

**"TJ got the hang of things here quickly. He's not a whiney expat," says friend Shazz Simpson.**

Keenan Ivory Wayans' *In Living Color*. He's hosted call-in radio shows and has done stand-up, writing and performing raps about Ronald Reagan and boxer Mike Tyson.

Despite his successes, TJ insists that comedy has always been a hobby, never a job. Is he kidding? He counts the few years he spent as a top-producing salesman in a department store as a real job. But whether he's selling Faconnable suits or selling himself on stage, it's all about connecting with people.

"When you deliver the joke, the audience has to hear it and then has to decide if they want to laugh," he says. "The comic and the audience are in a relationship together. And we all know what relationships can be like."

Without cracking a smile, he adds, "What I do is really hard. Sure, performing is energising when you're having a good night, but when things aren't going well, it's no fun." Forever the optimist, though, TJ never lets a slow night get him down for long.

"Since moving here, I've felt that everything is possible. It's the best thing that's happened to me in 30 years."

When he's not performing or reading a book in Ava's school (he's there so often her classmates call him Daddy), TJ loves spending hours driving around the island in his "expat special" (the ubiquitous

Honda Odyssey). It didn't take long to realise that Singapore is a comic's dream. His material comes from his observations of both locals and expats alike, from the expat women he overheard discussing the size of their husbands' packages at a Coffee Bean to figuring out what "lah" really means while searching with an estate agent for a place to live – "late as hell".

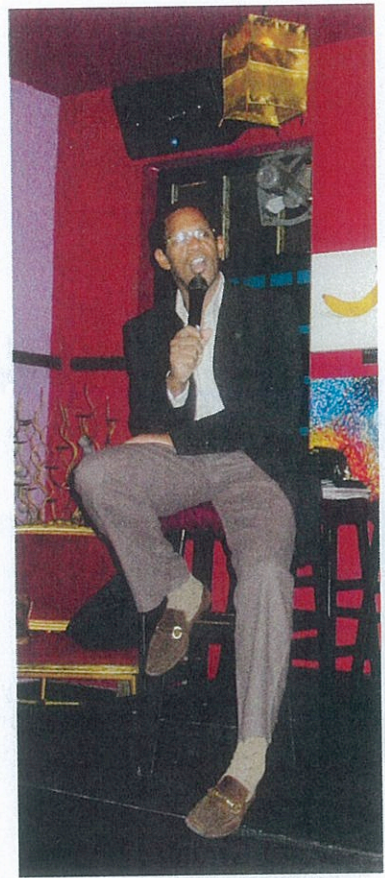
"I hadn't been inspired to write jokes for years until I moved here," he says. Don't even get him started on the American Club, one of his favourite haunts.

"People actually complain that the American Club isn't American enough." He adds, in mock surprise, "Gee, I know I miss drive-by shootings."

As a student of human nature, nothing surprises him anymore. Well, except certain American Club members assuming he's from Africa. "I'm from the Dayton, Ohio tribe. Where are you from?"

Everything is potential material for his routines, from taxi drivers to marriage, maids and pondering why the toilets here hold so little water. He tells self-deprecating jokes about being black and pokes fun at ageing, sex and drinking coffee out of a plastic bag. No one is spared from TJ's comic web.

"I am often the butt of his jokes," says his wife, Sandi. "He tells yarns about me that aren't true, for



the laughs, then people meet me and say I'm not as bad as he said I was." However, she admits that his infectious silliness has helped her to loosen up.

As comfortable in his skin as TJ seems to be, he's only human. "We moved here because it was so multi-cultural," he says. But he admits to being irritated by some stereotypes. TJ lost count of how many times someone here has assumed he was a musician or basketball player.

"I look nothing like Michael Jordan and I'm tone deaf." Though, he concedes having a slight resemblance to Jamie Foxx and Denzel Washington.

Looking a decade younger than his 51 years, TJ's a chameleon, as comfortable in cargo shorts as he is in a Hugo Boss suit. This man about town resists being defined or typecast. For him, life is a stage and each day is a live performance. **31**