

CELEBRITY

Rap Sh!t Star Aida Osman Is Blessed



By Katja Vujić, a writer at The Cut covering culture, news, wellness, and style.

DEC. 20, 2023

 SAVE





RULES TO LIVE BY

Inspired by our popular etiquette guide: New rules for behaving in polite society.

Photo-Illustration: by The Cut; Photo:Abdi Ibrahim

When you hear that Aida Osman went from bartending in her hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska, to joining her first writers' room, for Netflix's Big Mouth, in the span of a year and

that by 2022 she was cast in her first lead role on Max's Issa Rae-produced *Rap Sh!t* — which she helped write — you might think divine destiny is on her side. But the second you get the chance to speak with Osman, it's immediately apparent that this trajectory just makes sense for them, and the rest of the world is still catching up to their talents. (Osman is nonbinary and uses both she and they pronouns.)

On this season of *Rap Sh!t*, on which they are still writing and starring, Osman brings new dimensions to Shawna Clark, one half of an up-and-coming Miami-bred rap group (Shawna's other half, Mia, is played by the rapper KaMillion) who spent season one committing credit-card fraud and being a bad friend. Now, faced with a looming investigation and a badly funded tour, Shawna is slowly repairing her relationships and figuring out how to navigate her career authentically and successfully. Don't get it twisted, though — while Osman and Shawna are similar, the actor is adamant that they are not the same. "I'm naturally more collaborative than Shawna," Osman says. "And I fear God, unlike Shawna."

At what point in the writing process did you start imagining yourself playing Shawna, and what has it been like writing a character you're playing and playing a character you helped write?

It's so painful. [Laughs.] When you're writing characters, you have to look at their flaws, because that's how you write good stories. It's really understanding the characters' flaws and letting that keep coming up over and over again. Writing in a writers' room when you're the star of the show is like going to psychotherapy every single day. It's not the most fun experience. About one month into the writers' room, I started to realize that this character was so similar to me. She is the woman I might be if I had pursued rap music instead of trying to be a screenwriter and producer, director, filmmaker — all the things that I want to be. So she's a parallel-universe me.

Most of us imagine alternate versions of ourselves, but to bring that version to life as a character must be really trippy.

It's super weird. When people tell me that what Shawna did was so cringey or it was so difficult to watch, I think, *Oh my God, would I have done that? Would my ego have been too big? Would I have taken the spotlight away from my friend and done a freestyle shamelessly?* I'd like to think I wouldn't have done that. I'm naturally more collaborative than Shawna is. And I fear God, unlike Shawna.

Issa Rae has plenty of experience writing a character she's also playing — have you had conversations with her about that unique process?

Issa's been really helpful, because our situations are very similar. This suspicious thing happens in television writing and acting where you might write a scene, and then a year later, the exact triangulation, the exact conflict, the exact plot with different characters in your real life will happen to you. I was starting to get really superstitious about it, and I asked Issa, "Do you ever write something and then it just happens?" She was like, "Yeah, all the time." She said it so blasé, like, "Of course." That's the fact of this career.

It seems like Shawna cannot catch a break, especially in her love life. Is there a dating rule she should be following but isn't, or one that she is following but shouldn't?

I think you probably should stop trying to be in a relationship with somebody you're doing crimes with. Thelma and Louise, Bonnie and Clyde, those things belong in the past. The internet exists. People can record your conversations. Mixing pleasure and business, especially if it's dirty business, bad idea. I would never kiss someone who could send me to jail. I know it's hot, it's kind of freaky deaky that there's danger involved, but maybe go find an accountant. Maybe go find a mechanic. Maybe the guy down the block who teaches kindergarten is a better option than the concierge you scam with.

I was obsessed with your cameo on *Ramy* — so brief yet so powerful. What was it like working on that show?

My mother speaks Arabic and I was raised Muslim, but I had to call my mom and have her translate every single part of the script for me so I could trick *Ramy* into thinking that I spoke Arabic. I have been blessed — I'm gonna say blessed, and I'm also gonna say extremely scared away — by the people I have gotten the opportunity to work with. My first three television jobs, I've gotten to be under Issa Rae, *Ramy* Youssef, and Terence Nance. And those are the only TV shows I've ever acted in. So effectively, the wildest, brightest auteurs of our generation are the people who have been kind enough to let me make art with them. I hope that means good things for me and my future, but I also see how difficult it is. The level at which they are functioning is scary.

Shawna and Mia have some of their biggest moments of the show at industry parties — what's your best rule for engaging with people at industry parties?

Industry parties are work. It's like any career, though. You're not going to let your hair down at the office Christmas party. You should probably count how many drinks you've had. Remember these people are responsible for your money, your potential success in that industry. You don't want to embarrass yourself. My very first industry party was a *Big Mouth* one, where I may or may not have tried to offer drugs to Nick Kroll, like, immediately. He said no. A few short moments after that, I told Kumail Nanjiani all of my failed jokes about him in the writers' room.

What about a normal party that's just your actual friends?

