

## Arts &amp; Entertainment

# Kunal Nayyar a Big Hit on TV's 'Big Bang Theory'

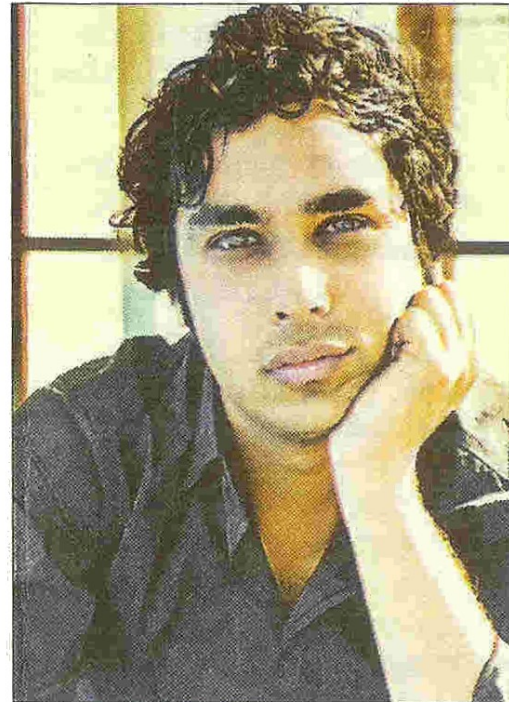
By NICK THOMAS  
Special to India-West

Back in 2007, Kunal Nayyar was doing his third or fourth episode of the CBS comedy "The Big Bang Theory," when he looked out into the studio audience and realized he was part of something special.

"They were clapping wildly, enjoying the show, and even though they didn't know us that well, I could tell they were beginning to develop an affection for the characters," Nayyar, 28, told **India-West** from Los Angeles. "That's essential for any show to become successful."

Now in its third season, with a fourth planned for 2010, "Big Bang" has gone on to become one of the most popular sitcoms on TV this year and now pulls in up to 13 million viewers each Monday night.

Nayyar plays Rajesh "Raj" Koothrappali, one of the four brilliant scientists who are totally absorbed in the world of science, engineering, and computers. Raj, together with buddies Leonard, Sheldon, and Howard, also share a fanatical interest in science fiction, video gaming, and comic books, but unfortunately lack the social skills required to connect with their 20-something non-academic contemporaries. And therein lies much of the show's comedic appeal.



London-born actor Kunal Nayyar grew up in India and came to the United States at the age of 18 to study business. (Meg Perotti photo)

The series, however, had a rocky start. "The first season, we got caught up with the writers' strike," said Nayyar. "We had done seven episodes and felt we were gaining momentum, then the [writers'] strike came along. Audiences are fickle and we were worried they wouldn't come back. But after the four-month break, they did — they were loyal to us."

Unlike the show's other main actors who have considerable TV experience, Nayyar comes from mainly a theater background but has been able to adapt to the small screen.

"In TV, you have to be very subtle with your facial expressions and physical comedy. The viewers are sitting just a few feet

from their TV sets and the camera picks up everything."

Chuck Lorre, the show's co-creator, writer and executive producer, says Nayyar was hired for the role despite his lack of TV experience.

"When Kunal walked in for the audition, we recognized his talent immediately — we were lucky to find him," Lorre told **India-West** by phone from Los Angeles. "He has great comic instinct and has become a terrific part of this ensemble. Nor did we set out to make his character Indian, but we did want reflect that scientists are diverse and come from all cultures."

Nayyar was born in London, where his parents had been living for many years, before he and his family moved to New Delhi when he was 4. He moved to the U.S. at 18 to study business at a university in Portland, Ore., but also took acting classes. After winning some acting awards, and applying to graduate school, he completed a master's degree at Temple University in Philadelphia. His theater credits included "Huck and Holden" at the Los Angeles Dahlia Theater, and Shakespeare's "Love's Labor's Lost" in England.

For fun, he has played badminton and is a huge cricket fan. And like his TV character, Nayyar admits to having a few "geekish" traits. "I'm a huge 'Star Wars' and 'Lord of the Rings' fan. I played the board game, 'Star Wars Epic



Kunal Nayyar (c) costars with Johnny Galecki (l) and Jim Parsons (r) on "The Big Bang Theory." (Cliff Lipson/CBS photo)

Duels,' with friends throughout three years of college," he said.

"The Big Bang Theory" is seen on television in dozens of countries, including India, where it appears on the Zee Café network.

"Our fans are very passionate about the show," he says. "We'd be nothing without them."