



JASON ALEXANDER INTERVIEW
THE THREAD SEASON ONE

Jason Alexander, Actor
April 15, 2023
Interviewed by David Bender
Total Running Time: 22 minutes and 13 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

JASON ALEXANDER:

On any day that the world continues to turn, and we wake up the next day and it's a functioning world, you have to know one thing. There's a ton more good people on this planet working for the light, than there are not. And there's the hope.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories
Jason Alexander
Actor

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JASON ALEXANDER:

My birth name- My God-given name—which I always find is a strange phrase because it's really my mom, although my mom and God, very close—I was, born as Jay. Not Jason. Jay Scott Greenspan. I am still Jay Scott Greenspan. And if you do know me, you probably know me as Jason Alexander, because when



I was 14, I joined my first acting union. And it wasn't about, you know, hide the Jewishness of Greenspan. It was about playground trauma. I was green. Fill in the blank with any horrible thing you wanted. So when I went to get a stage name, they said, Would you like a stage name? I said, Yes, I would. My mom named me J, but always called me Jason. So I was used to Jason and I said, okay, I'm going to be Jason Scott. And the woman at the after counter said, We have 11 of them and every spelling you can come up with so you can't have it. And I and I in a blind pen, I never thought about another name. In that moment I went, Oh, but my dad doesn't feel great about me wanting to lose his name. So I'll just say, How about Jason Alexander? Because my dad was Alex Greenspan. And they said, Yeah, you know that. So it was it was a barely a full thought in the blink of a moment and out of necessity, always born out of necessity. I don't do anything if it isn't a necessity.

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DAVID BENDER:

I've known a lot of people who've had the experience of fame. You didn't when you started out doing this. No. It would have that longevity in that range and reach. How has that impacted your ability to tell stories? People are looking to you and listening to you. They'll come up to you now, obviously, they'll come up to you at some point as your character, but that also opens the door for you to be heard in other ways. As you know, Jay, not Jason Matt talk about that, but that opportunity.

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JASON ALEXANDER:



So most celebrities, for some reason or another, seem to be an object of fascination and attention for people. I assume with someone like me that. It is because the audience and I have shared an experience together or it's perceived that we've shared it together. In my particular case through the Seinfeld show, specifically, the most resonant thing that I hear about that shared experience. Are people who come up to tell me about some very challenging time they were going through in their life. Anything from the loss of a child or a parent to a personal illness to serving overseas in the military? You name it, a period of time where joy was elusive and they approached me to thank me for helping them to laugh, helping them to reconnect to some kind of happiness, joy, laughter and how therapeutic and appreciated it was. So there's that bond. It is the only kind of compliment that I can take easily because I understand and I tell this to my fellow actors all the time. We are not powerful. This idea that we are celebrities, we are powerful. Look at this powerful thing we can do. I began performing as a magician. I was always well aware I didn't have any powers. The illusion has the power. The illusion is what's powerful for people, not the person. So the. The event, the connection, the result of what our work does for the audience. That is powerful. We're just a cog in the works. I, as truly a shy, more introverted than anyone would believe person. I kind of can't take that in as readily as someone going. That thing you did really helped me. The reason that I. The kind of relish that is my mom, who was a nurse and a nurse educator all her life. The one disappointment, if there was any disappointment because, you know, Jewish mother cannot be disappointed. The one disappointment that she had was. She felt that because of the direction I was taking, that it would be harder for me to live a life of service. And that was the thing she would



always talk about. If you can live a life of service to this world, to other people, it's a good life. And she certainly that was her life. And when I went into acting, I could not imagine it as a life of service. I did it. First of all, I fell into it. Second of all, I was attracted to it because it seemed to be serving me. I was a kid without a community. I was a kid without a real sense of self. I was a kid who was quite frightened and not terribly good at a lot of things and suddenly had community and I had encouragement and I seem to have had an ability. So it was all good for me. It was very good for me. And then they started paying me and then they said, You can make a living at this. And at the end of every stage performance, they go, Hey, you're so great. Thank you. And all of that is just an ego trip. But it didn't seem to be serving much of anybody other than myself. But when I am able to meet and hear people say, no, no, no, no, no, that thing you did, that thing you were part of. Helped me. Helped me, Got me through something, got me over something. Reconnected me to myself. That then becomes, Oh, maybe I maybe, Mom, I stumbled into that life of service after all.

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DAVID BENDER:

Making your mother proud. Did she get to see how much of your impact and did you ever have that discussion where I've now seen what my work can do.

