

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** Wait, is there such a thing as mental health or not? A heck of a question to ask, I realize, on this mental health podcast. But stay with me. There's this school of thought that says that by focusing on mental health and physical health as separate things, we risk ignoring the connection that they have with each other, how each informs the other. Like if you have chronic pain from a physical ailment, that pain is going to have an effect on your mental state, could put you into a depression. And if that's the case, you don't really have two healths—physical and mental—you have one health, and your health has a problem. Similarly, a whole bunch of different mental health conditions can lead to, say, a lack of sleep, which can be felt physically all over the body.

So, is that a mental health problem or a physical health problem? Well, it's just a health problem. So, the thinking goes that there is only health: physical and mental are part of health, are part of each other. After all, if a brain is separated from a body, the individual who owns the brain and the body does not tend to thrive. Okay. This is not the kind of introduction you would ordinarily provide for an interview with a comedian, but this is not an ordinary show. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

[00:01:22] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:01:20] **John Moe:** Sasheer Zamata is an actor and standup comedian. She may be best known for her several seasons as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*. Sasheer has been a regular on the shows *Woke* and *Home Economics*, and she's appeared in several films. She has a new standup special coming out next month entitled *The First Woman*. Here's a little preview.

[00:01:50] **Clip:**

Sasheer Zamata: We wanted to go dancing one night, so we went to the concierge desk and we're like, "We're gonna go dancing. Can you please call us a car?" And we were talking to a staff full of men. And they were like, (*scandalized*) "You wanna go out alone? You are just two women! Do you need a man to go with you? Should we send a chaperone to watch over you?"

And we're like, "We're not going to prom. We're just going to a bar. It's fine." But they wouldn't let it go.

And then one guy behind the desk was like, "(*Scoffs.*) I mean, I guess you have to learn your lessons the hard way."

(*The audience "ooh"s.*)

And I was like, "Is this... the beginning... of a porn?"

(*The audience laughs and cheers.*)

Learned my lessons the hard way! I mean, I wasn't expecting this, but okay.

[00:02:50] **Transition:** Cheerful acoustic guitar.

[00:03:01] **John Moe:** Sasheer Zamata, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:03:03] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yes! Thank you for having me.

[00:03:05] **John Moe:** I love the new special. It's a wonderful special. I was watching it, and I wrote—just down in my notes, I wrote one word: anxiety. There seems to be some anxiety in the material and in your day-to-day life.

[00:03:19] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah, absolutely. Um, yeah, before I shot this special, I was kind of on a journey trying to analyze my health a little bit more. Like, I talk about it in the show. I was having these heart palpitations, and I had them in college, and I remember like going to the student health center and asking if someone could analyze me, and they like did all these scans, and I had to wear a heart monitor. And they were kind of just like, “Oh, you have an irregular heartbeat, but nothing to worry about.” So, I did have that for years. And then, in the last couple years it was increasing in frequency how irregular these heartbeats would be and also like how intense they would be. And so, I was like I should probably check this out again. And then, I went to a bunch of UCLA doctors and heart specialists and whatnot. Had to wear a different heart monitor, which was like nice to see the advancement in the science.

(They chuckle.)

The one before was like—

[00:04:20] **John Moe:** Uh-huh. It's a little more streamlined? Yeah.

[00:04:23] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yes, exactly. I could just tape it to my chest. The one I had before, I had to like wear in my pocket like it was like a mic pack, and like it had all these wires and tubes attached to my chest. This was just like a cute little—a cute little heart monitor that was just like taped under my shirt. The heart monitor was supposed to pick up the irregularity, but I was also supposed to tap on it whenever I felt an irregularity. And then, the doctor analyzed it and was like, “Okay, so the heart monitor didn't really pick anything up, but you tapped on the monitor like eight to ten times a day.”

I was like, “Well, who's right?” *(Laughs.)* “I'm going off of what I felt.” I mean, thankfully, they said there was nothing wrong with my heart. There's nothing like physically wrong with me. And she was like, “I believe there's something going on like anxiety wise; I think this is maybe an anxious reaction that your body's having to whatever is going on.” Which I wasn't surprised.

