

SF WEEKLY

Like TV Father, Like TV Son: Jonathan Katz and Jon Benjamin Are Strange, But Not Stranged

By [Emilie Mutert](#) Wednesday, Jan 21 2015

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the first season of *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*, the squiggly cartoon featuring comic Jonathan Katz essentially playing himself as a therapist to a never-ending series of neurotic patients, voiced by comedians from Louis CK to Julia Louis-Dreyfus. Voice celebrity Jon Benjamin, aka television's Archer from *Archer*, and Bob from *Bob's Burgers*, played Katz's son Ben, who was always getting notions, for the entirety of *Dr. Katz's* six-season run on Comedy Central.



This year the two are back together, on stage, for yet another Sketchfest reunion show. Yes, it's sold out, and it has been for weeks. That's why *SF Weekly* is kindly providing this consolation: a transcript of a phone conversation between these two iconic Jons, one of whom was in a falafel restaurant for at least part of the time.

Jonathan Katz: Jon, are you on with us?

Jon Benjamin: I am, Jon, how are you? Thank you for doing this.

Katz: Oh please.

SF Weekly: Thank you both for doing this.

Katz: Emilie, do you have any background in the law?

SFW: No.

Katz: Do you know if it's against the law to yell "Dr. Katz" in a crowded theater? I can't believe I've been trying to answer that online for the last hour.

Benjamin: I hope you have one more.

Katz: Where are you, on the East Coast?

Benjamin: Yeah, I'm in a falafel shop on the East Coast. That's not code for anything. That's just why you'll hear Moroccan jazz in the background. It'll end soon. I'm just waiting.

Katz: I can't believe I just downloaded my first ringtone.

Benjamin: Congratulations.

Katz: Oh wait, I did something else yesterday which you'll get a kick out of. Emilie, this will mean nothing to you, I apologize. But yesterday I was so lonely I turned to video chat with [another comedian,] Adam Mutterperl.

Benjamin: That's pretty desperate.

Katz: Yeah. I could see him, but I couldn't hear him, and that was fine.

Benjamin: All those people in the San Francisco area will appreciate that reference.

Katz: I'll tell you one thing about San Francisco. I was there in the turbulent '60s, and I saw a sign that said "End Construction." Kind of a bizarre cause, but I was glad that spirit was still alive.

Benjamin: Oh my gosh.

Katz: What? She wants jokes that are 40 years old.

Benjamin: That describes me.

Katz: You know, Emilie, Jon used to be an acoustic engineer for IBM when we met.

SFW: Oh? How did you meet?

Katz: There were a number of ways our paths crossed. The first was — when was the first time we met? Was it the Cross Comedy days?

Benjamin: Yeah.

Katz: Jon was part of a sketch group called Cross Comedy, which was David Cross' group. And I was doing standup. I did standup for 15 years before we did *Dr. Katz*. The second time we met was at a club in New York City. One of the interesting things about the show *Dr. Katz* is that during the making of the show, Jon was living with Laura [Silverman, who played Katz's secretary on the show and who is, incidentally, Sarah's sister], they were a couple. And things tend to go south, and when I say south, well, we tended to exploit that on the show. They never got along that well on the show.

Benjamin: It spilled over a little bit. And I apologize for that.

Katz: One of the things about Jon Benjamin, you'll forgive me, Jon, is that—

Benjamin: No, please.

Katz: It's almost impossible to write for him. So many people I know have tried to write for him, and anything you write for him, he will say something funnier. On the other hand, reading him is not so bad.

SFW: What's the reunion show going to be like?

Benjamin: Well we've done these before. It'll follow the same pattern. There's a lot of droning on, and then they do the show very much like they did the animated show. It's just, comedians will come on, and they'll talk to Jon as their therapist, and I come in and talk to Jon.

Katz: The most significant difference with the live show is that I too am in therapy with Tom Snyder, the producer.

Benjamin: Oh right, I forgot about that part, sorry. I wanted that to be a surprise, but whatever.

Katz: That's how the show begins, is I'm up on stage in therapy with Tom Snyder. But by the time the show's over—

Benjamin: There's a guaranteed six or seven therapists on stage by the end.

Katz: And Tom asks all my patients if they mind if he, he's there to observe my work, which happens in therapy, so he's trying to see if I'm on top of my game as a therapist. And he asks my patients if they mind if he listens in. And they almost always say yes, they do mind.

SFW: But he stays anyway.

Katz: Yeah. He has nowhere to go really.

Benjamin: He could walk off, but...

SFW: So it's not even a courtesy to ask the patients.

Benjamin: He's kind of a Greek chorus.

Katz: I don't know what that means, but yes.

Benjamin: It's an old reference.

Katz: Oh, you mean the ancient Greeks.

Benjamin: I think so, but they still do it. Some things never change with the Greeks.

Katz: One of the other things we pretended the last time we did this show in San Francisco was that my patients could see Tom but, or no, Tom could see them, but he couldn't hear them. It was just a really stupid idea.

Benjamin: So did he have like noise-canceling headphones?

Katz: No, we just pretended it for some reason, I don't know why.

Benjamin: Oh got it, a theater trick. It doesn't sound great right now, but it's brilliant when you see it.

Katz: What's the hardest you've ever laughed, Emilie?