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JASON ALEXANDER:

It and help affect people? Both my parents were blessed with longevity and both of them lived many, many years in the in the meat of my success in this



chosen field. So they got to see it. They got to breathe a sigh of relief that it would all seemingly work out. My father actually stopped wishing I would be an orthodontist, which was that was huge. That was that was a big get. And yes, my my I would talk to my mother frequently about very specific occasions that were uniquely striking, where this sense of service, by doing just what I do, seemed to prevail. And she loved us. Stories absolutely love them.

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DAVID BENDER:

This is part of our tradition, the Jewish tradition of and I always bollixed my. I was not bar mitzvah. You were.

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JASON ALEXANDER:

I was bar mitzvah. Yes. And that was that was about the last time Judaism. And I shook hands or religion nations that religion. And actually.

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DAVID BENDER:

Do you feel that connection to that, the culture of Judaism, does that connect at all?

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JASON ALEXANDER:



Certainly I do feel the connection, you know, very specifically to the culture of Judaism. And I have no particular you know, if I was a religious person, I'd be very happy to be a religious Jew. I think it's a very in many ways, a very friendly religion. I am intensely spiritual. I'm just not terribly religious. But the. Well, you know, I think it is unfortunately, unfortunately, part of the human condition that we have an affinity for our tribe, whatever our tribe may be. So I. I am very warmed by the feeling of the of the cultural landscape that is Judaism, the values that it contains, the history that it contains, the ideals it tries to uphold, and work for its sense of humor. Are all you know, I have them on a cellular level. I couldn't walk away from it if I if I wanted to. So, yeah, it is a it's a deep connection.

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DAVID BENDER:

As you look at life now and we're going to talk about in the context of America, what makes you hopeful. Does anything make you hopeful?

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JASON ALEXANDER:

Yes, I think there is reason for hope globally. What we. The narrative that we are being fed right now in this year of our Lord, 2023 is of desperation and division and a lot of the division perhaps being a byproduct of desperation. There's. I mean, there's a lot of people struggling. Just a lot of people struggling and. When you're struggling like that, you are living in a state of fear. And any any, you know. Grade C, scientists will tell you when any animal is living in a state of fear long enough, that fear will turn to rage. You cannot



sustain living in fear. I have a theory about why we are so divided. It's just mind. I haven't heard it from anywhere else, but it all comes from Y2K. So if you recall the story we were told about the change of the century, Y2K was that our computer systems are technological systems, couldn't handle the calendar change, and they would collapse, which meant worldwide technology would collapse. And then January two showed up and everybody went still here. And so we dismissed that idea that we were coming into a cataclysmic new century. And we went, Oh, this is the turn of the calendar page. It was not just the turn of the calendar page. The 21st century, in these 23 years, barely resembles the 20th century. It is such a radical shift and it happened so fast. So now let's look at the two political values in the world. Progressive, conservative. If you're a progressive, change excites you and interests you. You're not fearful of change maybe a little bit where you may be overwhelmed, but you're not fearful of change. You know, technology shows up, You go, Well, that's interesting. Let's explore that. New possibilities. Let's explore that. New communities, new cultures, new powers. There you go. No fear in that. But if you are a conservative, change is a frightening thing. Conservatives believe in tradition. They believe in stability. They they cherish the history. And change. Especially fast change. Radical change is frightening because they think they don't see themselves being a part of it. They they fear, perhaps, that they can't keep up with it. They're going to get lost and that somehow they're going to suffer. Well, those two ideologies to me are is ingrained in your system as your sexual preference. You know, you don't choose to be a progressive. You don't choose to be a conservative. It's kind of wired in. And so you have the entire movement of the earth being pulled into different directions. And what we are experiencing, I believe, is the seam. It's



all that stress and tension on the seam. And everybody is going from both sides. It's going to rip. It's going to rip if we don't stop this. And as I tell my younger son, Noah, who is a little bit of a fatalist. And he, you know, he's convinced we ain't gonna make it. And I go. On any day that the world continues to turn. And we wake up the next day and it's a functioning world. You have to know one thing. There's a shit ton more good people on this planet than bad. When that changes, you'll know it. But with all the stuff you see, all the negativity, all the anger, the rage, the hate, the violence, that everything else is a shit shit. Ton more good people on this planet working for the light than there are not. And there's no hope. The worst thing we could do right now is for good people to abandon the dialog, Abandon the hope.

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DAVID BENDER:

One of the things our culture is not terribly good about is venerating our elders and listening to them talk to me. You know, I have a grandson as you see this. Do you think about mortality? Do you think about what you want to accomplish? How does that inform your thinking about what's ahead for you?