I think I was like surprised—I was like, “Oh, I didn't realize I was that anxious, or I didn't realize that I was feeling this so frequently.” But then, it's one of those things where you like flashback and you're like, “Oh, I guess I was feeling like a little stressed at that moment or something I was thinking of made me tense, and then my heart started racing. But I didn't think that those things were connected.” And yeah.

[00:05:49] **John Moe:** Was it like an atrial fibrillation, I think they call it? Where it's like you're—it's like you're just missing a beat or it's like a drummer screwing up or something?

[00:05:58] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah. Exactly. Yeah. It's like instead of like a steady heartbeat, (*clapping an even rhythm*) it's like—like my—(*clapping becomes faster and irregular*) I'm doing like a double-time step with my heart. (*Laughs.*) Thankfully, it's like operating just fine. It's just like just having little hiccups here and there. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:06:13] **John Moe:** It always is nice to hear from a doctor, “There's nothing wrong with you physically.”

(*They cackle and Sasheer agrees.*)

It's such a great leading statement of—when you get to the next thing. So, what did it feel like when you were hitting the monitor, and what was the sensation that caused you to hit it?

[00:06:31] **Sasheer Zamata:** I would just be kind of doing whatever I did during the day—doing the dishes, doing whatever, and then all of a sudden my heart would skip a beat. And I'm like, “Oh, there it is!” And I would mark it. So, I think it's like a delayed thing. 'Cause it's never like, “I'm so stressed or anxious,” and that's when it's happening. 'Cause I feel like I would've been able to track that better.

It's truly like randomly. Like, I'm driving. I am talking to someone. I've been in mid-conversation where it's happened, and I'm like, “This doesn't feel like it's related to what's happening currently.” So, it could just be a delayed reaction to what happened before that, or me thinking about something in the future, which is anxiety. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:07:12] **John Moe:** It sounds a little bit like *Family Feud* or *Jeopardy*, like you're buzzing in when you know the right answer or something.

[00:07:18] **Sasheer Zamata:** Oh, yeah, yeah. I have trigger finger. (*Laughs.*)

[00:07:20] **John Moe:** Yeah. Well, I mean, first of all, did you agree with that assessment that it's coming from anxiety?

[00:07:27] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah, I do agree. Because I don't—I didn't feel like it was anything health-wise, like physically. Like, I also was like, “Yeah, it doesn't make sense, 'cause everything else feels like it's operating just fine.” And then once we kind of put a name to it, when it did happen I would have moments of being, “Oh, I'm feeling anxious about something.” And it would kind of calm down. And honestly, the frequency of how many times my heart palpitates has decreased immensely since I have acknowledged the anxiety. So, I think it's kind of like naming it helped a lot.

[00:08:02] **John Moe:** How far back do you go with anxiety?

[00:08:05] **Sasheer Zamata:** I mean, it's funny. I don't know. (*Chuckles.*) 'Cause I—'cause I mean. I had these—these palpitations were starting in college, but I didn't know that's what that was at the time. And then, I know I had a big—my first big panic attack in like 2007 or something like that. 'Cause I was working at Disney World and—

[00:08:29] **John Moe:** In Orlando.

[00:08:30] **Sasheer Zamata:** In Orlando. And I was a character performer, and I was friends with—that's what you're supposed to say; you're friends with Pluto, Eeyore, Mrs. Incredible. And I was also barely in the height range for the Buzz Lightyear costume. And they do everything by height. I'm 5'6½", and so Buzz Lightyear's in like the 5'7" to 5'9" range, and they're like, "So, you technically fit." But like I felt too small. Like, the chest pack was so huge. I could barely touch one hand to another hand. The face was too close to my face. It was like all wrong. And I remember arguing with my manager before I got out in front of the kids, and they were like, "Everyone hates this costume. You're just trying to get out of it."

And I was like, "That should be a sign! Like if everyone hates it—"

[00:09:17] **John Moe:** Yeah, everybody hates this costume!

[00:09:19] **Sasheer Zamata:** We should get rid of the costume! And so, I was sobbing in this costume in front of the kids, just like lackadaisically stamping my signature onto their little books. And then, my character attendant, who's like the eyes and ears of the character, saw how upset I was and was like, "Hey Buzz, how are you doing? Thumbs up, thumbs down." I gave a big thumbs down. And they were like, "Okay, we gotta get you offstage." So, they tried to usher me offstage, but then Woody was like hamming it up in front of the door with some kid. And then, I guess—I don't know, my body reacted, and my lungs just stopped working, and I like started hyperventilating. And you could hear it outside my costume. And they just like picked me up and rushed me backstage and took off my costume. And they're like, "We think you had a panic attack." And I hadn't had one at this point, so I didn't know what that even entailed. And they took me to the medic, and they finally were like, "We realize now you probably shouldn't wear that costume."

