

'Woodie' host working hard, playing harder

By Karl Rybalowski
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Last Monday TechNews had the opportunity to take part in a conference call with Donald Glover, known by many as "Troy" from the *Community*. Donald joined us two days before hosting the mtvU Woodie Awards at the SXSW festival in Austin, Texas, and just before embarking on his I Am Donald tour, which combines his stand-up comedy with his rap act, Childish Gambino. Representatives of several newspapers were able to ask questions, and the following are highlights from the interview.

What you are most excited for in the mtvU Woodie Awards?

I'm most excited for the fact that it's live - I like that a lot. It's a kind of energy that I don't think a lot of things have, because... I don't know, when you're watching taped stuff you always think "They're not going to do anything 'tounuts, because somebody's looked over it already!" so I like the fact that it's like live television... and also seeing Odd Future - I love those guys a lot, so that's going to be pretty cool.

So you would say that doing live performances is your favorite type of project to work on?

Oh yeah, because - I don't know, when you're doing a movie, you have to wait a whole year, and when you have to wait a long time it's just "that's not that funny; I didn't enjoy myself" I like the immediacy, how immediate the reaction is to something, because you can change it in the moment and feed off the energy. I appreciate a live performance; I love stand-up because you know when somebody's enjoying themselves.

You're pretty heavily involved in making music, and the Woodie Awards honor these up-and-coming acts; do you feel more connected to these kinds of acts?

I really do, and I'm really excited. This is kind of the perfect awards show for me. I'm very excited about all the acts; it's very cool knowing about a lot of these acts before they "blow up." I think it's really cool to see artists like Odd Future and a bunch of others get recognition. But especially, I think it's kind of cool that it's on MTV and they'll get exposed to a bigger audience. I think everybody on the show, pretty much, is on the verge, except for maybe the Foo Fighters - people might know them (laughs).

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Show: I am Donald
When: May 18
Where: Park West

With a lot of these awards shows, they're all pre-written, and you said that being live, you'll have time to improvise things, but as a writer yourself, coming from 30 Rock and *Mystery Team*, are you particular about writing when you choose a project like this? Are you nit-picky or is it a pretty collaborative process?

Well, usually with stuff like this, I want to have a fun energy, so I'm not going to worry too much. People really relate when you just come out and you - like, lately with everything from music to stand-up I just come out and say how I'm feeling, and people tend to relate. With this, I could try to do that but... I mean, I think MTV wants to know what I'm saying, they won't just say "hey just go out there on stage and wing it!" So... we'll figure it out when I get there. We have some stuff planned out, tiny things, but in general it depends on the flow of the show. I want it to feel sort of like SNL on that first show, where anything was possible. There are definitely bits in there that are scripted and I think we're going to be awesome. Hopefully I'll get to do a Childish Gambino song, that would be cool. But I think there are going to be other parts that are truly going to be "oh, that band just did something crazy!"

A lot of your fans know you mostly as "Troy" from *Community* and probably aren't as familiar with your stand-up work or your work as Childish Gambino. With the mtvU Woodie Awards and your upcoming I Am Donald tour, what do you think will surprise these fans most about your act?

I guess that they're all the same person. I don't know what people are expecting when they come to see my stand-up. It's



(Photo courtesy of mtvU)

really funny, I try to immediately tell people that I am not Troy... a lot of people bring little kids, and then I start talking about my d**k and the y change really fast. So I want people to understand that I Am Donald is a show about just being able to do whatever you want... At a previous show of I Am Donald there were a lot of people going "oh, there's a music portion of the stand-up?" but I think they all walked away happy. I don't think any of this stuff is usual. I don't ever want to make something that's typical, because then it's boring.

A question for the nerds... playing Troy on *Community*, that's not your typical jock; it's sort of a quirky, nerdy character. As a writer, do you have any perspective as to why those kinds of characters are so popular right now?

I think it's because... very few people see themselves as cool or popular. If you have a scale of 1 to 10 of "how were you in high school" everybody, no matter who they were, would put down a 4, 5 or 6. No one thinks they're really cool or really nerdy, but everyone's in the middle. Especially in high school, you feel very nerdy or alone - at least, I did. I think those characters are very popular right now because there's this shift - people are saying "I don't want to watch what I want to be as much as I want to watch what I am." I don't know, people call it nerdy, but I really do think it's part of who people are. Everybody's quirky, everybody does weird things, but they just don't show it to everybody because they'd be like "you're weird!"

Do you think that's also important in your live performances as a stand-up comedian and hosting awards shows, bringing that quirkiness and relatability?

I feel like that's the stuff that people enjoy the most because I'm not lying. That persona is out there - when that whole Spider Man thing happened, one thing that came up was that I thought "well, that's kind of ridiculous;" but people were saying "you should be Spider Man because there aren't any quirky black dudes!" I was like "that's not true! My dad's a quirky black dude, he totally listens to Kraftwerk, he totally made me watch Star Wars in theaters!" Everybody's into little things like that. In the stand-up I do I try to be true to that.

How psyched are you about the new EP?

I'm uber-psyched. I was not expecting it to be as popular as it is. It was supposed to be something that I put out right before the tour that would make people excited for the tour, but that was it. But the response has been very cool. Very unexpected,

but very cool.

Could you tell us a little bit about how you got the hosting gig?

Well, I don't even know. I wish I could just say MTV wrote a formula on the blackboard and were trying to figure out who the best host could be and I was a janitor who found the formula and figured out it was me. I don't know, somebody called me. Actually, you [MTV rep] can probably say more. What did it? Was it the spark in my eye?

MTV: (laughs) I think it was definitely the spark in your eye. No, I think he really was just the perfect fit for the show. Having that background of being a writer and comedian and actor and also, at the same time, I think your music is awesome. And you've actually worked with some of the songs with the artists, like Sleigh Bells and Vampire Weekend.

Donald: Also, I'm dating *The Situation*. (laughs)

Was that a reference to the movie *Good Will Hunting* back there?

Yeah... I'm surprised anyone caught it, since everyone here's younger than 40.

You wear a lot of hats - as a writer, actor, comedian and musician. How do those roles inform each other? And do you find yourself now as an actor, thinking you have to do a scene a certain way because that's how the writer would want an actor to do it?

Oh, absolutely... I try to do it the right way for everybody and it's impossible, but... I think they also all just blend into each other and I think that's why I'm allowed to do all that stuff.

It's weird - it's more freeing because you're more confined as to what you are. The more I'm myself in all of the things I do, the more people respond because they know it's not BS.

Regarding the I Am Donald tour, is that a way to give everybody the Donald Glover experience? What's your goal for the show?

Yeah, it's funny - my friend said "so this is basically the Donald Glover Experience!" and I said "yeah, it is, but I don't want to call it that because I sound like a d**k if I do!" So I guess I Am Donald was originally going to be all sorts of music or maybe comedy music, and then finally I decided I'm tired of trying to do that, to walk the line, so I'll just do stand-up, and then I'll do some cool video stuff, and then I'll do some music, and integrate all three and make it a fun time. People don't go to concerts because they want to hear exactly what was on the album in real life. They go because it's an experience, and I thought I'd make it an experience that's cool and unique.