

AND NOW IT'S TIME FOR A LITTLE SOFT ROCK

ON HIS COMEDY TOUR, CHRIS ROCK HAS THEM ROLLING WITH LAUGHTER

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Even Chris Rock feels flickers of burnout.

It's just that Rock's version of taking a respite from directing and starring in movies entails a six-month stand-up comedy tour that is carrying him not only around the United States but also to England. Twice.

After two decades of performing, Rock is still the guy who refuses to shut his mouth, who has so much energy onstage you might swear he's just gulped 12 Red Bulls. He is the Rock who makes people roll — out of their chairs laughing.

The "Chris Rock: No Apologies Tour" is his first in more than three years. Rock, 43, has always managed to take America's touchiest social issue and turn it into something that seems OK to laugh at.

"I come from a real honest place, and I just use a bunch of stereotypes to get laughs," he said. "I think I call everybody out. Sometimes the joke's on the white people; sometimes the joke's on the black people. It's very equal opportunity."

Characteristic Rock humor can't help but seep into a conversation with the comic, but what Rock calls the off-duty part of himself is much mellower than his performance persona. When Rock chatted over the phone recently, his voice was half an octave lower than the high-pitched modulations he uses onstage. It was so relaxed it was almost a drawl.

Perhaps it was because Rock had a rare day off. His only responsibility was to play dad to his daughters, Lola, 5, and Zahra, 3. While they were in school, Rock had some time to chill at home in Alpine, N.J., where most houses start selling in the seven-figure range.

"All it really does is give you more in common with the average person," he said of suburban parenting. "When I was younger, people with kids were odd. And then it was, 'Wait a minute, you're the odd one without kids.' My

kids really just gave me more in common with the audience. Marriage is the same way.”

Rock has been married to philanthropist Malaak Compton-Rock for 11 years. The secret to their marriage longevity?

“Low sperm count,” Rock deadpans.

(He clarifies that despite what Internet sites say, he is in his only marriage and has just two children.) That, Rock said, means that he’s doing better than Will Smith, who he notes is in his second marriage.

His family usually figures into his stand-up routine, which he said is all new material he has honed for the past several months in small clubs.

“You got your presidential politics, your performance-enhancing drugs, wherever I am in my life,” Rock said of his new tour. “Lots of jokes about race, lots of jokes about sex, women, Barack, Hillary, McCain, the Clintons, Michael Vick.”

When it comes to his actual views on politics, Rock — who reiterates that he “was thinking more of Kwame Kilpatrick than Barack Obama” in the 2003 movie “Head of State,” about an unlikely black presidential candidate — calls Obama’s presidential run amazingly impressive.

“I hope it keeps going,” he said. “You want your kids to see it. Actually, I want the white kids who compete with my kids to see a black president. It would be a world in which my jokes wouldn’t work anymore.”

And like that, it’s back to his kids. It’s telling that the edgy, expletive-spewing (at least while he’s onstage) comic actually bought them tickets to go see Hannah Montana.

Because even though he directs movies and he’s won three Emmys and his fans include Kid Rock and Madonna, Chris Rock is still a suburban dad — albeit one whose jokes are actually funny.

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