And I was like, "Oh, good."

(*They laugh.*)

[00:10:18] **John Moe:** Thanks.

[00:10:19] **Sasheer Zamata:** Oh, good. Glad my body had to break down for that to be the result. But then I remember reading about panic attacks years later and seeing that it wasn't just those types of physical reactions. Sometimes it's just like, you know, the tingling of your tongue or your—like numbness in your fingers or little things like that. And I was like, oh, I've been having a lot of little panic attacks for a while, and I don't even know when that started. But I can think of many instances where I'm like on the subway and my tongue is like tingling for some reason or like my fingers are getting numb or my breath is getting

shortened or something. And I didn't know what it was. I'm just like, "Oh, what a weird thing!" (*Chuckles.*) But then realized, oh, I've been—I've been having panic attacks.

[00:11:08] **John Moe:** Well, I think a lot of people who haven't experienced them think that it's a purely psychological phenomenon. Like, you know, "I'm having a panic attack," is sort of shorthand that a lot of people use for, "I'm feeling stressed," when it's not really that at all. Do you feel emotional stress for these things too? Or is it mostly just a physical sensation?

[00:11:30] **Sasheer Zamata:** I think it—I think it depends. Could be both. The last big panic attack I had was at work. I was onset, and I was closing my house—closing on my house and like just stressed in general and trying to like send all these—this paperwork while I was onset, and there was like smoke in the air. So, I think there was like many factors adding to this.

And so, I was starting to get a headache and then like standing outside to get air. And then, a PA came up to me and was like, "Oh, we're ready when you are." And that stressed me out, like the fact that the crew was waiting for me made me anxious. And then, I had a panic attack. (*Laughs.*) And it was like a migraine into a panic attack, and it was like a full—like, I was out. I was out of commission. And they actually had to shut down after that, because we were like, "We can't continue."

[00:12:21] **John Moe:** wow.

[00:12:23] **Sasheer Zamata:** Like, I was—and thankfully the director also suffered from migraines and was like, "I understand that like once you have one you cannot continue. You gotta go home." So, yeah. The medic on set was like, "We're done. We gotta call it."

[00:12:38] **Transition:** Staccato acoustic guitar.

[00:12:41] **John Moe:** Coming up, more with Sasheer Zamata on panic, migraines, and how that all works out as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:12:57] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat, cheerful music.

Laura House: Hi everyone. I'm Laura House.

Annabelle Gurwitch: And I'm Annabell Gurwitch. And sometimes, it feels like the whole world is a dumpster fire.

Laura: Right? There's too much to worry about it.

Annabelle: That's why we make *Tiny Victories*! It's a 15-minute podcast where we celebrate our minor accomplishments and fleeting joys!

Laura: And listeners call in, like Valerie—who found the perfect gift for her daughter's boyfriend—and Adam, who finally turned his couch cushion the right way!

Annabelle: And little happinesses, like how birdsong helps your brain.

Laura: That's science!

(Birds tweeting.)

Annabelle: So, join us in not freaking out for 15 minutes a week.

Laura: That's *Tiny Victories* with Annabelle and Laura, Mondays on Maximum Fun. Whoop! It's a tiny victory just to make a network promo!

Annabelle: Honestly.

(Music ends.)

[00:13:43] **Transition:** Relaxed guitar.

[00:13:47] **John Moe:** Back with Sasheer Zamata: actor, comedian, erstwhile Buzz Lightyear performer, panic attack haver, and—as we've learned—migraineur. That's a person who gets migraines.

(Music ends.)

How long have migraines been an issue?

[00:14:04] **Sasheer Zamata:** That's also a new development. *(Laughs.)*

[00:14:05] **John Moe:** Ah!

