



Interview

A Conversation with *Comics Not Otherwise Specified* (CNOS)

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On June 24, 2021, the Canadian comedy troupe *Comics Not Otherwise Specified* (Michael McCreary, Pat Tiffin, Curran Dobbs, and Adam Schwartz) participated in an interview with the *Autism_Media_Social Justice* editors (Kennedy Ryan, Margaret Janse van Rensburg, Miranda J. Brady, and Kelly Fritsch). Our conversation, both awkward and profound, ran the gamut from labour rights and funding, to bombing, autistic stereotypes on TV, and importantly, racoons. Bios for the *Comics Not Otherwise Specified* follow the transcript below.

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Listen to the podcast online through the web link below:

https://mediaspace.carleton.ca/media/CNOS+Final_+26+Nov.+2021/1_52k1oxvu



Pictured from left to right, top to bottom: Margaret Janse van Rensburg, Miranda J. Brady, Kennedy Ryan, Kelly Fritsch, Curran Dobbs, Doug McCreary, Adam Schwartz, Michael McCreary, and Pat Tiffin.

Miranda We're having a conversation about comedy and the experiences of autistic people with the Canadian stand-up troupe *Comics not Otherwise Specified*. Our discussion is part of a special issue for the *Studies in Social Justice* journal out of Brock University. I'm Miranda and I'm joined by my co-editors, Kennedy, Margaret and Kelly as we talk to four autistic comedians. Michael McCreary, Adam Schwartz, Pat Tiffin and Curran Dobbs chat with us about comedy and how we can think of media as a matter of social justice. They also talked about their new podcast, *Comics Not Otherwise Specified* or CNOS, and the many different forms of media they work with. Kennedy got us started by asking the comedians about their name.

Michael Like most things, if they're in a medical journal, there is "not otherwise specified," refers to something that can be identified but not formally diagnosed. So, I think that what this is saying is that it's like they're technically comedians.

- Pat If we were a *Jeopardy* category, we'd be potpourri.
- Curran I personally believe when I describe myself as a comedian to include air quotes.
- Adam But Pat came up with a longer extended named "Comics, not the world's most awkward boy band..."
- Pat I was I was sort of looking at all sort of we all sort of fill that void in each category that we're in. So, it's just like [long pause] And now I lost my train of thought.
- Michael [With sarcasm] Yeah, we're an improv troupe folks!
- Adam Michael's the corporate bro, Curran is the indie darling, I'm the fringe sweetheart, and Pat is the club underdog.
- Michael And the twist is we're all the sensitive one... that's the dynamic.
- Pat I've called us a band full of Ringos a couple of times.
- Curran And, you know, it works as a name because it sounds like S.O.S, so that made the theme song kind of easy.
- Michael So, yeah, no, I said, what's copyright law in Canada? And, Curran's like, doesn't matter. I've already, I've already recorded it.
- Margaret Do you mind singing it for us? Because I don't think my co-editors here know.
- Curran It's basically me going, Sending out an NOS. Sending out an NOS, and then I do that a few times.
- Pat With a ukulele under it.
- Michael I feel really bad because Curran was like, you can cut that whatever you want, and it was just like a raw that was like a 90 second file and I'm pretty sure our producer, God bless him, put the whole thing in. You can just hear Curran running out of oxygen as he says this one joke for like...
- Curran Well, you know, I figured giving you guys too much is better than giving you guys too little. And I just assumed I'd go on a bit too long, and that way in that way... and you guys could cut it down to four or however many seconds...
- Michael It does. It gives us time to buffer well, like it gives us time to not research our guests so we can have a distraction.
- Margaret You know, you don't have to worry because everybody listens

