

Tough Times Call for Comic Relief

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Body

With TV production mostly on pause and comedy clubs off-limits because of the pandemic, check out these podcasts for some much-needed comic relief.

As the coronavirus continues to rage and Hollywood's production shutdown persists, new episodes of television sitcoms may soon be in short supply -- and going to a standup show is likely to remain out of reach for some time. But that doesn't mean you need to forgo a comedy fix.

Whether you're craving the binge-worthy laughs of a scripted series or the electric wit of live sets, these seven podcasts will bring you some much-needed comic relief.

'Bodega Boys'

Before the Bronx comedy duo Desus Nice and the Kid Mero became widely known as the hosts of their self-titled late-night Showtime series, they built a loyal following through their consistently hilarious "Bodega Boys" podcast. This weekly two-hander shows off their chemistry, observational humor and impeccable comic timing. The longtime friends riff at breakneck speed on subjects both broad and niche. Some weeks they delve into pop culture or roast politicians -- their semiregular Trump sketches leave Alec Baldwin's impersonation of President Trump in the dust -- while other episodes are full of slice-of-life anecdotes about the duo's past and present lives in New York City. "Bodega Boys" is one of the best examples yet of podcasts' ability to showcase future stars.

Starter episode: "Mask On"

'My Dad Wrote a Porno'

Any combination of parents and pornography is nightmarish, but none more so than Jamie Morton's discovery that his father, a retired builder, had begun writing erotic literature. Thankfully for Morton, he was able to channel the awkwardness into a devastatingly funny podcast, which sees him and two college friends, James Cooper and Alice Levine, lovingly tearing apart the cringeworthy "Belinda Blinkered" series chapter by chapter. Written under the unforgettable nom de plume "Rocky Flintstone," the now five-book series follows plucky sales director Belinda Blumenthal ("the least sexy name I've ever heard," one host notes) and her raunchy corporate adventures. (Those encompass a surreal blend of clunky erotica and strangely detailed tangents about regional sales meetings.) The British hosts' deadpan, often horrified commentary on this singularly unsexy smut is liable to draw actual tears of laughter.

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Starter episode: "The Job Interview"

'A Very Fatal Murder'

Early in the first episode of this scripted mockumentary from The Onion, there's a skit that perfectly captures how the show skewers true-crime podcasting. The fictional host, David Pascall -- voiced by David Sidorov in an earnest NPR-esque monotone -- enlists a supercomputer to help him find a murder case that's tailor-made for a podcast investigation. "Set a filter for female victims only," he tells the bot, explaining that he needs to find a culturally relevant and thought-provoking case that also involves "a murder where a really hot white girl dies." After identifying the perfect (fictional) murder of a prom queen in a small factory town, "A Very Fatal Murder" delivers snappy 15-minute bursts of true-crime satire, complete with incongruously chirpy ads for fake meal-delivery services that interrupt the gruesome murder investigation.

Starter episode: "A Perfect Murder"

'Las Culturistas'

There's no shortage of podcasts that follow the basic format of "Las Culturistas": witty banter between co-hosts, followed by a guest-of-the-week interview. But thanks to the comedians Bowen Yang's and Matt Rogers's palpable passion for pop culture, this is one joyful and uplifting audio experience with a perfect balance of snark and heart. In each episode, a guest discusses the pop culture that shaped him or her -- and, in a regular segment titled "I Don't Think So, Honey!", rants for 60 seconds about a pop culture pet peeve. Even as the hosts have found wider recognition -- Yang recently became the first Chinese-American cast member on "Saturday Night Live" -- the show has avoided becoming too insider-y, retaining the relatable perspective that makes it such a rewarding listen.

Starter episode: "Someone Spilled Sauce"

'2 Dope Queens'

Though this breakout show from Jessica Williams and Phoebe Robinson has since become an HBO series, the Brooklyn-based audio original is arguably superior. Hosted regularly for two years in front of live audiences, the now-defunct podcast is led by the charismatic duo, whose laugh-out-loud banter runs the gamut from raunchy reflections on celebrity crushes to their experiences of being racially stereotyped in Hollywood and in everyday life. Interspersed among the hosts' segments are standup sets from comedians like Michelle Buteau, Paul Scheer and Naomi Ekperigin, and occasional guest appearances from comedy-adjacent stars including Jon Hamm and LeVar Burton.

Starter episode: "How To Channel Your Inner White Lady"

'No Such Thing As A Fish'

For fans of the beloved British comedy mainstay "QI," the emphasis on obscure trivia in this spinoff podcast will feel familiar. For the uninitiated, "No Such Thing As a Fish" sees the researchers behind "QI," which stands for Quite Interesting, gather to discuss the best surprising facts they've recently learned -- like the eponymous fact that there is, in fact, no such thing as a fish. The regular hosts, Dan Schreiber, James Harkin, Andrew Hunter Murray and Anna Ptaszynski, have such a wealth of reliably weird, fascinating knowledge at their fingertips that the show has never had a dud episode in its six-year run.

Starter episode: "No Such Thing As A Glowing Ballet Dancer"

'The Read'

The self-described mission of this show from the comedians Kid Fury and Crissle West is "throwing shade and spilling tea with a flippant and humorous attitude," which means delivering frank truths about pop culture and its stars. Now in its seventh year, the show's episodes break down into a few broad segments: the dryly hilarious Fury and Crissle discuss pop culture news, respond to listener emails and hand out a weekly "Black Excellence" award.

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Finally they "read" (that is, give their brutally honest opinions on) a person, trend or event, delivering well-deserved takedowns with nuance and a lightness that never feels meanspirited.

Starter episode: "Filet Melon"

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/arts/comedy-funny-podcasts.html>

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