[00:14:06] **Sasheer Zamata:** I would say that probably started in the last couple years, and I haven't had many. But when I do, it's bad! *(Laughs.)* It's very bad. Yeah, I haven't had so many or had them so intensely that I've had to like get medication or anything like that, but I have definitely had them and can feel when they start coming on. So, I start trying to like leave whatever situation I am I'm in to like be in a dark room or like rest for a minute so hopefully I can catch it. Yeah.

[00:14:38] **John Moe:** Yeah. God, just migraines and panic attacks at the same time. That sounds—that sounds awful.

[00:14:44] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah, thankfully that was the one and only time it happened, and I think after that I was also like, “I gotta take care of myself!” (*Laughs.*) “I gotta—I can't afford to be doing this, especially at work!” And so, I started doing transcendental meditation, and that's been helping a lot. I don't do it often. (*Laughs.*) I don't do it all the time as much as I should, but just like knowing that I can rest at any time of the day is very helpful. ‘Cause I think I would usually just push it off to the side. Like, “I'll get to that later. I'll like meditate before I go to bed or something like that.” As opposed to like, “You have 20 minutes, just do it now. Like, stop checking your email. Go close your eyes for 20 minutes.”

[00:15:26] **John Moe:** How did you—how did you get involved in that kind of meditation? Like, what did you do to learn those skills?

[00:15:32] **Sasheer Zamata:** I think there's actually a lot of actors and like people in the industry who do TM, so I think I've heard about it for a while. I actually think I first heard about it at *SNL* when I was there. ‘Cause I remember Colin Jost and Vanessa Bayer were doing it, and I was like, “What is this woo-woo shit they're talking about?”

(*John chuckles.*)

But also, they seemed—like, they seemed pretty calm in a very stressful environment. So, I was like, “Something's happening.” (*Chuckles.*) And then, yeah, I think I was looking up different types of meditation, and I ran across it again. And I was like, “Oh yeah, I think I know people who do that.” And I did like a few workshops and felt like it was helping and felt good. And it was kind of like an undeniable physical change I was going through after I did it each time. So, I was like, “Okay, I can't like deny that there's something going on here. Like, my body feels better, my breath work is better. I sleep better. I dream more.” Like, it was all just—all the things were working well whenever I would do TM, so I try to keep doing it.

[00:16:36] **John Moe:** Is it something you could do during a panic attack to kind of slow things down and reverse course a little?

[00:16:43] **Sasheer Zamata:** I don't know if I can fully meditate during a panic attack, but I do try to like focus on my breathing. And then, what I've been told from my panic attacks is to like look around. So, I feel like for—when I meditate, I close my eyes. But when I'm having a panic attack, it's actually good to look at your surroundings and know where you are. So, like being like, “Lamp. Uh, table. Shoelace.” Like, just kind of like clocking what's around you. And I honestly don't know what the science is behind that, but it has helped me when I'm actually in a panic attack, to kind of like move your head and look in different directions to figure out where you are in the world. Because maybe the panic is also like, “I don't know what's happening.” So, if you know—if you have some sort of solid ground to touch down on or like some sort of knowledge of like, “I at least know this. I don't know what's happening, but I know that there's a lamp in front of me. I know that this man's in front of me. I know this is happening.” That can like kind of calm you.

[00:17:46] **John Moe:** I have been I guess fortunate to have only had a couple/three panic attacks ever. And—but I remember the first one I got, we were—my wife and I were moving our family from the west coast—from Seattle to Minnesota—and I was in the middle of—I

was doing journalism. I was reporting a story. I was planning this move. We were pregnant with kid number three, and it all kind of came upon me, and I had this sense of like, “I think I’m about to die.”

[00:18:15] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah.

[00:18:16] **John Moe:** Like, I called my wife and I said, “Uh, bad news. I think I’m about to die. I know—”

[00:18:22] **Sasheer Zamata:** “Really bad timing. I know.”

[00:18:23] **John Moe:** “Really bad timing. I know we’re moving and having a baby, but I’m gonna die.”

(Sasheer laughs.)

With your panic attacks, do you get that sense of mortality? 'Cause I've heard about it from other people as well. Like, there's a sense of doom that kind of comes over you.

[00:18:37] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah. Yes. Yeah. I don't know if I've ever been like, “I’m gonna die in this moment.” I have felt like something's really wrong with me, and I gotta get this checked out. Or like, I have a big like health problem that I'm unaware of, and it's gonna affect me for the rest of my life. *(Chuckling.)* So, I need like to figure this out. Which is why I also went to the doctor as much as I did to try to figure out what was happening with my heart. But yeah, I don't think I've ever been like, “This is the moment I'm gonna die.”

