

News+ Reviews

THE MOST IMPORTANT TAKES OF THE MONTH



ILLUSTRATION BY MATT CHASE

CONTENTS ↓

○	MOVIES	P. 76
○	TV	P. 84
○	MUSIC	P. 92
○	BOOKS	P. 99

LAUGH IN THE TIME OF CORONA

TIMES ARE TOUGH, BUT LAUGHS CAN HELP EASE
THE PAIN—AND THEY'RE MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER

By Lynn Harris

PERHAPS YOU'VE TRIED EGO Nwodim's quarantine makeup tips, achieving a "chill, everyday vibe" with the creative use of Crayola markers, courtesy of a recent *Saturday Night Live at Home* sketch. Maybe you were a virtual guest alongside Dan Levy and Billy Porter at *Saturday Night Seder*, a celeb-studded charity event that made a lonely Passover both heartwarming and hilarious. Ideally, you've heeded the advice of experts, summarized on YouTube by former *Voice* contestant Adley Stump: "Don't be afraid of [this virus]. It can only kill those who are vulnerable, and also those who are not vulnerable." Surely you've chosen your "quarantine name" (mood + what you last ate = "Topsy Burrito"). Maybe you've also picked your "quarantine house," a riff on the choose-your-celebrity-lunch-table meme that's spawned its own iterations, like the one with all the worst people (Stalin, Goebbels, Jar Jar Binks).

Tragically, there's no live club stand-up or improv right now—R.I.P., UCB! But there's comedy everywhere else: in Kate McKinnon's hallway, Tom Hanks' kitchen,

John Krasinski's den, and a kajillion memes gone...well, you know. This is what happens when calamity delivers comedy, in real time. Today, comedy equals tragedy plus Zoom.

Compared with the previous worst thing ever, this is a little different. On Sept. 11, 2001, for one long moment, comedy felt impossible, almost immoral. Pundits gave reports on the death of irony (in hindsight, greatly exaggerated). *The Daily Show* returned with a Jon Stewart monologue that called comedy a "luxury" and made us cry. At the Friars Club roast of Hugh Hefner—where jokes go to cross the line—Gilbert Gottfried's bit about a plane and the Empire State Building was heckled as "too soon." Satirical outlet *The Onion* scrapped its issue dated that day and took a week to let the shock subside. "We'd watched it from our rooftops," says then staff member John Krewson. "We couldn't write anything."

Our country is again staggering, grieving and girding for exponentially larger loss. But now the funny people, stuck at home, *are* writing—and thank God. We've needed comedy since the start of this crisis,



← This just in: John Krasinski behind his makeshift anchor desk on his new weekly web show *Some Good News*, where he provides laughs and heartwarming stories every Sunday night

and not just because “laughter is the best medicine.” (A COVID-19 vaccine is the best medicine.) Comedy today is a first responder for our souls, its arm around us as we collectively lose our s---. It is definitely not too soon.

“Comedy has gotten harder,” says Krewson, “but its job is the same: to reassure people that they’re not alone.”

That’s what *The Onion* did when it roared back with its legendary post-9/11 issue, with articles like “Not Knowing What Else To Do, Woman Bakes American-Flag Cake” that poignantly captured our stunned, stumbling response.

This type of comedy-as-therapy is what we’re craving now. As always, plenty of jokes out there won’t age well, or should never have seen the light of whatever it is we now call “day.” But mostly—as in the

9/11 *Onion*—the lines are clear. Death: not funny. Our fear, our drunk haircuts, our clumsy humanity? Hilarious. We are fair game.

And so we’re mainlining memes, especially those that look directly into the sweatpanted belly of the restless, quarantined beast. “Humor is honest about scary things,” says Trina DasGupta, CEO of Single Palm Tree Productions and an expert on content that drives behavioral change. “And translating fear into comedy can help make your anxiety feel normal—and universal. Like you’re not alone in it.” Even the silliest TikTok can be a magic mirror that says: You’re not crazy. Everyone gets the joke.

Comedian-actor-writer-podcast cohost Naomi Ekperigin is seeing, and making, that happen in real time. (Her “How are we ending phone conversations now that we

don’t have anywhere to go?” scored nearly 50K likes.) She and her comedian fiancé, Andy Beckerman, have begun live-Twitching their *Couples Therapy* podcast, chatting with listeners as they mine the veins of COVID malaise and relationship-in-place. “It’s amazing how many responses we’re getting that we would not otherwise,” she says. “There’s lots of ‘Yes, girl I feel you!’ Sounds hokey, but when you laugh at fear you conquer it.”

Which, admittedly, is a privilege. Not everyone’s life now is home-schooling slapstick and sourdough (@Yassir_Lester: “I’m sorry but did white people not have access to bread before the quarantine”). The “we” for whom comedy is balm excludes many in crisis or on the margins. It’s only funny until someone loses...everything.

Comedians have lost plenty too. For us, it’s charming to see our favorite stand-ups sitting on couches. For them, it’s months of work gone poof. Their jobs are physically safe, but they can’t see or hear us laugh. So for those who depend on humans in rooms, this is a monumental bummer. Comedy didn’t need this dumb virus in order to evolve and delight. But here we are. We don’t know what comedy—or anything—will look like on the other side, but comedy will help us get there, and help us be kind of okay when we do. ●



Laugh In

YOU MAY BE STUCK INDOORS, BUT DON’T SOCIALLY DISTANCE FROM THE COMEDY CIRCUIT. AFTER CHEERING UP WITH HANNAH GADSBY: DOUGLAS (SEE PAGE 30), SIT DOWN WITH THESE UPCOMING STAND-UP SPECIALS. **By Dan Snierson**



Patton Oswalt:
I Love Everything
(NETFLIX, MAY 19)

After the Emmy/Grammy-winning comedy wizard tackles turning 50, he masterfully deconstructs the Denny’s menu.



Jesus Trejo:
Stay at Home Son
(SHOWTIME, MAY 29)

Watch Trejo (*Mr. Iglesias*) recount assisting in his mom’s robbery and steal laughs with a riff on...a faulty hourglass.



Esther Povitsky:
Hot for My Name
(COMEDY CENTRAL, JUNE 5)

The *Dollface* star mixes underdog jokes with a trip home to learn why her dynamic with her parents led her to seek laughs.



Yvonne Orji:
Momma, I Made It!
(HBO, JUNE 6)

Know Orji only as an *Insecure* standout? See her effortlessly command the stage (and visit Nigeria) in her first special.



Eric Andre:
Legalize Everything
(NETFLIX, JUNE 23)

The subversive Adult Swim star impersonates a bong-hitting, pants-dropping cop—and then things get weird(er).