- to podcasts on 1.5 or 2.0 speed. So, it is only 40 or 30 seconds, right?
- Michael I didn't know this. You can do that? You can get through stuff so much faster.
- Kennedy OK, and I'm also wondering, how do you guys approach the production side of it? Like you said that Curran will send you stuff, so Mike, do you do the post-production, or do you all collaborate on that?
- Pat We have a wonderful producer by the name of Christian who does that. I sort of take on the guest and research produced portion, sort of something I been able to cruise through my time like volunteering over at Rodgers here in London and something I have a knack for.
- Michael You can tell them you run the London Comedy Festival. You don't have to be...
- Pat Yeah, I was going to get to that at some point Mike.
- Michael Yeah, I did co-op in high school, so I know how to pick up a phone.
- Pat Yeah, I did that in my 20s, so that's a major chunk of time.
- Curran And they send us a raw copy of the audio just to give us the option of vetoing any bits, where, we like, we say something that we don't want to get out in public.
- Michael Don't tell them that Curran. Just so you know, we never said anything that would get us in trouble. It's fine.
- Curran It's not that anything that would get us in trouble, but if I go too far on my foot fungus issue, the audience doesn't want to hear that.
- Adam Yes, they do.
- Curran Exactly.
- Kennedy This one is a bit, I mean, we could go long on this, I'm assuming. But what do you love about comedy? All of you.
- Pat It's community for the most part. I find as being in the autistic community, my scene, that I have my own lane and I find that other people have their own lane. So when hanging out with professional comedians, they're used to people being super competitive. I'm just like, OK, I'm somewhat down to earth, I'm somewhat weird, I have Asperger's, so that that makes me

- interesting. So I think both sides benefit from that experience.
- Kennedy It's very important, I think, to know your niche. Like, there's a lot of power in that. What do you say?
- Adam Mm hmm. I would agree.
- Margaret It's interesting because a lot of your guests, they bring in their own niches, and autism comes up, but it's not like the focus, right? And I think that's really interesting how it is like a niche. However, at the same time, like, you're able to riff about other things. And just like...
- Michael The funny thing about that is that there are so many podcasts of neurotypical comedians talking about autism. The irony is, though, I just... I guess we can I mean, it's our...
- Pat So, our gimmick is in the reverse. So, when I was kind of pitching this to the guys like, I was like, you know how in any situation where we're in the green room, we're the only autistic person in that green room? This podcast would be the reverse of it. So, you're going to have four autistic comedians talking to one neurotypical person, see how that works out.
- Adam Then make sure that we're going to talk at them and over each other. So, it's funny that you mention that we do a good job of giving each other the chance to talk because our whole gimmick is that we talk over each other.
- Michael Yeah, it's like an audio documentary of like just a person being fed to lions. Like, what I mean is that it's just it's just someone who has like spent their lifetime accruing social skills and taking things for granted, like eye contact and waiting your turn to talk, being in a room with four men who have never learned how to do that. And it makes for I think it makes for good radio. It's fun.
- Kennedy I like that point, I'm also wondering, like, for someone who's never heard your podcast before, could you tell us a little bit more about what they could expect?
- Michael Sure. It's really like, um, and this is really thanks to Pat, who just gets these incredible guests for us. It's just a long form interview, but also semi roundtable discussion about, about comedy, just about like the last several episodes, especially the ones with like Mike Wilmot. And when we recorded with Sandra Battaglini, who used to run CASC the Canadian Association for Stand-up Comedians.

- Adam The mayor.
- Michael Yeah, exactly, the mayor of comedy. Like a lot of those episodes, sort of turned into the political where we're talking about really trying to platform people that are making a case for the Canadian stand-up comedy scene and how right now financially compromised people are. I mean, I couldn't say this, Sandra would do a better job or Monty Scott, who's their current president, would do a better job articulating this. But we want to platform a lot of comedians who are very vocal about sort of championing getting comics, among other things, unionized and getting heard and even getting them recognized for things like Canadian arts grants, which and again, until very recently and this is my ignorance showing, I didn't even know we couldn't apply for an arts grant. If, you're a circus performer, but you can't if you're if you're a comic.
- Pat There was this one guy who was from somewhere and he was originally from northern Ontario, moved to BC, and sort of spent some time in southwestern Ontario. But I hear he was one of the only people I've ever met who actually figured out how to get a fringe grant to do stand-up. And got that fringe grant, and it's possible, but rare.
- Michael Was he a ventriloquist or a magician?
- Pat Just, just normal.
- Michael Just normal.
- Adam Fringe shows are usually, are more like what? Mike Biblio, Biblio or...
- Michael Birbiglia, his name is Mike Birbiglia.
- Pat It's OK. It's like Mike trying to say the word.
- Adam So, where it's more storytelling and that's the art form where there's jokes worked in. But it's not, premise, punch line. I'm not sure how familiar you are with comedy jokes... like, when I was 12, my mom, I thought I was autistic so I must be an artist. So that's just a quick joke. But it's not really a story versus like a long form storytelling, which is a different art form.
- Michael So basically, if you have a stand-up set that isn't funny, you can get a grant. It's really easy.
- Curran You can get one of those... I've never applied for a grant, but I was able to qualify to apply for a grant by applying for