(They laugh.)

“This is the end. I had a good run.”

Honestly, I have that moment—that feeling whenever I'm in a plane, whenever there's turbulence, I'm like, “This is it. And—you know what? If this is it, I had a good run. I did what I could.”

(They laugh.)

[00:19:25] **John Moe:** Has that always been the case with flying?

[00:19:28] **Sasheer Zamata:** I feel like it increased as I got older. Like, I've been flying by myself since I was 11, 'cause my parents split, and they would put me on a plane, and I would go visit my dad for the summers. So, I was very comfortable on planes when I was a child. But then, something about my adulthood—I'm not sure what changed, but I just started freaking out whenever there's turbulence, and I like white knuckle it, and then I look around at people just like on their phones. And I'm like, “How are you not freaking out right now?!”
(Laughs.)

[00:19:58] **John Moe:** Right. I always look to the flight attendants like—you know, if I see a panicked flight attendant—and I never have—but if I do, then it's all over I think.

[00:20:08] **Sasheer Zamata:** That's true. That's a good litmus.

[00:20:11] **John Moe:** (*Chuckles.*) So, you're a person who has dealt with anxiety in some—to some level and has dealt with panic attacks. I can't imagine the kind of pressure that a job like *SNL* entails. Did all these—were all these things spiking a lot more when you were in that pressure cooker?

[00:20:32] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah! (*Laughs.*) P-probably! I actually don't remember having any panic attacks then, but also I probably did and didn't know it.

[00:20:40] **John Moe:** Just another day at the office in a place like that.

[00:20:43] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah, where everyone's panicking. Yeah. Yeah. It's a stressful environment, and everyone's dealing with stress in their own way. But it is funny. I feel like by the end of my fourth season there, I had reached a place of Zen. Like, a kind of a, “Well. It is what it is,” kind of feeling. ‘Cause I think I could take solace in the fact that no one really knew what was happening. There were some people who knew what was happening, but it's not like there was a formula or a game you could play to like fully crack the code of how to do well on this show. You just did well, or you didn't, and it varied from week to week. And so, I think eventually I was—I realized, “Oh, there's nothing specific I can do to change what's happening. I could just do me and try my best, and that's that.”

And also, understand that other people are so involved with their own shit and like so stressed in their own right, they're not worried about me. They're not like—I'm not being iced out this week or no one's like attacking me this week. 'Cause they're stressed about their own sketch! So, I guess eventually I was like—there was like a—I don't wanna say dead end, but like a of acceptance of “This is what it is, and all I can do is stay afloat.”

[00:22:04] **Transition:** Relaxed acoustic guitar.

[00:22:09] **John Moe:** Coming up, Sasheer gets a little help in that effort to stay afloat.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:22:19] **Promo:**

(*Animal noises.*)

Music: Cheerful, upbeat music.

Alexis B. Preston: Are you tired of being picked on for only wanting to talk about your cat at parties?

Ella McLeod: Do you feel as though your friends don't understand the depth of love you have for your guinea pig?

Alexis: When you look around a room of people, do you wonder if they know sloths only have to eat one leaf a month?

Ella: Have you ever dumped someone for saying they're just not an animal person?

Alexis: Us too.

Ella: She's Alexis B. Preston.

Alexis: She's Ella McLeod.

Ella: And we host *Comfort Creatures*, the show where you can't talk about your pets too much, animal trivia is our love language, and dragons are just as real as dinosaurs.

Alexis: Tune into *Comfort Creatures* every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(Music fades out.)

[00:22:56] **Transition:** Harmonic acoustic guitar plucking.

[00:23:01] **John Moe:** Back with actor and comedian Sasheer Zamata. She's got a new comedy special called *The First Woman* coming out next month. We've been talking about a place of relative calm that she reached during her time at the very stressful *Saturday Night Live*, where she realized all she could do was stay afloat.

(Music ends.)

That's very wise and that's very healthy. How did you arrive at that? Did you—did you have help through therapy or did it just dawn on you?

