

## And Here's the Kicker: Conversations with 21 Top Humor Writers on their Craft

By Mike Sacks

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"Did you hear the one about..."

Every great joke has a punch line, and every great humor writer has an arsenal of experiences, anecdotes, and obsessions that were the inspiration for that humor. In fact, those who make a career out of entertaining strangers with words are a notoriously intelligent and quirky lot. And boy, do they have some stories.

In this entertaining and inspirational book, you'll hear from 21 top humor writers as they discuss the comedy-writing process, their influences, their likes and dislikes, and their experiences in the industry. You'll also learn some less useful but equally amusing things, such as:

- How screenwriter Buck Henry came up with the famous "plastics" line for "The Graduate."
- How many times the cops were called on co-writers Sacha Baron Cohen and Dan Mazer during the shooting of "Borat."
- What David Sedaris thinks of his critics.
- What creator Paul Feig thinks would have happened to the "Freaks and Geeks" crew if the show had had another season.
- What Jack Handey considers his favorite "Deep Thoughts."
- How Todd Hanson and the staff of *The Onion* managed to face the aftermath of 9/11 with the perfect dose of humor.
- How Stephen Merchant and Ricky Gervais created the original version of "The Office."
- What it's really like in the writers' room at SNL.

Funny and informative, *And Here's the Kicker* is a must-have resource—whether you're an aspiring humor writer, a fan of the genre, or someone who just likes to laugh.

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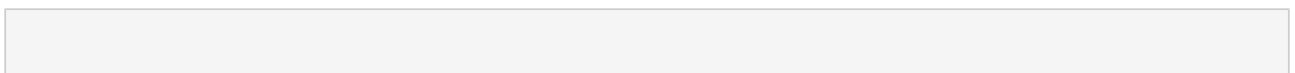
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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Veteran journalist Sacks conducted dozens of interviews with the top humor writers of the last century, and the result is a whiz-bang collection of Q&As that will school readers just as often as it provokes laughter. The assortment boasts elder statesmen including Dick Cavett, 93-year-old Irving Brecher (who wrote shtick for the Marx Brothers and Milton Berle) and Mad magazine's Al Jaffee, who reminisces about reading American comic strips during his 1930s boyhood in Lithuania. High notes include David Sedaris, with the bestselling humorist confessing to cringing when he reads earlier writing, including breakthrough *Me Talk Pretty One Day*: "I used to exaggerate a lot more than I needed to. So when I needed readers to believe me, they didn't." Other contemporary writers offer up equally revelatory tidbits, especially Marshall Brickman (*Annie Hall*) and Allison Silverman (*The Daily Show*), but would-be humorists will appreciate most the nuts-and-bolts knowhow regarding the industry. Though it's decidedly testosterone-heavy, Sack has compiled a lively compendium sure to captivate anyone who loves a good comedy.

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Publisher's Weekly

Comedy writers--like George Meyer (*The Simpsons*) and Dan Mazer (*Borat*)--tend to be depressed, brilliant, erratic and sometimes even funny. Mike Sacks' collection of remarkably frank interviews with 21 of them reads like a secret history of popular culture. --*Time Magazine*

Laughter may be universal, but the world of comedy writing is shrouded in mystery. In *AND HERE'S THE KICKER* (Writer's Digest Books), Mike Sacks, a humor writer and *Vanity Fair* staffer, helps lift the veil with in-depth interviews of 21 top comedy writers from various fields. How in-depth exactly? To give you an idea, 94-year-old Irving Brecher, who wrote for the Marx Brothers, accused the diligent Sacks of "killing" him. (It would prove to be one of Brecher's very last interviews. He died in 2008.) Collecting rare musings--and practical advice--from the likes of Harold Ramis (*Animal House*, *Groundhog Day*), David Sedaris (*Me Talk Pretty One Day*), Bob Odenkirk (*Mr. Show*), and Allison Silverman (*The Colbert Report*), Sacks puts together the book he wishes he had read as a budding humor writer. The comedy world is a treacherous landscape. All of his subjects agree: Funny can't be taught, but it can be self taught. And it helps to know where the banana peels are hidden. --*Vanity Fair*

Analyzing why something is funny is a little bit like trying to fathom why people fall in love. You might be able to do it, but by the time you do, you feel just a little foolish about falling for that person, or that joke.

There's a new book, "And Here's the Kicker: Conversations with 21 Top Humor Writers On Their Craft."

Mike Sacks, a veteran magazine writer, who's now on staff at Vanity Fair, poses questions to old comedy hands, including Larry Gelbart, who co-wrote "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," as well as wrote the television show "M.A.S.H.," to new hands like Steven Merchant, who invented "The Office" with Ricky Gervais, Tom Hanson of The Onion, and classical comedy writers, including Dave Barry, David Sedaris, Allison Silverman, and Harold Ramis.

Mike Sacks joins us from New York. Thanks so much for being with us. . . . --NPR Weekend Edition

And Here's the Kicker builds to a funny, sad, tremendously insightful group portrait of the comic mind. It's an almost sociological dissection of the strange creature that is the comedy writer. In his glorious extended ramble through the minds of comedy greats, Sacks finds a number of common denominators, like depression, self-doubt, raging insecurity, a predilection toward obsessive-compulsive disorder, and a borderline pathological need to entertain.

It's enormously comforting to realize that some of the most gifted writers in the world (other Kicker subjects include David Sedaris, Harold Ramis, Buck Henry, Mitch Hurwitz, Robert Smigel, Dave Barry, Bob Odenkirk, George Meyer, and The Onion's great Todd Hanson) wrestle with the same demons we do. They are a wondrous breed of misfit. They're not normal; they're better than normal. They're lucky to have a gifted chronicler like Sacks documenting their curious ways and odd customs for posterity. . . . --The Onion

About the Author

Mike Sacks has written for such publications as *The Believer*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Maxim*, *McSweeney's*, *The New Yorker*, *Premiere*, *Radar*, *Salon*, *Time*, *Time Out New York*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vice* and *Women's Health*. He has worked at *The Washington Post*, and is currently on the editorial staff of *Vanity Fair*.

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