

Entertainment WEEKLY

Jonathan Katz on the legacy of 'Dr. Katz' and his new album 'Dr. Katz Live'

By [Kyle Anderson](#) on Oct 21, 2014 at 1:29PM [@KyleAEW](#)



Image Credit: Michael Fein

In between *Mystery Science Theater 3000* and *South Park*, Comedy Central's biggest breakout was a cheaply made animated show called *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*. Co-created by comedian Jonathan Katz and animator/producer Tom Snyder, it starred Katz as the titular shrink and his relationships with his receptionist (Laura Silverman) and his son (H. Jon Benjamin, now of *Archer* and *Bob's Burgers* fame). The show was fleshed out by comedians like Ray Romano, Dom Irrera, Dave Attell, Louis C.K., Denis Leary, Jon Stewart, and Janeane Garofalo.

The show last aired in 2002, but a few years back, Katz dusted off his old Dr. Katz character to perform a live show, which is finally getting an audio release today as *Dr.*

Katz Live. The special features Katz going through his own session with Snyder (who plays Katz's therapist), then finds him welcoming Andy Kindler, Eugene Mirman, and B.J. Novak. "These live shows are very different," Katz explains. "In the cartoon, I was essentially a straight man. In the live show, Tom Snyder plays my therapist, so I get to make jokes. Part of the deal is that he is there to sit in on sessions with my patients, and nobody gives him permission. We're all sitting on the stage within earshot of each other, and we were pretending that Tom couldn't hear us even though he's ten feet away from us."

Katz was particularly impressed with his guests. "When I'm talking to Eugene Mirman, I couldn't stop laughing," he says. "I think I was laughing harder than the audience or my patients. B.J. Novak was much more in the moment than I was. He mentioned that I had broken my fourth wall when I said I thought somebody was backstage, and he was like, 'What are you talking about? I'm a patient. Why would I be backstage anywhere?' Andy Kindler poses the question, 'Dr. Katz, why are our sessions always miked?'"

Kindler was a throwback. "Andy was in the first season, and he's in one of my favorite episodes called 'Mourning Person,' where Dr. Katz is giving a eulogy, but he can't stop laughing, and Ben is in the back trying to get me through it," he explains. "He was a great guest."

Katz was also glad to give a platform to Snyder, an unsung hero of the *Dr. Katz* legacy. "Tom Snyder is a wonderful storyteller and a musician—he wrote all the music to the show, and he introduced me to the world of audio engineering, which he had been working in for years," Katz says. "He's somebody who has a background in educational software, and he is an innovator and a scientist and an educator. He kind of fell into comedy by accident."

The origins of *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist* lie in Katz's background. "I know all the moves as a therapist, because I've been in and out of therapy all my life," says Katz. "And I live in Newton, Massachusetts, where we have the highest per-capita population of therapists. If I go outside of my home right now and yell, 'I need help!' somebody will offer me some kind of anti-depressant. Therapy is uncomfortable. In the very beginning,

I took the role of Dr. Katz literally, and I was actually trying to help people. I made one woman cry, and I made some guy feel better by accident.”

The show, which will be celebrating its 20th anniversary next year, has a deep legacy in comedy: Producer Loren Bouchard went on to launch *Bob's Burgers*, and a huge series of comedians got an early screen credit on *Professional Therapist*. “In the beginning I was calling in favors from comedians I had worked with when I was doing stand-up,” says Katz. Like Dom Irrera, who is a guy I started out in comedy with, and he was on the show more than anybody. I would describe him as sort of an obscene poet, because he is truly disgusting, but so funny. His use of words is amazing.”

“But then it became a thing comedians wanted to do. It was a good credit for them,” Katz continues. “The fact that we had these brilliant comedians was wonderful in terms of marketing, and in terms of getting 11 minutes of a 22 minute show written by other people. Some of the comedy is brilliant, and it was more of an acting job than a stand-up job, and Ray Romano was the first guy to really figure that out. Then I got a little carried away and heard that Winona Ryder wanted to be on the show. Just the idea of being alone in a studio with her was kind of exciting. I made the trip to L.A. and discovered it was a bad idea. She was perfectly charming, but she’s not a comedian. I guess they call that jumping the shark.”

Katz doesn't perform as much as he used to thanks to multiple sclerosis, though he can be heard on [his podcast *Hey, We're Back*](#) and on the Snyder-produced animated web series [Explosion Bus](#). He's currently developing an idea for a TV show with Snyder and former *Cheers* and *Seinfeld* writer Tom Leopold. In the meantime, [Dr. Katz Live is available now](#).

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