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## Best (and worst) comedy

By Jane Borden



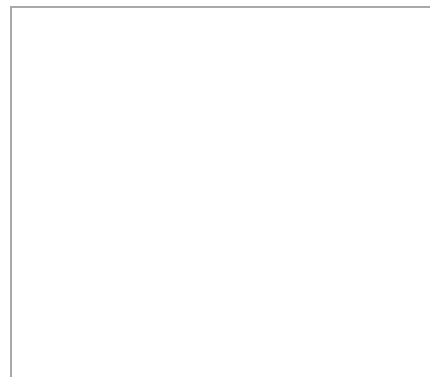
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**Best stunt:** When Kathy Griffin arrived at the Teen Choice Awards with Levi Johnston, she took her celebrity-mocking shtick to the next level. Even if the relationship was fake, she scored.

**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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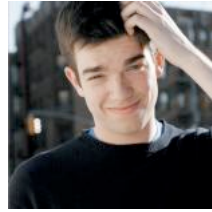
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