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war?

C.H.: Well, it's not really a hashtag war the way that we would do a hashtag war. That is a serious social issue. The fun thing about designing our show was that we were on after "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report". And those are both shows that are very funny, but they're also shows that are tackling very serious issues and so we decided, we're on at midnight, people are about to fall asleep, let's let our show be like the information that you don't need, but want. It's sorbet for the brain at the end of the day. You know when you've had to process the world and all of the things that are happening, and our show is just a little escape: you don't have to think too hard. The spirit of the show is satirical and snarky and upbeat.

S.Z.: *Can anything be made funny?*

C.H.: Well, in the grand theory of comedy, anything is funny if the audience thinks it's funny. It's a really interesting question and one that I've been dealing with now because my dad died last year. He died in November, very suddenly. I was very close to him ...

S.Z.: *I'm so sorry.*

C.H.: Oh no, that's OK! You didn't kill him! What if you were like, "I did actually. This is all a fake interview ..."

S.Z.: *The reason I called you today is because I need to get something off my chest ...*

C.H.: I hope you feel better. I appreciate that you came forward. He just very suddenly had a heart attack and died and it was really sad. The way that I was dealing with it was to talk about it on stage. I went on stage two days after my dad's funeral. It was able to talk about it on stage and take this really horrible thing, and find out

how can I process this – not a therapy session – but how do I find the human element of this thing and make it sharable with people so that they understand and talk about death and dealing with death in a way that is relatable and funny in the sense that it's something that we all have to deal with at one point or another? Is there a way to do that? I'm finding that I think that there is.

We had Mel Brooks on the podcast and he had a really great idea of what is funny to an audience. Or what is acceptable to joke about and what's not acceptable to joke about. His idea was that comedy ultimately should be subverting the people who are in power. If you're subverting people who are in power, that's funny, you know? But if you're subverting people who are not in power, why would you do that? Why would

you kick a person when they're down?

I think there is a lot of mean-spirited humor and I think a lot of people like it. I think (they like it) more for the shock value: "Oh can you believe I said that?" I think our show, and certainly our podcast, shows you can be edgy without being mean. We, as an internet culture we all do these ridiculous things.

S.Z.: *You created The Nerdist Podcast in 2010. What a fantastic idea. Can you give our readers a thumbnail version of nerdist.com?*

C.H.: It has sort of turned into a "can I trick people that I want to meet into talking to me for an hour?" I've been able to do that.

In the beginning the podcast was a response to the fact that. It's entertainment – you get kicked in the face a lot. There are a lot of reasons why you may or may not get a job, but you're not really in control of any of it and so it's very similar to stand-up.

I thought, I'm going to make a thing that is just mine that no one can tell me what or how to do. I will have full ownership over it and I will make it what I want. I'm going to do it because it's fun, it's with my friends, and we'll have guests on and we'll have conversations. I always like the dynamic of comics hanging out backstage at a show. It's riffy and it's fun and it dips into serious stuff, but then it goes back to screwing around – everyone is kind of one upping each other with jokes. I just always liked that vibe and so, that's ultimately what we tried to create and then it started to get to this place where I started wondering if we could get (bigger names on the show).

I remember the first time we ever did a real musical podcast it was with Ben Folds a couple of years ago. I thought, maybe we should do a show – because you can do a podcast from wherever you want – maybe we should do this in a recording studio and see if he will play the piano. So we asked and he said, OK. We were in the studio, we were doing the interview and he sat down at the piano and we started requesting songs and it was just me and the two other guys in the podcast and our girlfriends. I really expected him to stop playing the piano and turn around and go, "You tricked me into giving you private concert!" Which is ultimately what we did – we just shared it with everyone. We've had some great podcasts, Morgan Freeman just did one and Tom Cruise is doing it next week.

S.Z.: *You sang a duet with Tom Cruise at Comic Con last year. Random.*

C.H.: I did. I would be lying if I said we have actually hung out since then, we haven't. Everyone I've had on the podcast who has worked with him is like, "He's the most amazing person. You just can't get over the guy's energy, it's unbelievable."

I met him and they're right. He knew that we both played the same character – I was in a play, years ago and he did the same character in a movie version, but I didn't expect him to know that. He did know that and started singing at me, during the panel. It was the most surreal ... it was one of those weird moments: I had this crazy dream that I was moderating a big panel at Comic Con and Tom Cruise was there and we started singing '80s songs. But that actually happened. I don't put celebrity on this big pedestal. I know he's just a person,

but still, when you are used to seeing someone on a giant screen, there is something about your brain that can't ... The most insane experience I ever had meeting a famous person was when we did stuff with Muppets. When you see a Muppet come to life in front of you for the first time, you can't handle it.

S.Z.: *Speaking of Tom Cruise, what are your thoughts on Scientology?*

C.H.: I don't personally understand Scientology, but there are a lot of religions that I don't understand either. I was raised Catholic. Were you?

S.Z.: *I was raised Catholic.*

C.H.: Do you still consider yourself a Catholic?

S.Z.: *No.*

C.H.: Me neither. I'm not a religious person, but I have a lot of friends who are. Religions in general, I just don't understand, but I also I think because of nerd culture, I feel like I'm less inclined to judge people unless they directly do something that is harmful to someone. I try to be open-minded because so much of the time, when I was growing up, I didn't really have that. I felt like I was judged a lot. People constantly tell me things online about myself that aren't true but they assume are true. Why do we do that? You don't know what someone else's life is like.

It's funny, I find that a lot of the people online who claim to be open-minded are actually really kind of judgey. They're like, "I'm open-minded – not like those jerks over there!" Well you just called those people jerks.

S.Z.: *You said that you love Portland. What is one of your 'must do' Portland kind of things?*

C.H.: There's a lot. I always have to go to Ground Kontrol. I love going over to Mississippi Avenue. There's a place over there, Gravy, fantastic. What's the Asian restaurant that is so good? You have such good food in Portland.

S.Z.: *Pok Pok?*

C.H.: Pok Pok. There you go. There is so much good food in Portland, so many good donuts in Portland. I do like VooDoo, but I also like Blue Star – it's a good doughnut place.

S.Z.: *A doughnut connoisseur. Have you ever had a cronut?*

C.H.: Yes. We actually had the original cronuts in New York. It's a good idea. Why didn't anyone think of it sooner? You know, croissants are great, but they're not sugary. How can we accomplish that?

S.Z.: *We're Americans. We can do it.*

C.H.: (laughs) We can make anything less healthy.

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