deferral... but I had to put myself down as like a different kind of professional artist than I identified as because I technically have done professional theater work, and I had to kind of lean on that more, although I personally see myself as more of a comedian, and that's because most of my theater work were friends or co-workers or whatever, getting me involved in their thing. Rather, as opposed to me doing comedy, which is something I have actively pursued myself on my own initiative.

Adam He did beat out a few mimes in a... contest.

Curran Yeah. Oh yeah. But a mime is a terrible thing to waste.

Margaret I think it's really interesting how you use your podcast as a way to kind of promote workers' rights and in a way like which is a broader issue. And you use comedy as a way to really like promote this change that you want to see in society. Do you have any hopes about when things hopefully reopen, about the state of on stage performing and stand up?

Adam People have articulated that.

Michael Pat, you had something on that.

Pat I was going to I was going to jump in on that one. Sorry, guys. I think as far as like on stage, I think they'll come back in London here. We sort of had like those two or three gaps of like solid yellow and orange time, it was like. Being able to hang around the comedy club during that, because as far as the comedy goes in London, it became a little bit easier because we didn't have enough budget so a lot of us got extra time. But you could see people once we got to the yellow areas and the orange areas, people want to get out, people want to see live again. And also, people want to actually be out and about. I like to call this like period of time like the golden age of babysitting because you just kept parents with their kids for a year and a half now. They're going to need some time away, post-haste as quickly as possible.

Michael Just to jump in here. My dad is on the call right now and we are recording from the same room. So I'm just letting you know there is credence to Pat's observation.

Curran But one thing I like about the live shows, you get immediate, honest feedback. If you're doing well, the audience lets you know and you can believe them. And if you're doing poorly, same deal usually.

- Michael Yeah, I had a question here actually asking if you guys like how you handle bombing. And like Curran was saying, I would rather like bombing than like polite sort of sort of forced laughter because at least, you know, there's clarity there. I mean, for an autistic person, it's not like you are incapable of inferring the thoughts and emotions of other people. But you need people the to to to play it up a little bit, ham handedly, if that makes sense. Like because like the problem for me when I'm trying to infer where people are at. Right. I understand that there's usually a conflict of interest between verbal and body language. Right. Like people are people are saying one thing, but the body is demonstrating something else. And usually that's not always the case. People just have like people just have like a face that just that just looks mean all the time. So you don't know. It's nobody's fault it's just what it is sometimes. But in a stand-up format, what's really great is if people don't like you, they'll let you know by just rejecting you outright. And as horrible as that's not like booing, but just by simply not laughing, by not smiling or enjoying you and as painfully... it's a rip off the Band-Aid kind of thing. It's one of those like it's not good for me because I want you to like this, but at least I know this doesn't work and now I know I'm the problem and I can fix it. Right.
- Adam There's some joy in bombing. Like if people will laugh at everything, you don't really know what works, and you don't really feel constructive if everything works, because you are like, okay are you just being polite? Or...because some of these jokes are really weak, so you can't really be enjoying everything so won't keep putting out weak jokes... if people bomb. But, I was going to go back to Margaret's question. I don't know if we answered your question, the advocating for the political unions...
- Michael Right. That was put kind of by happenstance, it just sort of came up because most things, like if you talked to any Canadian comedian usually about people like what's on your mind, what's going on, and they go, well, like Rob Pue has that great joke where he was talking about being as loved as he is within the comedy world. And he's like, and you know what? I'm still on financially shaky ground. So, like, it doesn't matter if you have guest spots on *The Debaters*, if you're well-liked, at least domestically, you're not making what the American comics who are flown out to JFL [*Just for Laughs*] are making. And a lot of the sort of animosity that comes up in the Canadian comedy scene is from the prioritization of American

acts. The sad thing is sometimes the American acts are Canadian acts coming back because they found success abroad, because it was the only way they could get work. That's just what happens. And so the fact that the show got a little bit political was incidental to the fact that just it's what's on everybody's mind, especially now during the pandemic projects.