SFW: I'm always trying to laugh harder than I laughed the last time, so I suppose it would be the last time I laughed.

Katz: Well I promise you that, if you come to this show —

Benjamin: You'll cry.

Katz: I know the show's sold out, it's been sold out for a while, so that's good.

SFW: Does it feel like it's been 20 years?

Katz: Since you called? No! No, it's been a long time. And I think the character of Dr. Katz is so much like me, and the character of Jon Benjamin as Ben is so much like me. It's really such a familiar character to me.

Benjamin: Well you've aged since the show. I don't know if you've noticed.

Katz: But, my mind—

Benjamin: No that's true. If you shut your eyes—

Katz: Yeah. I'm much older, but Dr. Katz is 49. And Jon Benjamin is older than 24. We'll stop pretending he's in his twenties.

Benjamin: No, I'll wear sunglasses and a wig.

SFW: So people don't recognize you? Or so they think you're younger?

Benjamin: That's my go-to when I want to look 24.

SFW: What kind of wig?

Benjamin: Like a Jewfro.

Katz: Emilie, you know San Francisco had such a unique comedy scene when I did standup there for the first time. It was totally self-contained. You could be a star in San Francisco and be unknown everywhere else. That was cool. Sorry, you'll hear my dog in the background.

Benjamin: Or is that your ringtone?

Katz: No the ringtone — I haven't downloaded it yet. It's the song "That's What Friends Are For."

Benjamin: So obnoxious.

Katz: Oh can you imagine?

SFW: How does it go?

Katz: You know that song? Stevie Wonder? (Singing) "The good times, the bad times, I'll be on your side, forever more, in good times, in bad times, I'll be on your siiide foreevermore." You know, I tend to travel light when I go to San Francisco, but I'm thinking about bringing my lap-steel guitar. What do you think of that idea? (To someone) I'm talking with Jon Benjamin and Emilie from *San Francisco Daily*.

SFW: *Weekly*.

Katz: *Weekly*.

Benjamin: Is that Suzi?

Katz: Yeah. My wife just had her knee replaced.

Benjamin: Really? I'm sorry.

Katz: Yeah. I was a donor. You know, I know it's illegal to yell "Fire" in a crowded theater. But I did it once in Cambridge, and I saved 500 lives.

Benjamin: Was there a fire?

Katz: No. Just a really bad movie. Well so is it *Charlie Hebdo*, or *Charlie Hedbo*?

Benjamin: Oh my God.

SFW: Go for it.

Katz: How do you feel about that as a journalist, Emilie?

SFW: I think that news outlets should have shown the cover.

Katz: So cowardly that some of them don't. And they think it's okay to show people being massacred. But not to show a cartoon. Do you have kids?

SFW: No.

Katz: Would you like to carry my — no, I've strayed too far. If I stay on the phone long enough I will say something inappropriate.

Benjamin: It's never too late to ask.

SFW: Do you two still talk regularly?

Benjamin: Yeah. Twice a year maybe, on the high holidays?

SFW: Are you both in New York?

Katz: I'm in Newton, Massachusetts. It's a beautiful place.

SFW: Are you excited that Boston might host the Olympics?

Katz: Yeah I am excited, that's kind of cool. Is it the summer Olympics?

Benjamin: You've always wanted to see a decathlon.

Katz: Jon and I used to play both table tennis and regular tennis together.

SFW: Who's better?

Benjamin: Jon's really accomplished at table tennis. Anything table-related, really. I think I beat him once.

Katz: Yeah you did. That was my first symptom of MS. I think it was triggered by Squigglevision.

Benjamin: No, he's very good. I think I'm better at regular tennis.

Katz: We played doubles once, you played with Laura and I played with my brother-in-law. Oh yeah, he cheated. He's a viciously competitive guy.

SFW: How did he cheat?

Katz: Well, he would call a ball that Laura or Jon hit as "out" when it was not.

Benjamin: That was a tough ethical dilemma for you.

Katz: You know my wife lived in San Francisco for a summer, and her first day there she witnessed a murder in a parking lot.

SFW: No way. Was it a stabbing?

Katz: I think it was a gunshot. She had to go to court to testify, but it was an awful way to arrive in a city.

Benjamin: The last time I was there I saw a man defecating on the street. But I did not press charges. I didn't even clean it up.

SFW: No, you don't have to.

Benjamin: Leave it to the city.

SFW: I've really enjoyed listening to you two talk.

Katz: Do I sound at all paternal when I talk to Jon Benjamin?

SFW: Yeah, do you think of him as your son?

Katz: I will on Jan. 23.

Benjamin: I think in the way that I'm always disappointing you.

Katz: No, that's not true, don't say that. I think so highly of you and what it is that you're capable of.

Benjamin: You do sound like a dad now.

SFW: Talk about his potential.

Katz: Oh it's endless. It's really endless.

Benjamin: That's why I hate you.

Katz: He's just exploding with ideas.

Benjamin: I'm excited to go through my new ideas with you.

Katz: I think some of them will be realistic while others of them might not be. I'm anxious to hear what they are.

<http://www.sfweekly.com/sanfrancisco/sf-sketchfest-2015-jonathan-katz-jon-benjamin/Content?oid=3349742>