



Interview: Maria Bamford and Andy Kindler

Two comics take themselves down by trade.

By Jane Borden



Photographs: Susan Malian

Maria Bamford and Andy Kindler are a likely pair to share the bill at Comix this weekend: Both spin comedy gold out of self-deprecation. Bamford, the neurosis-exploring secret weapon on the Comedians of Comedy Tour, is best known for her characters and voice work. And Kindler, whose hilarious correspondent videos up *Letterman*'s game, has made a career out of mocking his lack of a career. On this conference call, they took the reins.

Why perform together?

Andy Kindler: Maria likes me to actually keep her company when she's onstage, which is off-putting.

Maria Bamford: We're the equivalent of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* and *The Terminator*.

Kindler: Or *Shields and Yarnell*.

I don't even know who that is.

Kindler: Nobody does, but it's a good reference from the '70s.

Maybe that's why you're not connecting with audiences, Andy.

Kindler: You may have hit too deep with that one. By the way, that was Maria's actual voice.

Yeah, Maria, your fans are dying to know what you really sound like.

Bamford: I think this is it, my voice. When I get nervous, it gets higher, or when I'm trying to be charming. When I'm in therapy, I'm in a deeper range.

Kindler: Wow, you really nailed that answer, Maria. What are you hiding?

Bamford: More like, "What are you *not* hiding? Hide something please!"

Both of you are very confessional. But there's also a masking veil of irony. Is there a time to be sincere?

Bamford: I have trouble watching singers because they are *so* sincere. I'm like, "Why are they... [*Gasps*] Don't put it out there!"

Kindler: My goal is to be exactly how I am offstage—although I realize I'm supposed to punctuate it with jokes. My favorite comedians are basically themselves onstage. I'm not the only comic who comments on stuff, but I'd hate it if *every* comic did what I did.

Believe me, so would we. Zing!

Kindler: I liked your voice just then when you went into roast mode.

You love shtick! You mock hack comedy—and then deliver it.

Kindler: I have a true love for the old style of Catskill comic. There's a joy in discovering a bad joke...and then there's the joy of delivering it like, "Isn't this a hacky joke?"

Bamford: I do an impersonation of the kind of comedy I think people want, and it turns out they actually *do*. They go, "You should do more of that, it's funny."

That'll lead you to drink.

Bamford: Or watch ten episodes of a dance contest show... *Street Dance!* A group of rug rats jam on it and then their friends vote—it's very serious.

Maria, what are some things that *don't* make you neurotic?

Bamford: I love support groups, people talking about their feelings. I like Internet shopping.

What do you buy?

Bamford: Self-help books. I just got *Staging Your Comeback: A Complete Beauty Revival for Women Over 45*; I'm getting ready. When I turned 30 I got a subscription to *More* for women over 30; the message in that magazine is: You can still shop! I love a glossy picture. I love that vision-board thing where you cut out pictures that resonate with you so they'll manifest. I've done that since I was three; I cut out pictures of ladies from the JCPenney catalog.

Kindler: Are you saying these are things you do for fun? Or are these the most depressing parts of your life?

Bamford: Things I do for fun!

Kindler: You would be eccentric if you were doing it without self-awareness.

Bamford: Yeah, that might be mental illness. I'd like to create a lovable character for schizophrenia; it doesn't have a celebrity spokesperson because by the time somebody's schizophrenic they've lost all their teeth. I'm thinking, Sid the Squid Schizo.

Kindler: I'm starting to disassociate from reality as you're describing this.

Maria, you mine a lot of humor from depression. If you found happiness, would you stop being funny?

Bamford: I'm a pretty happy person actually; I'm pretty pumped.

Are you looking at a picture of a happy blonde in a leisure suit right now?

Bamford: My sister said, "Why do you tell jokes like you're some loser when you have a boyfriend, and own a house?" So I've been trying to tell these jokes: "You're filled with a deep contentment; waves of elation crash into you, and your self-esteem is so high you just bleed into...shopping."

Kindler: I do think, though, that when you've had a tremendous amount of success very quickly, that's hard. Even if I loved Dane Cook, which I don't, I think there's a confusion there. "Now I have 80 million fans but what do I do?" Maria and I have both struggled; that will hopefully give us a better sense of ourselves if things start to happen.

Andy, is it possible that Dane Cook reached people who were not comedy fans at all, but who then went on to purchase *your* album?

Kindler: Let me check my list of fans. I have them fill out a questionnaire: "How did you hear about me?" Enh, you might be right; I don't know if it got me more fans, but I do think his base is 15, 16, 17, and then they outgrow it.

Bamford: What's wrong with Dane Cook? He's hard-working. I like to think we're all flowers in a beautiful garden.

That was your real voice!

Kindler: You're not judgmental in those areas, Maria.

Bamford: That's a cultural thing in Minnesota: You never say anything negative; you think it to yourself and it comes out when you yell at your dog. I yell at myself: "Why don't you go to the gym and have a baby?" Not *at* the gym though.

Maria Bamford and Andy Kindler headline [Comix](#) Fri 19 and Sat 20.

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