Adam Can I interject something? So I was going to say that a weak American act can do better in Canada, than the strongest Canadian act. And that just by being American, you have a better chance of getting on JFL than the strongest home grown talent. We've got amazing Canadian comedians who will never be household names outside of just the people part of the comedy community like Kathleen McGee and Rob Pue.

Michael Kathleen does have a Wikipedia page that shocked us.

Pat We found a few Wikipedia pages so that that's a step. That's a half step.

Adam Unless you're even then, the top comic Canadian comic can be a million times better. But you're never going to be as big until you've gone to America. And then you can come back and it's a lot easier to do. Than come back to the American comedian and make a lot of money than it is to just stay in Canada the whole time, which is ridiculously terrible. And that is unfair and lots of adjectives, but, yeah, it's something that Canadian comics often think about.

Michael Adam's in Winnipeg, so sorry if he sounds like he's in a bad mood, that's just a constant.

Pat He's been stuck in in quarantine for way too long.

Curran You asked about bombing and whatnot... I think the one time I got the most perverse pleasure about bombing a joke is when I was doing my set and I was doing great until like one joke smack dab in the middle of my set where just no one laughed. And then I moved on to my next bit and the second half afterwards they were back laughing with me and there was like that weird one isolated joke right in the middle of my set where no one laughed... I don't even remember what joke it was, I just that I just remember, like, I had a great set except for one joke in the middle, like.

Adam Curran, you're great at that. You have that joke with your song where you just end right in the middle of the song and then you

- walk off.
- Michael The thing I'm going to tell you the thing I love about both Adam and Curran is they have something that I could never do, which is because the majority of my shows have been corporates like like since I lucked out when I was like 15. And and I've never had a forum where I felt courageous enough to just make an audience feel uncomfortable because then I wouldn't get paid...
- Adam I think everyone feels uncomfortable.
- Michael But with Curran, he has that song where he says you won't see the end coming. And then he just leaves immediately after that. Adam, however, at his fringe show, I don't even know he even has like a preamble to that, just like the light comes up at some point while he's talking and then he just stands there and you just starts looking at people and gets like annoyed with them because you can go now, like, take a hint. Like I could never do that.
- Margaret So there's no difference... or there's no audience when you're podcasting, do you find that difficult?
- Michael Yes.
- Pat Yeah, but but but for me, it's just like the audience is going to hear this later. So just like try to be as funny in the moment. Then the audience gets the joke from me when they listen to it.
- Adam I don't think of podcasting as trying to be funny. I think for me it's much more organic work instead of I'm trying to get things to get laughs. To me, it's just hanging out with four of my buddies and I don't even really like listening to the episodes afterwards because it's like, all right, we've done our thing. We had our hour hanging out. When do we get to hang out again?
- Kennedy With the podcast one of the nice things is that like you can what you guys talked earlier about the difficulty of getting exposure. Like, have you found it to be different when doing podcasts versus doing comedy on stage?
- Adam Because though right now our podcast has like 30 followers. And if you go to Pat's TikTok he's got like a 129,000 followers.
- Pat 124.8
- Michael Pat's the oldest guy in the group. He's the one with the

- TikTok.
- Adam Michael has like the like four million followers on Facebook.
- Michael No, that's not true, though.
- Adam I'm always getting annoyed that we don't have more followers. I'm like, what's going on?
- Michael But I think Adam's lonely and he wants to talk to people.
- Miranda The cats get all the attention.
- Michael Yeah, Pat, do you have a cat?
- Pat I had a cat. It died 10 years ago... sorry, it was about 15.
- Michael Sorry. I realized I sounded really *laissez faire* when I said, OK, like, that's fine. That I didn't mean that. I'm really sorry.
- Adam I mean, it's not like with the raccoons like Michael's racoons that he adopts randomly.
- Michael I don't adopt them. We have we have a friend up the road... a really nice German lady. She takes in raccoons for, like the local wildlife protection agency. And sometimes she has more than she can handle. And she said, yeah, I know, sorry. Margaret's making a face like. Right. What's going on? It's like it's like welcome to the podcast. Where we talk about civil rights issues. And this guy... coming up next, a raccoon fashion show.
- Pat Well, in the daytime.
- Michael Yeah, it's like this is a serious bit of journalism. Now we're going to interview an autistic 25-year-old with four raccoons living in his bedroom.
- Pat We have basically Dr. Evil.
- Michael Yeah, well, no, no, it's more of a Dr. Doolittle like we had upwards. I think the last batch we had was like six. This time around it was just three. But we have sorry, Margaret's making faces. I got to turn off speaker view. It's very good. But basically I again, we have a local wildlife protection agency. Sometimes they have more raccoons than they can handle. And so, this German lady gives us three gives us a couple of raccoons we can look after and they're great. We usually keep them for like we usually keep them for like three to four months. And then we give them what they call a soft release where we give them like a little sort of like a nest, like we set

