

Annotated

Man at His Best

and Judd Apatow

The Profile

By ANNA PEELE

Filmmaker, producer, and writer Judd Apatow asked if he could take a pass at his profile. We thought, What could go wrong?



Instructions to meet the man who will lead me to Judd Apatow specify only that he can be found “under the rainbow,” which turns out to be a 30-ton 100-foot-high \$1.6 million homage to *The Wizard of Oz*. On the way, I make eye contact with a goat dressed as a unicorn.

But the strangest thing about Sony Pictures Studios is the state of the office occupied by Judd Apatow, producer of *Anchorman* and *Girls*, auteur behind the films *Knocked Up* and *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, and arguably the man who is better than anyone but Lorne Michaels at making comedians famous. Apatow’s workplace is barren, with lurid lighting and views only of nearby walls. He likes this barren office, though. He has a nicer one in Santa Monica, but it’s packed with the by-products of shaping the entertainment industry for three decades, and Apatow wanted something unburdened. The new place, which would be totally generic without the whiteboard casually festooned with names like “Louis C. K.” and “Chris Rock,” comes with a Netflix deal that has Apatow producing the upcoming Pee-wee Herman movie and two guaranteed seasons of *Love*, a new romantic sitcom, with writer and actor Paul Rust.

Apatow has described himself as looking like “the next abusive alcoholic stepfather in *Boyhood*.” But with his ’90s rock-critic outfit (unbuttoned plaid shirt over silk-screened T, jeans, and sneakers), Apatow is sloppily handsome. He looks a little like a hungover Javier Bardem, with a fairly sound head of hair and teeth so beautiful and

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No you didn't!

What about Mark Sennett?

Just moved.

I am a hoarder!

I interviewed them for my book sick in the head. But it's for 826 charity.

Sex? Way?

INSIDE MAHB

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There is no way that exercising your body is healthier than resting it!¹⁵

Hi Maude & Iris! You love Esquire!

Space filler- Rich people won't create jobs if you give them more money. Hi, I'm a democrat.

Who takes a cat to a laser show?

My mom never told me to make eye contact.

CONTINUED • I am a mouth locker.

straight and white that they feel at odds with the rest of him. The lone off-putting thing about Apatow's appearance is his gaze, which darts around like a cat at a laser show. He seems to make extended eye contact only when he feels certain about something or receives external validation—if I laugh, the man whose comedies have grossed \$1.8 billion has proof that what he's just said is funny. I am like

Apatow's primary gift, even more than writing or directing, seems to be finding and fostering nascent comedic superstars. He saw latent greatness in the not-immediately-obvious future-A-listers Jonah Hill, Jason Segel, Lena Dunham, Steve Carell, and Amy Schumer. He looked at chubby, gurgly 7-year-old Seth Rogen and said, "Oh, Seth's a movie star." But Apatow claims he isn't deluged by people eager to be transformed into the next Rogen. "I wish everyone was kissing my ass and trying to get in the door, but it really doesn't seem to happen that often. I think that's because it just requires so much work. With me, it's not like Judd's gonna give me a job. It's more like Judd's gonna grind me for half a decade."

The many drafts written during his years-long development process are in service of a lesson learned from Garry Shandling in the writers' room at *The Larry Sanders Show*: "The more personal it is, the more universal it is." That Apatow has internalized this decree is obvious, and even in the work of his apostles he keeps telling his own story: a stunted but nice-enough man (or woman) overcomes anxiety and cuts back on bad behavior in order to accomplish his goals and appreciate his life. Or, more plainly, "The main philosophy [in my films] is *Don't be a dick*."

Apatow asked Amy Schumer to make a movie with him after hearing her talk about her dad's MS on *The Howard Stern Show*. Her first attempt was a funny but premise-driven screenplay that he told her to forget so she could write about things that were actually happening to her in her relationships. The result is the Apatow-directed *Trainwreck* (out July 17), about a screwed-up woman working at a men's magazine. Apatow was right: The movie would be conventional if it weren't for the guttingly personal relationship Schumer's character has with her sick father. It's the same trick he pulled off with *Superbad*, a comedy about high schoolers trying to get laid, which Rogen and Evan Goldberg worked on for six or seven years, and Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo's superhit *Bridesmaids*, which they started writing before *Knocked Up* came out.

Which means, of course, that they started writing before people began to call Apatow and his acolytes chauvinists. Even *Knocked Up* costar Katherine Heigl characterized the film's main female character as "humorless and uptight" for she like her being annoyed that Rogen's character protected his (very nice!) bong instead of his unborn child during an earthquake. "People thought we weren't doing female-focused projects [before *Bridesmaids*]. We were; the scripts just weren't good yet." *Women are funny!* Apatow believes it, proselytizes it. Is it really plausible that he's spent the last decade of his life constructing an elaborate system of female empowerment solely to trick people into thinking he isn't sexist?

