



'The Daily Show' Works to Retain Balance, Humor in Trump's America

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In an industry where job security is not the norm, a five-year contract extension for Trevor Noah by Comedy Central on the heels of winning the Emmy Award (for best short-form variety series) means he will remain host of satirical news-themed *The Daily Show* through 2022. Noah succeeded Jon Stewart in late night two years ago this week, and will also be producing and hosting annual year-end specials as part of the new deal.

Noah and members of the *Daily Show* staff - executive producer and writer Steve Bodow, head writer Zhubin Parang, on-air contributor and writer Michelle Wolf and writer Joe Opio-were present on Sunday for a session at the inaugural Tribeca TV Festival in New York City discussing the day-to-day making of the show in the current era of the Donald Trump administration. The goal behind the TV Festival portion of the festival is to "celebrate television not only as entertainment but as something essential that interacts with the world around us."

Like other comically topical talk entries where the show was established but the host was a new addition, the immediate mandate for Noah was to attract the younger viewers who were not necessarily watching TV on TV, while keeping the established audience intact.

"First off, I inherited fans from Jon Stewart - people who were fans of the show and rightfully so," said Noah. "So, you have to tread somewhat lightly. And then there were the cord-cutters and those viewers watching online who in today's cluttered landscape have so many other choices elsewhere. But the bigger challenge was trying to figure out the larger idea of the show; what we want to say and how we wish to say it.

"What we are doing each day is telling the story of America and how you are dealing with the force known as Donald Trump," he added. "There is the one big story that everybody pays attention to, which is Trump and how he impacts the world. Then all of these other sub-plots become interesting as you move along."

Comedy Does Better When it is Based on Facts

Balancing news, information and entertainment while always trying to find the real truth is the The Daily Show's three-tier goal. With the controversial Trump administration always in the background, that's become no easy feat.

"We have a first meeting in the morning where there are a couple of dozen people in the room - writers and producers, and researchers and fact people," said Bodow. "If someone writes something that is funny but is not true, our fact-checkers will catch that and we have to figure out if we want to kill that joke entirely or rewrite it. Our best understanding of what is real comes out of that room. We're not trying to make the news, but we are definitely not trying to say something that is wrong either."

Counterpoints Represented in the Writers Room

Stressing that there are diverse points of view in the writer's room - liberals, conservatives and moderates included - the only real point of view the show is looking to express is Noah's, said Bodow.

"When we discuss political issues or what we think about the day, we usually try to flesh out Trevor's own idea, gut instinct or feeling about something," he said.

"We have a foundation and that is the facts," said Noah. "Two people can see the same thing and might completely process it in different ways. So, in the writer's room, what we are really trying to do is hone in on a comedic take or a point of view about what is happening.

"The toughest thing about the show is trying to find that balance of truly trying to be neutral," he added. "But it is great to see ideas clash and to see which ones will remain and which ones will come out stronger."

As for life at The Daily Show with Trevor Noah, or any series with a topical political theme, chances are there will be no shortage of subject matter in the future.

"Don't be shocked if Donald Trump gets a second term," said Noah. "I am not saying it will happen, but just don't be surprised. Trump connects with people below the surface. Part of American politics is celebrity culture, which is a strange world for me to observe, but he taps into that."

"As standup comedians, we go everywhere," added Wolf. "I mean Kansas City, Kentucky, Iowa—places that are not on your vacation list. We see America and it is not New York."