- up a little nest in the middle of nowhere. We kind of make sure that nobody messes with them, no hunters doing illegal hunting or anything. And then we and then we and then we send them on their way. But anyways, my mom does most the work...
- Adam I hope we answered your question, whatever it was.
- Kennedy That can be your mascot of the podcast. I feel like every, you know, every troupe needs their mascot.
- Pat You see my eyes. Yeah, I'm pretty much the mascot at this time.
- Michael Yeah well, I feel bad because, like I remember, everyone is going into every recording session for like half a year. Everyone was going, so how are the raccoons doing? And then I got rid of the raccoons. And a week later Adam was like, I didn't know Michael had raccoons. We should have... we should have had them on the show. Like no one's going to see a raccoon.
- Adam Mike should have done a live show with the racoons and give them one of our names... that's Mike McCreary.
- Michael No, you never you never relinquish... you never relinquish control to a raccoon...
- Kennedy Is comedy a good vehicle for talking about autism and social justice?
- Pat I found it when I started doing comedy. It sort of like fits the autistic way of doing things like. You write something. You're super scripted while doing so, it's repetitive, it's a one-sided conversation and you're doing routines. So so kind of how blind people somehow know how to play music, if you have a certain brain when you have autism like this goes with this, this goes with this, this goes with this.
- Michael Now, I know he sucks now, but but this is a really good quote, I'm going to paraphrase John Cleese one time said once said, if you want your audience to remember something couch in a joke and he was referring to exposition like it just if you want people to remember something later on in like a movie, like you get to a point in *Life of Brian*, you go, oh, right. They set this up earlier with a joke. That's why I remember this. But I think that can be applicable to to to broaching the subject of things like politics or...
- Adam Or autism.

- Michael Exactly, or any or any subject.
- Adam Comedy, is a great way. You can't really change people's minds through a hostile way, but by making people laugh, you can slowly get them to think different ways about things, by using stories and by making them laugh and getting them in a place where they're approachable.
- Kennedy I'm wondering if you can all speak more to this question, what what do you think is so funny about autism?
- Michael Sure. Do you mind if I fill in?
- Kennedy Go ahead.
- Michael So, one of the characteristics of autism that at least the average person knows or is familiar with is like the really intense fixations on a very specific subject. And so, to me, anyone who prioritizes something really innocuous over something that actually matters is just funny. So so, again, it's like people that build their day around, like I'm building a Gundam, I got a Gundam set, I'm going to build a Gunpla like thing and they don't eat or sleep. That's funny to me. It's like they've built their day around something that's like a single use like high effort, low reward thing. It doesn't feed or guarantee them shelter like that's funny and I'm guilty of that too. So, it's like I love watching movies. Those don't help me survive. So, it's like yeah I get it, it's it's fun.
- Pat I always find that when it comes to comedy and autism, the reason the comedy works on a very surface level. The fact that we, we actually like... nothing's funnier than breaking the pattern. Especially if breaking the pattern is quite odd. So just like you're like neurotypical person, neurotypical person, neurotypical person, me just standing at a corner.
- Margaret Do you find that you're able to break some of the myths that people traditionally think about autism as well?
- Pat I think especially with club work you can sort of play into that, especially with autism, we're socially inept... so relationships, sort of goes out the window for some of us. Normal life goes out the window for some of us. So just like. But you've got to make people realize, we're like everybody else.
- Michael I think more going beyond, sorry, Adam. I'll let you speak in a second, but kind of going beyond content... He knows I'm not going to let him speak... but going to like subject matter. I think what's even more important is the idea of an autistic

