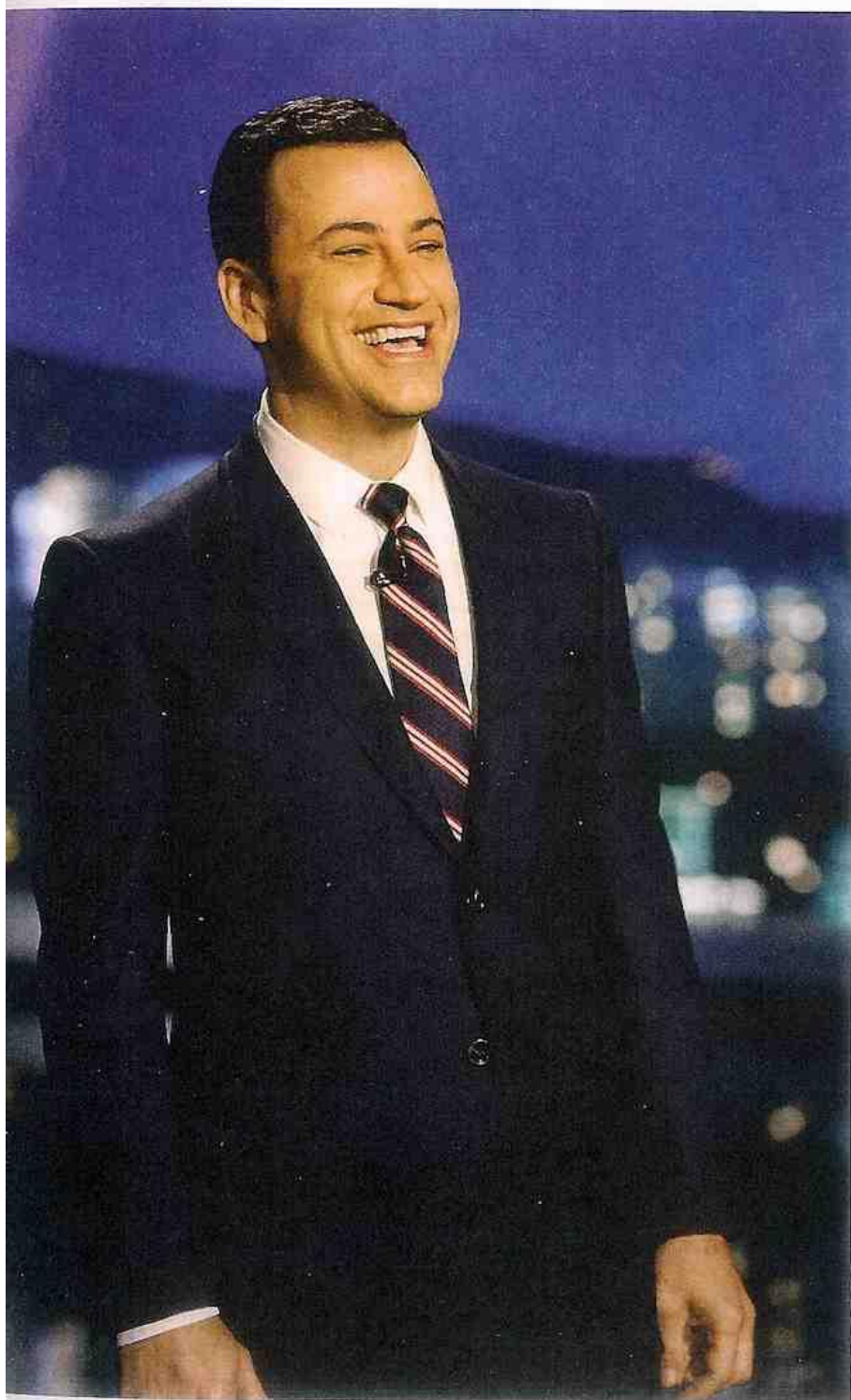


PROFILE

by Stephen Camelio

JIMMY KIMMEL



➔ JUDGING BY HIS TWITTER FEUD WITH Kanye West or his supposed love affair with Ben Affleck, everything seems to be a joking matter for Jimmy Kimmel. But underneath that crooked smile and snarky laugh is a serious guy.

After all, he turned a childhood fascination with *Late Night with David Letterman* into a hugely successful radio and TV career, and now his Emmy-winning talk show *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* has him in direct competition with his idol. Nowadays Kimmel directs that same passion into his newest obsession: fly-fishing. That's why a man who spends his nights interviewing stars and other boldfaced names made time in his busy schedule to talk angling with *Fly Rod & Reel*. We caught up with him while he was being fitted for a Snow White costume. No joke.

Have you always fished?

Growing up in Las Vegas we used to go fishing for stripers in Lake Mead. I always wondered why I never caught anything, but wasn't till I was an adult that I realized I was fishing with 30lb-test—it was like fishing with rope. I used to go with Cleto, my bandleader and best friend, and his dad. We didn't catch much, but there was nothing I loved more than fishing, and it's really still the case, though I've given up bait-fishing.