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JASON ALEXANDER:

I've become more jealous of time as I get older. Because I know there's less of it. There's nothing left that I need to do, although there's a lot of things I'd like to do. I again, going back to my mom, I find these days more and more opportunity to be of service. To use the mind boggling and certainly disproportionate blessings that I've been given in my life and somehow pay it



back and pay it forward. The only thing I'm greedy of when it comes to time is I want to see. Things I want to see. My grandson is an adult. I want to know what he thinks, what he chooses to do with his life. I am very curious to see what's going to happen. And you just want a lot of the time I spend these days is teaching and talking. I think that younger people are actually, for the most part, they're kind of fascinated. But it's not about tell my story. I'm not a big fan of telling my story. I'm a big fan of going, Tell me your story and let me see if there's anything I can give you. That may help you. That's why I do the Q&A. That's why I do the teaching. That's why I do any of that, this kind of stuff. I could make my sons, one said to me. Julia Louis-Dreyfus was getting her star on the Walk of Fame and she asked me if I would be part of that ceremony. I was thrilled to do it. And I came home and my boys said to me that you have one of those. They said, Do you want one? I said, Well, I never really thought about it. I said, They threw it at me. I'd probably take it. But, you know, I can We'll take you guys up there and we could walk three blocks. You won't know a single name on that floor. And they're all important people in their day. And and they were kind of perplexed by that. And I said, guys, here's here's the truth. As far as I can tell you, when I'm gone, there's only two people on the planet that I care about if and how they remember me. And I'm looking at both of them and the rest of it and matter to me. So none of none of what I want to do with the rest of my time is about to tell my story. But I am really interested in hearing yours and seeing if my story can be one of my storyteller. Can my story enlighten, entertain, educate? You know, uplift if it can. There's a reason to tell my story without it. I mean, I'm your best audience.

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DAVID BENDER:

I want to ask you, why is storytelling important in our culture and in life?

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JASON ALEXANDER:

I don't know why storytelling is so. Intrinsicly a part of the human experience. But I do know it is. We know that going back to prehistoric time from as early as humans could stand upright, there was some effort to share our experiences and whether that was with a spoken language or whether that was depicted with paintings on a wall or movement. There was always some desire to reenact our experience for each other. Sometimes it is about. The experience resonates with us in such a powerful way that the only way to contain it in ourselves is to share it with others. To sort of give pieces of it away. Other times there's an excitement or a call to educate or inform somebody else through an experience that you've had sometimes. And I don't know why human beings are drawn to this. We have an innate desire to entertain and amuse each other to share. LAUGHTER. I recently learned we're not the only creatures on this planet that are capable of laughing, but we seem to have mastered the art and we seem to require it. And we. We really seem to require it at times of great stress or challenge. When they when they came up with that great phrase, laughter's the best medicine. There is truth to that. So I think we are called to storytelling for all of those reasons to to literally try and divest ourselves a little bit of something that is so overwhelming we can't contain it or to help inform each other and educate each other. Or this strange calling. We seem to have to entertain and amuse



each other as I assume a way of bonding and holding our mutual humanity. But it is ancient, and I hope it is eternal. If we lose it. I think we essentially lose our humanity itself.

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DAVID BENDER:

And joy for you. I've asked this of everyone I want to ask you, what do you listen to that gives you pleasure musically?

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JASON ALEXANDER:

You know, music. So the reason why I always start something is what's your favorite song? I go, What am I feeling? Where am I? There isn't. The music is, to me one of the easiest ways to tell you exactly where you are in your in any given moment. It is the window into your soul. So if I said to you, don't think stop right now, just close your eyes. Some song is going to come into your head. What is that song that's going to tell you a lot about who you are, where you are in this moment in time, and what you need. Do I need to hear? You know, the Bangles, Billy Joel, Stephen Sondheim or Rachmaninoff? You know, it's what I love about music more than anything else. Think about how much music there has. There's seven notes for actually. Say, 14, 13, 13 notes. 12. When I talk about 12, 13. That's whatever. This. That's how much of a moron I am right now. But that's all there is. Look at how it has been used over and over and over and over and over. Is it incident? Is music infinite? Is that. Is that the voice of God? Is music the voice of God? Because. It. It never stops creating. It never stops. It's one of the most fascinating. It's magic. It's magic.



Especially people who are so good that they got gobbled up in Manitoba and that immediately comes out in their fingers. There's no interpreter. Of I have an avatar. But what is happening right now. It is and Alzheimer's patients. So they are. They don't know who you are. They remember the songs. There's something. If I was going to be a really big philosopher, I'd say the day the as you know, Don McLean wrote, the day the music dies, humanity dies.

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DAVID BENDER:

You can't top that. But the song that's in my head right now is Do you Believe in Magic?

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JASON ALEXANDER:

Oh, there you go.

END TC: 00:22:13:00