person in an entertainment forum in itself is subversive just because when we think of autistics, we stereotypically think of them as introverted or academic primarily. So to see someone not even necessarily looking confident, but being in an atypical format like that's enough to make people kind of perk up their ears. And actually, I remember it surprised employers I've had in the past, like I did a show in Alberta years ago where like I was just out pacing. They didn't have a green room, which is fine. So. So I was just pacing in a hallway and like this woman who worked for the event, who was like a first responder, she came and found me. And I was like I told the organizers, I said, hey, by the way, just so you know, I'm not I know you said you want to be in the room before I go on stage. I'd like to be outside just because I and this is not an autism thing. It's just a comedian thing. It's like I just want to run my first two minutes so I can kind of get my rhythm so I could just do that. And I run on stage and then I'm going into it. And so, before, one second, I swear to God it's coming. And so, this first responder, a woman trained to deal with autistic people, comes out into the hallway and she grabs me first. First, she touched me without asking so that was the first sign. And so, she touched me without asking and she goes, "We go on stage now." And on the one hand, and on the one hand, I was like, that is the most condescending thing I've ever experienced. But on the other hand, I was like, thank God. I don't know where the stage is back there.

- Pat Kudos to Mike for not going full racoon on that woman.
- Michael Oh, I'm serious. Like sometimes like ableism sucks, but sometimes it helps you find where you need to go. Anyways.
- Adam Doing stand-up comedy for autistics is subversive in itself. People think we're supposed to be into the sciences and just misunderstanding. It's hilarious how we view the world in a different way. And this is where I plug my book and do a cheap plug for promotional purposes, even though... I've got a book, *I've got Asperger's, So I'm Better than You, Shhh...Don't tell Mom*, where I make the argument that having autism is better because we're more consistent because we can't read body language. So we have to follow the rules and rules that we make up, which are arbitrary and just how... It's hilarious because we don't understand body language, so we have to approach situations based on words and other signals and there's just too many misunderstandings. Hilarious.

- Michael Just to recap for the listeners. Adam was really upset that I rudely interrupted his shameless plug to talk about like a really upsetting thing that happened to me a couple of years ago.
- Adam I know. I'm horrible.
- Pat Hey Mike, are you going to promote your book now?
- Michael Well, I might as well. You know, it wasn't my idea, but since you've asked, you can't see it because this is a podcast, but I'm holding in my hand a copy of my book, *Funny You Don't Look Autistic*.
- Adam I got more exposure from Michael mentioning my name in his book than from my own book.
- Michael Well, just to clarify, I mentioned Adam in my book only because he was mean to me at the time I met him. Well, just a quick story. It's really funny.
- Adam So there's a reward to being mean.
- Michael Oh, yeah, it worked out, Adam's been Adam's living in his mom's house, too. It's worked out for both of us. We're all living in our parents' house except Curran I think.
- Pat I'm I'm shooting for my mom's place, but I live separately.
- Curran OK, I'm a 45-minute bus ride away, so.
- Michael OK, so you're really you really moved out like.
- Curran Yeah, my own apartment.
- Michael You have to shell out \$3.75 to talk to your mom.
- Curran Pretty much.
- Michael Basically, Adam and I met in Winnipeg while I was on tour in 2014 and before the show I was excited to meet him and he came up to me before the show and he just said, hey, I'm looking forward to doing the show. I saw you have a set online. And I said, yeah, you know, that was a really fun show. And he said, well it didn't sound like the audience was having too much fun. He's like a 25-year-old man ruffling a teenager's feathers. He's just like, oh man. You sure?
- Adam You know, I'm going to live off of that fame. For those of you who can't see, Adam's rubbing his hands together maliciously.
- Pat Get Adam some hand sanitizer...