The sexism charges and subsequent career transition into the patron saint of funny women have become part of the Apatow myth. It's an oral tradition

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that sounds sexy.

Actually my first big writing job was writing jokes for Roseanne Barr.

I Wasn't sure if I was supposed to use this space. So... Conserve water California!

Thank you or tho. Daniel Weinstock

I see myself more as a helpful leech.

Garry taught me almost all I know.

Ramis taught me that one.

Amy had the courage to be honest. Most people avoid that.

Which is a dick move.

So they never got made.

Seth- I didn't use that word. You never gurgle.

I am like Robert Durst

Nobody likes being grinded by me. That came out wrong.

People hate being called that.

Finally after 30 years of listening I find a way to make money off it.

People don't say that. OK, 3 people.

That would be insane.

But...

-not sexy

6/9 Happy Anniversary Leslie - 18 years (longer than Cruise/Kidman)

Do the Koch brothers think they will live forever?
They need a different hobby.

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told and retold in the many interviews Apatow has done as subject and those he's done as interviewer in his therapy-level-intimate Q&A's with comedy legends, collected in *Sick in the Head: Conversations about Life and Comedy* (available June 16). "I realized on the last movie that your story starts locking in. And you start hating yourself, because you think, *Oh, basically my whole life is about these four moments.*"

I begin listing the moments I've heard him recite again and again, starting with his parents' divorce and bankruptcy, and he cuts in with one so cartoonishly neurotic that at first I think he's joking: "My mom refused to breast-feed me as a child. My mom used to brag about not breast-feeding and discouraged Leslie [Mann, his wife] from doing it. She's like, 'You're fine.' But I'm not fine. I really don't feel that smart. I talk with people and I think, *I can't really process all the levels that are happening right now.* I used to think I was needy because of all the stuff that happened later, but now I just think it happened day one."

Non-breast-related anxieties Judd Apatow brings up during our time together: The cancellation of *Freaks and Geeks* 15 years ago, resulting in so much stress that Apatow needed multiple back surgeries.

A joke about someone who's "as hairy as Robin Williams's knuckles" being translated as "hairier than the men in the circus" in the French version of *Knocked Up*. "Spending half my fucking day trying to figure out if, like, this type of tinfoil is recyclable. I am guilty every time I put a plate in the wrong fucking garbage can." And his "general lack of spirituality" and "sense of the ridiculousness of everything" and that "nothing can be figured out."

During our conversation, Apatow talks about pressure, anxiety, stress, death, things falling apart, hypervigilance, and ISIS. His concerns are so myriad and diffuse, so self-conscious and existential, that when he grabs on to something he can make a tiny bit more okay, he seems to take on a sudden clarity of purpose. When Apatow talks about Bill Cosby, he is suddenly looking at me so hard I'm the one having trouble making eye contact. "This guy pulled it off in such a way that he's not accountable for it. He's a serial rapist. Everyone knows this is true. But almost nobody"—besides, he says, Rosie O'Donnell and *Nightly Show* host Larry Wilmore—"says it. I guess they just think, *It can only hurt me and doesn't really serve me enough for me to say it. And I don't want to look like I'm tearing down an important symbol of progress.* If we can't tear him down, who are we gonna tear down?" Destroying Cosby is Apatow's crusade, an effort that has entailed calling in to Marc Maron's WTF podcast, tweeting "If there is a hell, Cosby will forever be fucked by devil Cosby," and imploring me to write about it.

Apatow isn't going to let it go. It's his story, the same one in which he's the protagonist when he makes a movie, or raises his daughters to be what he describes as "just screwed enough that they're able to find jobs," or, hopefully, one day finds himself able to sit in a room by himself, without a device or gadget or book, and not go crazy. He's flawed, but he's got these goals, and he's grateful for his stressful life, and he's just trying not to be a dick.

And 72% of the time I succeed.

Trainwreck comes out July 17.
Star Wars in December?

How much time do I have to punch this up?

Divorce is a comedian factory.

The funniest, nicest man. Irreplaceable.

If the universe has no end what is on the other sides (Fuck)



But we must stand up for the victims.

One day by Huxtable and one day by I Spy.

TM helps

My book is great
→ if you are a comic, actor, or artist.
Or if you need a toilet book.

→ A new study just said breast feeding makes you smarter! I am not.

→ What is recyclable? No one knows! Bubble wrap?

→ get a job

Filling space - If you go see Bill Cosby in concert you may have a blind spot. ~ or you're an asshole