



Danny Clinch

DEON COLE

Longtime Chicago standup found a champion in Conan O'Brien

Deon Cole had been performing standup comedy for roughly 15 years when his break came. Thanks to an old contact, he landed him a gig on "The Tonight Show With Conan O'Brien" last August, and the host was so taken with Cole's set that he hired him to join the writing staff — making Cole the only black writer on the Emmy-nominated team.

"It's crazy what five minutes of material gets you," says Cole, who insists his self-deprecating African American humor meshes well with O'Brien's vanilla get-up. "We come from two different ends of the world, but we get along."

According to Cole, being the odd man out on the staff made the job intimidating. "I never did feel comfortable, really, because I was a fish out of water

working with genius Emmy-winning writers, and I'm just a guy from the south side of Chicago doing standup."

However, over the course of the show's brief run with O'Brien as the host, Cole found his groove. "They told me just to say in my lane, do what I do and think the way I think," he says.

When O'Brien left the program in January, Cole joined his boss on the road, performing with the high-profile "Legally Prohibited From Being Funny on Television Tour." Now, Cole is in talks with Comedy Central about possibly launching his own show, though he remains loyal to O'Brien if the former late-night host needs help on his new TBS program. "It's whatever Conan wants," Cole says. "He took a chance on me when a lot of people didn't."

— Eric Kohn

P.O.V.

"I use this notepad on-stage, mastering the art of not being professional. I'll do a joke that doesn't work on purpose, then go to my notepad and scratch it off, which becomes funny. Looking like I don't have it together is actually an art that I perfected. That's similar to what Conan does. He'll have a bat flying around the studio, but he wants you to see the string the bat is on."

Influences: Richard Pryor ("taught me to say what's on my mind"); George Carlin ("taught me how to say it") and Ellen DeGeneres.

Represented by: APA/Kirsten Ames Mgmt.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 2010

PLUS MONTREAL JUST FOR LAUGHS / 10 COMICS TO WATCH

SEE WHO MADE THE LIST
OF COMEDY'S TOP UP-AND-COMERS
PAGE A2-A6

VARIETY.COM/FEATURES