Frequent bathroom breaks to hype yourself up in the mirror. Don't be out in the field the whole time. You do not need to be the star quarterback. Go bench yourself. Go to the bathroom. Talk to yourself in the mirror. "I'm that girl. I am funny. I am witty. I am clever. I am intelligent. I am natural." Say whatever you need to say to yourself, and then go back out there. Throw a couple pig skins. I don't know, I'm trying to keep the football reference up. Throw a ball.

What's your No. 1 rule for meeting other famous people?

Don't act like you know them. That is every famous person's pet peeve. You do not need to walk up to Beyoncé and kiss her like she's your auntie. Stay away from her. "Hello. I'm Aida. You're — don't tell me, I know — Beyoncé." Like, don't be weird. Don't go to the other extreme

and be like, "I don't know you. What's your name?" You know who Beyoncé is. Don't play around. Find a happy medium where you treat them like a person and not like an icon statue. Don't make them your cousin and don't make them your statue. They are Beyoncé. Keep it cute. And keep it short. You're still a fan.

Any rules that you have in your home?

There are not a lot of rules here. It's kind of a lawless land. But there has to be fresh flowers. I like to go with the seasons, so right now it's festive time, and we have some poinsettias. *Don't get roses!* That's the biggest scam of the romance industry. They die in one week.

***Rap Sh!t* heavily features interactions that happen on Shawna and Mia's phones. In your own life, what rules do you have around your phone, for yourself and for others?**

I'm not like these girls. I'm not on my phone that much. I use it for work, I use it to look things up, and I use it to text my closest loved ones and even then, I'm not the best at that. I don't have Instagram on my phone. I've always struggled with social media because I don't like to be on it. I'm really emotional and sentimental. So my feelings get hurt every time I open Instagram. If my feelings are hurt, I can't write, or y'all are gonna get the saddest television shows in the world. So no, that phone's gotta be away. I use TikTok as a search engine. That's been fun. I've learned a lot from TikTok. If you think of TikTok like Google instead of just scrolling, you'll have a different perspective.

What's your No. 1 rule for ordering food?

No cheese, Jesus Christ. Every time I eat cheese, the next day I will literally hack up a lung. And I'll have acne on every inch of my body and I'll feel awful. Keep the dairy cows very far away from me. I'm sorry if I lose any milk sponsorship opportunities. I can't do it.

And order for the table. I like when other people order for the table and I don't have to order anything. Because I hate entrees. I think whoever invented entrees was like, just such a greedy pig. I do not want to eat the same fusilli pasta for 45 minutes. Personal entrees are very 2017. Get out of here.

You're in L.A. now, but thinking about when you were living in New York, do you have a No. 1 rule for walking on the sidewalk?

Pretend to be pregnant.

Tell me more.

That came to me so quickly. It's my favorite thing to do. I don't know why it makes me feel safe. It's really smart to wear the biggest coat you can in the winter. People just help you out. People will help you out more. I feel like you are less likely to be attacked, you're more likely to be looked after. This is something I invented when I was 15 or 16. I just noticed how pregnant women were treated in our society. And I felt that I, too, should be treated that way. So I just started sticking out my gut everywhere I went.

What is your No. 1 fashion rule?

Don't let anybody dress you all the way. Somebody can pick your outfit, but you always need to put your own personal touch on something because you're not going to feel like yourself in the outfit. I don't like just being a blank canvas for someone else's art.

What's your No. 1 rule for canceling plans?

You can cancel plans. But you are responsible for making it up to someone the next time, like you better pay for that person and you better invite them out. In your relationship, you are in the red, and you should know that. You need to now do a grand gesture to make things okay.

Would you send an edible arrangement?

No shade to edible arrangements, but how edible could that be? You sent me a bunch of week-old fruit that's been sitting in a box or maybe wrapped in plastic. BPAs exist. Is it packaged? I have too many forensic questions about edible arrangements that are pushing me toward "Do not ever send me an edible arrangement." You can bring me fruit to my house. I love fruit. This is not an attack on fruit; this is an attack on shipping fruit. Not precut fruit. You can ship me a banana.

Do you gossip?

In Islam, gossiping is haram; it's one of the basic tenets of our religion that you're not supposed to talk about other people's doings and goings ons and business and stuff. But I find gossiping is actually a little useful sometimes. If you do it, gossip responsibly. You can't bash people. You can't be mean. You can't undercut people's looks. But you can talk about what happened; that's just sharing a story. Sharing stories with one another about other people's lives is a good way for us to learn about one another.

I guess ultimately, it's a form of storytelling.

Just tell responsible stories. Really my only rule to live by is: Have some grace, but share your opinions openly and wildly. There's ways to tell people how you feel about things without making enemies out of them. Something that my mom used to say all the time is that you need to make believers, not enemies, when you speak. Do everything with love and care in mind.

RELATED

- › **You Can Keep Your Shoes on at Delaney Rowe's House**

TAGS: RULES TO LIVE BY CULTURE CELEBRITY

 COMMENT