

Comedy's real deal

Mike Epps at the Schuster Center

BY JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN



Comedian Mike Epps will perform at the Schuster Center on Oct. 24

Mike Epps' career reaches back to the early '90s, when he started as a stand-up comic. On the big screen, he's played memorable roles such as Day-Day in the "Friday" films and Black Doug in the "Hangover" series. His ventures onto the small screen include Def Comedy Jam and "That's Racist with Mike Epps," an AOL original. In 2009, he put out debut comedy album *Funny Bidness: Da Album*, which features appearances from Flo Rida and Snoop Dogg.

Currently, Epps plays Uncle Julius in *Survivor's Remorse*. Next spring, you'll see him as Uncle Buck in the TV series based on the 1989 John Candy film, and soon he will begin filming for Lee Daniels' Richard Pryor biopic in which he will portray Pryor. In anticipation of his Real Deal Tour stop at Dayton's Schuster Center this Saturday, Oct. 24, Epps took the time to talk to *Dayton City Paper* about his projects, his evolving career and the importance of pain.

What are you looking forward to most about working with Lee Daniels on his Richard Pryor biopic?

Mike Epps: This will be my first time working with Lee, and I think it's going to be phenomenal. I think it will be great. Lee

Daniels is a guy who knows what he wants. Lee was taking actors and shaping them and making them become what they need to become. It's a very humbling and intimidating feeling.

**"It's either a blessin' or a lesson. You're going to win both ways."
—Mike Epps**

You grew up not far from Richard Pryor's hometown.

ME: I'm from Indianapolis and he was from Peoria, so we were right next door to each other.

Do you think that will help you tell his story?

ME: No doubt. We both have the same diction. We both are from the Midwest. We both came out of that little area. And I think that's what helped me, in that I understood [the area] and a lot of the character. I grew up around there, too.

You're Uncle Julius. You're Uncle Buck.

Are you just everyone's uncle right now?

ME: Yeah, I'm everybody's uncle. I used to be everybody's cousin when I was Cousin Day-Day in the "Friday" movies, and now I'm everybody's uncle. I start shooting *Uncle Buck* in two weeks.

How's shooting going on *Survivor's Remorse*?

ME: We're in the third season right now. It's beautiful, man. This show right here is an incredible show. It's produced by LeBron James. It's incredible. It's one of those shows that's really creeping up on people because it's not all over the place. We all know *Empire*, but this is a show that people are starting to grow on because it's real, you know? [Creator] Mike O'Malley is writing from a real perspective.

What opportunities are available to you now that you have all of this success that maybe weren't available to you when you were starting out? Is anything easier now than it was at the beginning of your career?

ME: The hard part is really over with. But it's not over with. The hard part is over with because I don't have to struggle anymore. The easier part is that I don't have to struggle, but the hard part is that the stakes are higher.

Do you think the struggle played a role in the success that you're having?

ME: I think the struggle is what makes us who we are. Without the struggle, there's nothing that we can say or do because the struggle is what makes us who we are. I tell a lot of young guys, people who want to be in the business, to embrace that because that is what is going to make you who you are. You have to have some kind of testimony. Joy comes from pain. It's hard to recognize joy without pain. People don't understand that. I can tell you this much right here: Everybody that wants something for free, for nothing, without no work or no pain or struggle, they're not going to enjoy it anyway. How about that? That's real. How could you enjoy it without that? Without the pain and the struggle? There's nothing to enjoy! How do you even know to enjoy it if you didn't struggle? If you didn't go through nothing? If you didn't go through the pain?

That's important for people to remember when they're going through pain and struggle.

ME: It's either a blessin' or a lesson. You're going to win both ways. That's my thing about coming up in the business with young actors, young comedians. I wouldn't have did it no other way.

What's next in this incredibly diverse career of yours? You have national tours and television and movies and albums. Is there any arena that you haven't gotten into yet that you would like to?

ME: The reason why I might not be the greatest at none of them is because I do all of them. If all I did was stand-up comedy, I'd be the best at it. But I do it all.

I see a producer/director credit coming soon.

ME: Yeah, I want to do that. I've got the eye for it.

What can fans expect from your live show?

ME: Negro funny. I'm Negro funny [laughs]. No, I'm funny for everybody. The thing about my audience is that I've been having the same audience for years. They've been following me. I have some new customers. Hey, that's how we're doing it, you know?

I can't believe you're only here for one night!

ME: It's going to be great.

Mike Epps: Real Deal Tour will be at the Schuster Center's Mead Theatre Saturday, Oct. 24 at 7 p.m. Tickets are on sale at ticketcenterstage.com or by phone at 937.228.3630. For more about Mike Epps including his blog, photos and store, please visit mikeepps.com.



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