- Michael He washes his hands and he rubs his fingers together more than the raccoons I had.
- Pat OK, Miranda, your question was...
- Miranda Sorry, it's a bit of an awkward segue, but I'll bring it up nonetheless.
- Michael We won't tolerate that.
- Adam We love awkward.
- Miranda And so, Adam, I was wondering, since we were all talking about books, I was wondering about your kid's books, your children's books. So *Anna and the Substitute Teacher*, for example, and then *Jonathan and the Big Barbecue*, is that the other one?
- Adam Yeah. And then there's also *No School Today: An Autistic's Guide to Covid*, which you can find on my website, Adam Schwartzcomedy.com. I've got amazing news that I'm actually in talks with a film animation company in Vancouver and we're talking about turning my Anna into a children's cartoon about a young BIPOC girl on the autism spectrum whose strength is that she's autistic and that she's able to accomplish great things because of her autism.
- Miranda That's excellent. So why was it important for Anna to be the protagonist in your story?
- Adam Growing up on the autism spectrum, there weren't that many strong characters in plays or on TV, other than like *The Rain Man* who I can relate to growing up. And so I want to make a strong character. And I dealt with depression and anxiety because I couldn't I had a hard time coming to terms with autism and I was constantly in denial and I struggled because I did have autism. And so I... to be easier for children, future generations of autistic children and for other children to have an easier time understanding autism. So I wanted to create a picture book and then a play with a strong autistic character. I decided that she was going to be a girl because it, as hard as autistic guys have it, autistic females have it even harder, and they have a really hard time getting diagnosis and everything. And so then there's still also a huge misunderstanding that autism is a white male problem. And so I want to create Anna, a BIPOC person of color and a female who struggles with finding her voice and her own strengths. So that's how Anna came to being.

- Miranda That's very cool. I can't wait.
- Adam Thank you.
- Miranda I actually have the book for my kids, and I can't wait to see the animation. That's awesome.
- Kennedy I'm wondering... that feels like a good place to get to this question. Do you think that most people really know what autism is?
- Michael You know, so I think that's a great question, Kennedy, I don't think they do, but I don't think it's their fault. Most things that are like most groups of people that are marginalized, what people understand of them comes, I would say, and this this is a B.S. statistic, but it's like about 75 to 80 percent from popular culture. Right. Like, if you asked anybody, it's kind of like for the longest time. This is a very weird segue right here. But if someone said, like, why they just go, oh, so-and-so is a furry, they would go like CSI? like that. They know it from popular culture. Right. So in the case of autism, people would they would go to Rain Man or whatever popular culture they're consuming of the moment. I think the issue with most depictions of ASD in popular culture is that they're trying to conform to a neurological framework that can't be applied to a single person, because autism being a spectrum disorder means that no one person is a checklist of diagnostic criteria. They are an autonomous person with things that are stereotypically autistic and things that might be disarmingly allistic. Right. So the problem with most movies is that you have a character who is like, OK, we got it. We got the... we got the hyposensitivity. We've got the hypersensitivity. We got things that cancels out each other. You know what I mean? Exactly. Like, good. You've done your research and the character's completely unbelievable. And so by happenstance, a lot of people with ASD do tend to gravitate towards characters that are non-canonical or rather "fanonically" autistic. Right. So you end up with characters like an example being like one of the oldest, arguably the oldest serialized characters and most beloved serial characters, Sherlock Holmes, who has never been canonically identified as being autistic. As far as any cannon is concerned, the recent BBC series called him a high functioning sociopath subject to interpretation has never been identified. Exactly. He's never been identified as being autistic. However, a lot of people with ASD identified with that character because they exhibited characteristics that they found relatable, that they found even admirable or heroic, if eccentric. And I think

that that's why a lot of characters like that, or in my case, Barry Egan, the Adam Sandler character from *Punch Drunk Love* stick in my mind because me and my friend, every friend I've showed that *Punch Drunk Love* to. They're like, oh, he's just an autistic guy and goes, yeah. Complete accident. P.T. Anderson was trying to find sort of a a dissonant context to place the Adam Sandler comic persona into. So it's like you put the Adam Sandler comic persona in an SNL sketch or in one of his movies. You have something that's like very sort of accessible, lowest common denominator, kind of a silly man-child. But you put them in the real world and suddenly he has like a lot of pathos and he's even kind of scary and alienating at times, but ultimately very fragile and human. And for a lot of my friends, they heard the the elaborate sound mixing in the movie. They heard the score that was lock step with the camera movements in the way the characters would move. And they kind of went like that, that entire set piece where excuse the excuse, the term, but the the phone sex operator is trying to, like, coerce money out of him. And he's also trying to, like, do his job and explain to his sister why he has so many pudding packets because he's collecting them for to exploit a frequent flyer miles scam. While everything's going wrong. And even though that scene is meant to sort of emulate the flow of a classic musical in a non-musical context, I'm sitting there going, oh, dude, I love this. Like, this is like I'm getting stressed out of familiarity, of just seeing it's not that autistic people are oblivious. For me. It's like you're everything. Your entire life is just watching a car wreck in slow motion that you don't have the executive function to stop.