How'd you get into fly-fishing?

Fly-fishing is something I always wanted to do but it didn't become a reality until we had Huey Lewis on the show. He encouraged me to come up and visit him at his place in Montana. I was very anxious to do it and when I took Cleto and his dad up there I fell in love with it instantly.

What drew you to casting so quickly?

I love the rhythm, like it's some combination of swinging a golf club and cracking a whip. Watching the line go behind me and seeing the loop, then having the loop unfold on the other end as it delicately lands the fly on the water—I love it. Plus, I was pretty good at it right off the bat so that, of course, made me enjoy it more.

How'd your first trip go?

When we got up to Montana it was for the skwala hatch, and I caught a 24-inch brown. I assumed it would always be like that, but I didn't realize they shrink 10 inches when summer comes.

What's it like fishing with Huey?

Huey is very hardcore. I'm very glad he introduced me to fly-fishing because he is only interested in dryfly fishing. Also, you catch a whitefish and they deduct a trout from your total. He wakes you up in the morning with his duck call and from that moment till you go to bed, all you talk is fishing. Most of the night is spent with the practice rod just casting in the living room. If women were to look in on us they would get scared because it's like we are in a cult.

So are you dry only, like Huey?

I'd rather stick with a dry fly, but if I have to get it wet I will. If I have a choice to catch two fish on a dry fly or 15 on a nymph, I'll go with the dry fly.

Then what's your go-to dry?

I go to different places so I rely on the guide. Up on the Bitterroot I go with Andy Carlson, a real great guide and real character. I love his Purple Haze. I think he originally tied it and has a patent on it or something.

Where do you fish?

I've only been, probably, 40 times, but that's in the last six years. In fact for my birthday I'm going up to the Colorado River on the Arizona/Utah border. I've fished the Bitterroot, the Green, the Hood River, the lower Deschutes, the Smoky Mountains, Yosemite, the Henry's Fork and the areas around Jackson Hole and Sun Valley.

Is there any place in L.A. you've found to fish?

Sometimes we'll go out on the beach at El Porto, which is just north of Manhattan Beach. We fish for perch and corvina, but you can get a shark or a ray. You never



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY JIMMY KIMMEL

know what you are going to catch there. That's part of the fun, but nothing compares to fishing on a river.

What's your favorite river?

Probably Silver Creek, in Idaho. I went over the summer and we were in float tubes, which I'd never done before. It was just a magical experience. I would never come out of that creek if I didn't have to work. I'd be there permanently.

Aside from Cleto, who are your fishing buddies?

Chef Adam Perry Lang. In fact there was just a big spread on him in *Bon Appetit* where he went trout fishing. And Chris Bianco, who is a pizza chef in Arizona. My brother also will come along with us. It changes a little bit depending on who has a kid at home or an angry wife. My wife usually tells me to go fishing to get rid of me.

When I was on my honeymoon in Tuscany, I went online and scouted the fly-fishing opportunities. Our hotel didn't understand what I meant and it became very confusing, but I seriously flirted with the idea of abandoning my new bride for a day and a half so I could go catch trout in Tuscany.

Anyone you want to fish with?

Henry Winkler for sure. I have one of his flies on my desk right here. Probably more than anyone I'd love to fish with David Letterman. I think that would be the greatest day of my life.

Where would you go?

If I live long enough I am going to fish everywhere, but I think I have my eye on a trip to Alaska. Maybe catch some salmon on a fly. We went steelheading one year on the lower Deschutes. In three days I got

one hard pull and about 15 seconds of fish on. Everybody told me, "That's great," but I couldn't help but feel that it wasn't.

So with all the things available to you, why fly-fishing?

The easy answer is that it's relaxing, but the real answer is it is hypnotic. When you are

in a river, 100 percent of your focus is on this little white fly floating on a big body of water. You get hypnotized and the day goes by in a flash. I have two televisions in my office, two computer monitors on my desk, the phone rings, I get text messages and have hundreds of e-mails coming every day. To be focused 100 percent on something is a great break for my brain. Plus, I just love the drama of fishing. You never know when a fish is going to bite and you always have to be ready. It's so satisfying when you do get that bite. It's almost embarrassing how exciting it is. You feel like you are seven years old.

What's your favorite fishing story?

Something funny happened on our trip to Silver Creek. Adam caught a little fish and then a pig T-boned it. He wound up catching this huge, like 28-inch brown. It was bait-fishing, but it was accidental bait-fishing. To us it was the most exciting thing in the world, but when we came back and explained it to our wives and girlfriends they weren't impressed at all.

What's your favorite piece of gear?

I occupy my time looking at pictures of people fishing online and buying equipment I probably don't need. It's like I have my own little fly shop in the garage, but you know what I can't do without? My camera, because you'll never see me happier than when I am posing with a fish. It's funny, I am mostly serious all day long until show time, and it really does tickle people when they see me with this big shit-eating grin on my face holding a trout. ■

Stephen Camelio profiled comedian Christopher Guest in Winter 2013.