

SEBASTIAN MANISCALCO BIO

In 2019, Sebastian Maniscalco continued reaching heights that few comedians could ever dream about. With a string of record-breaking, sold-out arena shows including the United Center in his hometown of Chicago, Boston's TD Garden, The Forum in LA and New York's Madison Square Garden; a new Netflix original special called "Stay Hungry;" the launch of his brand-new *You Bother Me* tour; and a starring role alongside Robert DeNiro, Al Pacino, and Joe Pesci in Martin Scorsese's Oscar-nominated *The Irishman*, it's no surprise that *Pollstar* presented him with 2019's Comedy Tour of the Year award.

That success follows a number of blockbuster years for the comedian, author and actor that have included releasing a best-selling memoir, *Stay Hungry*; landing a role in *Green Book*, which won Best Picture at the Academy Awards and receiving *Billboard*'s inaugural Comedian of the Year award.

Maniscalco's five television comedy specials (for Netflix, Showtime and Comedy Central) scaled new ratings heights, prompting NBC's *Nightly News* to dub him "comedy's new superstar." His most recent special, "Stay Hungry," was filmed in 2018 during a run of five sold-out shows at Radio City Music Hall. The same week the special was released on Netflix in January 2019, he performed an astonishing four sold-out shows at Madison Square Garden, breaking the record for highest-grossing comedy event ever in North America. That trajectory continued all year with Maniscalco breaking the record for highest gross for a single performance (e.g., one event) comedy show at TD Garden in Boston and putting on the biggest comedy show in the history of Chicago's United Center and with 21,286 tickets sold, the event also broke his own record of best attendance at a single show.

It is no wonder the *New York Times* called him "the hottest comic in America." And while some might take a break, the Chicago-born Maniscalco is not one to rest on his laurels—it's a work ethic drilled into him by his father. And so, in 2020, the man dubbed "the comedian's comedian" by *People* magazine shows no sign of slowing down.

As a profile in *Vulture* noted, "Maniscalco, without a breakout TV or film role, built a tremendous fan base the old-fashioned way: one joke at a time, one audience at a time." The comedian expresses great pride in this hard-fought path. "When I first started doing comedy, I never thought about doing arenas," he says. "But in the course of 21 years, hitting the pavement, taking pictures with people, I developed a very loyal fan base. A couple would come to a show, then they'd come back and bring their family or their neighbors, and it just kinda swelled. Now you have limo buses pulling up to the shows—it's just staggering."

Jerry Seinfeld's "favorite comedian" has been one of *Pollstar*'s Top 30 highest-grossing performers in the world the last three years consecutively. Named one of the Top 10 highest-grossing comedians in the world in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019

by *Forbes*, Maniscalco has taken full advantage of this new platform. “With the success of the comedy, other opportunities opened themselves up,” says the man who hosted the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards. “I’m able to take on projects I’m passionate about, just do really quality stuff—I’m fortunate to be in a position where I can really calculate what I’m doing and not spread myself too thin.”

Known for his distinctive, physical style—he’s “not just telling a joke, he’s showing it, too,” as *The New York Times* wrote—perhaps Maniscalco’s most impressive feat is his leap into the highest levels of dramatic cinema. “The goal is not to be the next Denzel Washington, but to have some fun and be creative in another realm,” he says. “It was just unbelievable, doing those movies back to back. We shot *Green Book* in November, and *The Irishman* in December—coming straight off a set with Viggo Mortenson, then going toe-to-toe with DeNiro and Pesci.

“I grew up loving all these guys, so throwing me in that mix was a little daunting,” he continues. “But it’s a chance to exercise a different muscle, and I thought it would be interesting to give myself a little more dimension.”

Maniscalco expresses more surprise regarding *Stay Hungry*, his best-selling book. “I thought writing books was reserved for ex-presidents and people who survived disasters,” he says. “But I did think there were stories—old jobs I had, meeting my wife—where the best way to share them would be to wrap it up in a book. It’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done, it took a while, but I’m very proud of it.”

Since moving to Los Angeles in 1998, Maniscalco has served as a textbook example of perseverance and hustle, initially earning his place as a favorite at Los Angeles’ legendary Comedy Store. After Vince Vaughn enlisted him for his popular “Wild West Comedy Show,” Maniscalco began his ascent to what *Pollstar* dubbed “the vanguard of a live comedy revolution,” becoming a favorite on late-night television and a touring juggernaut, eventually being named Just For Laughs’ Stand Up Comedian of the Year in 2016.

But the biggest focus for Sebastian Maniscalco in 2020 is taking his observational comedic style to the fans on his *You Bother Me* tour. “I constantly walk around going, ‘This guy bothers me,’” he says. “Things you would probably just blow off, I get incensed by. But out of that kernel comes really great stuff. My wife never worked in a restaurant, but I worked in restaurants my whole life. So, a lot of the show is just taking the audience through things like the entire experience of going to a sit-down dinner with my wife and her family and all the things that annoy me.”

Maniscalco notes that all of his accomplishments and visibility definitely create new hurdles for his comedy. “You reach some type of success and people start to recognize the act,” he says. “Coming up, you go into Dallas and just do your act and try to have people see it. Along the way, people expect new material, but they still have favorite bits you want to pepper in. In some ways, it’s almost tougher to stay at the top than it is to get there.”

All he can do, he says, is keep living his life and finding new experiences and observations to draw from—including his son, nine-month old Caruso, who joined three-year-old daughter Serafina last summer. “Going from hotel to hotel, life gets more monotonous,” he says, “so doing stuff with family is even more important. Toddler groups, music class, gymnastics—the more I get out there, the more material I have to extract from.”