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Best (and worst) comedy

By Jane Borden



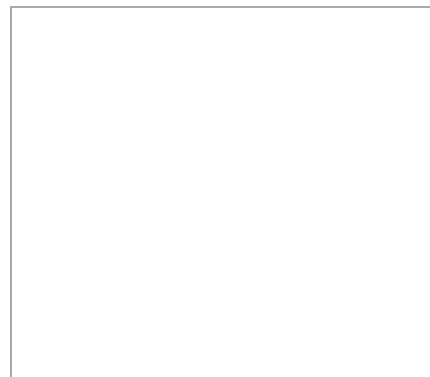
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Best stunt: When Kathy Griffin arrived at the Teen Choice Awards with Levi Johnston, she took her celebrity-mocking shtick to the next level. Even if the relationship was fake, she scored.

Best new venue: Prompted by a fan's dare, Chris Gethard took his show of candid and self-deprecating stories on the road—literally. Forty-plus lucky audience members rode a bus to, among other places, his childhood Jersey home where he pointed out the room in which he lost his virginity.

Most welcome guest: Fans of reclusive British chameleon comic Daniel Kitson were treated to his intelligent and touching new solo show, We Are Gathered Here, at this year's Eugene Mirman Comedy Festival.

Best homecoming: What a joy to see Kristen Schaal play in front of a packed Radio City,



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opening for Flight of the Conchords, with her foam mattress and pots and pans in tow.

Most deserved gig: We were thrilled to see Bill Burr headline the New York Comedy Festival alongside Ricky Gervais and Tracy Morgan. We predict he's about to make the leap from Opie & Anthony favorite to household name.

Most promising young talents: Cerebral stand-up Myq Kaplan and heartwarming storyteller Adam Wade sit head-and-shoulders above their peers.

Hardest goodbye: After five years of singing their way into the hearts of improv fans—and performing a positively transcendent set in this year's Del Close Marathon—Eliza Skinner and Glennis McMurray put their duo, I Eat Pandas, to bed. We're still hungry.

Biggest breakout: This year, 26-year-old Donald Glover landed a starring role in NBC's Community and released a feature film, *Mystery Team*, with his sketch group, Derrick. Also, he has more deals in the works with NBC, a forthcoming Comedy Central special and a new rap album—just because.

Hackiest joke: "Shut up and make me a sandwich" is a button we heard on a dozen jokes this year. Personally, we think sexist humor went out of style with the borscht belt, but even misogynists must crave something more inspired than that.

Most thoughtful show: Mike Daisey's latest monologue, *The Last Cargo Cult*, stimulates brains on multiple levels.

Best sketch show: *The Infinity Prison*, a one-act from BriTANick (Nick Kocher and Brian McElhane), was intricate, ambitious and stunningly silly.

Best local improv group: Week after week, *Death by Roo Roo* proves how smart dumb can be; yes, that's high praise.

Best stand-up: Months later, we are still laughing at—and sympathizing with—Louis C.K.'s retelling of being forced to let his dog crap on the floor.

Show of the year: Although the piece technically launched in '08, it is 2009 that belongs to *Sleepwalk with Me*. Mike Birbiglia's Off Broadway gem was everything a solo piece should be: hilarious, candid and gripping. And it actually made a little bit of money.

Report card

This was the year of the true-life tale. Comics turned inward for material and embraced long-form storytelling; they even, on occasion, got serious. And it was good—but not without consequence; we saw very little quality sketch. The trend is partly an effect of the recession; audiences want to laugh at and feel catharsis in woe-is-me honesty—an argument supported by this year's predominantly packed houses. Expensive clubs took a beating, but theaters and indie rooms overflowed with cash-strapped locals looking for an escape. Even the New York Comedy Festival, which should have taken a bath due to high-price tickets, had its best year yet.

But the other reason comics discovered confession is that they were running from irony... which means the pendulum will only continue to swing. **Final grade: A-**

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Aziz Ansari (February 4–6)

The Parks and Recreation star headlines the intimate Comix. Next time you'll be in the balcony of Carnegie Hall.

UCBT East (Spring)

The improv and sketch powerhouse is opening a space on Avenue A and 3rd Street. It's manifest destiny.

Improv will "cross over"

In 2009 we saw a feature film about T.J. and Dave, *Trust Us, This Is All Made Up*, and national buzz around the Improvised Shakespeare Co. *Longform* is about to enter the American lexicon.

The rebirth of sketch

After pouring out their hearts, comics will embrace divine absurdity again toward the end of the year. It will feel refreshing in its emptiness.

Supernormal

Tom Shillue's long-awaited storytelling show is set to open Off-Broadway.

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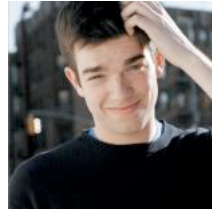
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