- Adam Now, there's seven minutes left. So I hate this part where we have to be like decide which joke you're going to tell when you don't have that time to tell that many jokes. So, the the researchers have the pressure of six minutes left. What question you want to...knowing...
- Michael Now they have five minutes left because of your introduction.
- Pat If I'm the person saying this, it actually means we have time left, but if it's Adam saying it, it's just like, oh hey... that's four minutes.
- Curran Ladies ask you questions but make them count... count like an autistic person counts.
- Margaret I just wanted to reflect on something that you said about the popular depictions. I think that it's it's interesting that you you

as four autistic comedians are able to raise awareness to autism, can look like a bunch of different things. And especially, Adam, you have the the children's books. Right. And that that's. A new media form as well, having the podcast, having stand up, and in my work, I've come across a lot of people who self-diagnose and like that, that being a really important validation for a lot of people who don't actually know what's going on in their life. So I want to thank you for for raising awareness and in your work. Right. And raising awareness to autism isn't like what a lot of programs and policies or organizations may also paint it as. You know, it's something to be fixed or something that needs to needs to be dealt with. Right. It's something that you live with. And that is it's a strength. And I really appreciate, Adam, that's something that you really brought up today.

- Adam Thank you and thank you for your wonderful answer and doing the important work that you guys are doing, because it's great that we're self-advocates, but without our allies. Also, even like that, we have a hard time reaching an audience and getting our voices out...
- Pat A few of us have a hard time getting to the stages, mostly because of bus schedules...
- Adam But thank you for all your work.
- Michael Love you guys, you know, it was nice...
- Pat Kumbaya [Singing]
- Michael I mean, Adam, that's so sweet.
- Pat Nobody's crying so, we kept our autistic license.
- Michael You guys are the best. We'll let you get on with your day. And it's... we came up just under 3:50 [pm]. That's pretty good. All right.
- Miranda OK, bye, guys. Good to see you. Bye bye.

Comics Not Otherwise Specified Biographies

Michael McCreary is an autistic comedian, author (*Funny, You Don't Look Autistic*) and TEDX speaker who has been performing stand-up comedy since age 13. In the past six years, he has performed stand-up shows and keynote addresses across Canada (plus the Yukon) as well as the United States. He has been featured on The National and on CBC Radio's *Laugh Out Loud!*

Michael gives you permission to laugh at his act “Does This Make My Asperger’s Look Big?” <https://www.aspiecomic.com/>

Curran Dobbs is an autistic comedian from Victoria. His dry delivery has entertained audiences in BC, at the Winnipeg Comedy Festival and at the ANCA World Autism Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. Curran was a finalist in Vancouver’s *Yuk Off* (2019). He has also appeared in films, including a starring role in the short film *Godhead*, which has been featured at, among others, the Toronto International Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival. @Currandobbs

Adam Schwartz is a stand-up comedian and author. Adam is a finalist for Winnipeg’s wackiest comedian with a day job and has appeared in the Winnipeg Comedy Festival and is a regular on the Fringe Festival circuit. His show *Aspergers: A Tale of a Social Misfit* has sold out in many cities. Adam’s books include *I have Aspergers so I’m Better than You*, and *Shh... Don’t tell Mom*, as well as a children’s book “*Anna and the Substitute Teacher*”. <https://www.adamschwartzcomedy.com/>

Pat Tiffin is a comedian, blogger, and comedy show producer from London Ontario. He spent the last 10 years honing his craft all over southwestern Ontario. In 2012, he won the Funny 1410 So You Think You’re Funny? Contest. In 2019, Pat was selected as one of the Top 100 for CBC’s *Next Up*. Later that year, Pat helped co-found the London Laughs Comedy Festival. When he’s not on stage, you can find him on the weekends at Yuk Yuk’s London and producing shows under 340 Comedy Collective moniker.