what I was trying to do. I cried a lot during those shows.'

The situation in Iran must have added another layer to the show.

'Around that time somebody from Iran came up to me after a club set. She said, "I wasn't sure if I was going to come because everything has been so bleak." Then she said, "I really needed this. I really needed to laugh." I still get emotional thinking about it. People have asked me, "How can you keep telling stupid jokes when people are being slaughtered?"

'It doesn't feel like something that matters, until someone tells you it mattered to them'

But I think it's important. Someone might spend all day worrying about family they can't reach, reading terrible news, and then come to a comedy show. It doesn't feel like something that matters, until someone tells you it mattered to them. That's something I won't forget.'

Is that the power of comedy?

'We're the lucky ones. People in my family made a big, scary journey so I could have this life. They didn't leave everything behind so I could sit here and be sad. I think we owe it to the people who came before us to live fully.'

What do you hope people leave your shows with?

'I hope they laughed a lot and that they feel a little bit seen. If they found me through Instagram, I hope they got to know me a bit better. But mostly, I hope they had a really good time. When you work in tech, you can work really hard all day and still wonder what difference you've actually made. Then I go and do 15 minutes of stand-up, people laugh, and someone comes up afterwards to say they really enjoyed it. That feels like I did something worthwhile. Then I don't have any questions about what I'm doing with my life. I know I'm doing something good.'

Catch Nadine at the Comedy Café on 6 September, Droog on 10 September and Comedy Café on 22 October. For other dates, head to linktr.ee/lefrough.

Nadine's Amsterdam – what does that look like?

'I love Noord because it still feels very much like Amsterdam, and if you want a break from the busiest parts of the city, it's great. My favourite shawarma is Tigris & Eufraat in Oost. Cocktail bar Vice Versa will always have a special place because that's where I did my first open mic. I also love Stacks. People can be a bit sniffy about American food, but it's very, very good. And at Buikslotermeerplein, there's an Afghan food truck that does the best soup. I always go back.'