[00:23:30] **Sasheer Zamata:** I did have a life coach, Betsy Capes, who is amazing—helped me through the whole time I was there, and she would help me with different techniques like socially. I'd be like, "Oh, I'm feeling kind of lonely here." 'Cause I'm here all the time. And I know people; everyone's friendly, but also I feel lonely.

And she's like, "Okay, what if we make a game plan? We're gonna invite all the girls in the cast to a dinner. What night's the best night for everybody?"

Like, I was like, "Monday's pitch night. People aren't really like doing anything after."

She's like, "Ask everyone to have dinner Monday night." Like she would like help me navigate a bit. And she also like works with people in the industry, so she like kind of gets it.

So, she helped me a lot. She helped me figure out how to talk to like the head writers, how to talk to Lorenn, sometimes.

I would try to come in with a game plan and at least know what my side of the conversation was gonna be. And I think having someone I could talk to about this—and I was in therapy too, but that was like more just me talking about my emotions, where the life coach is more about like, “Let’s plan on how you’re going to operate in this environment.” And I think that was immensely helpful.

[00:24:45] **John Moe:** How did you find a good life coach?

[00:24:48] **Sasheer Zamata:** I actually—she actually taught a class at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre, where I did improv and sketch and stand up and kind of started my comedy journey. And she used to be I wanna say an agent or a casting director. I can’t remember, but she used to be in the biz, and then was realizing that artists weren’t utilizing some of the skills that they needed to like go farther than they were. Like, they had talent, or they had the look or whatever, but they didn’t have a good knowledge of time management or how to use their resources or their connections or whatever. So, she created this class that was kind of like how to attain your goals with manageable bites, basically. And you kind of mapped out your goals in a year.

Like, in a year, I would love to—I think mine were like audition for more national commercials, get an audition for *SNL*, finish this web series, and something else. And then, you go back in time and you’re like, “Okay, so if I wanna achieve that in one year, in nine months, I need to have done these things. In six months, I need to have done these things. In three months, these things.” And then, you go week by week. And it could be as little as like email this director that I know and see if he’s available to talk about my web series, or research spaces where I can shoot this thing, or reach out to my commercial agent and tell them I’m willing to do more voice acting. Or whatever the thing is. But just as opposed to being like, “Eventually, I wanna be on *SNL*,” like really break down what are the steps to get there and how to achieve it.

And then, I remember the next year looking back at my list of goals that I wanted, and I had achieved all of them. I had auditioned for *SNL*. I don’t know if I had made it that year. I auditioned a couple times. I was booking more commercials. I did finish my web series. And yeah, so I think I had gotten a lot from that class to the point where I remember the last day we had to go around in a circle and say like what we got from the class. And it got to me, and I was just sobbing because I was like, “I got so much from this class, and I don’t know if I can do it on my own.” Like, I was like scared to like leave the class, because I was like—I loved the accountability of like having to like do homework and come every week with some work that I did. And I don’t know if I can do that on my own.

Which I did! Which is great. But then I was like, “I still want some help.” So, I actually reached out to the teacher, who is also a life coach, and was like, “Will you help me? Just me?”

[00:27:32] **John Moe:** Oh, nice.

[00:27:32] **Sasheer Zamata:** And she helps lots of people, not just me. But I was like, “Will you help me outside of the class realm?” And she was very, very, very helpful for many years. And yeah, I feel like I owe a lot to her.

[00:27:47] **John Moe:** I want to talk a little bit more about the standup and the special, which again, I really enjoy *The First Woman*. It sounds like you had done a lot of learning about your anxiety over the years. Is anxiety funny?

[00:28:03] **Sasheer Zamata:** (*Chuckles.*) I think anything can be funny. Just depends on how you phrase it or what you're talking about specifically. And also, I guess it depends on who you're asking. I think to some people, anxiety's probably not funny. But yeah, the fact that you can't control something that's happening to your body is a little funny. It's like you can lie to yourself as much as you want and be like, “Yeah, I got it. Or like, it's cool, this doesn't affect me.” But then your body's gonna be like ding, ding, ding! Like, no, no, no! We do feel this way!

[00:28:34] **John Moe:** Right.

[00:28:34] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yeah. It is kind of funny that it's like—it's a reminder of how human we are or how animal we are or how—like no matter how much thought or control we want our brains to have, we can't. It's not there.

[00:28:49] **John Moe:** Yeah, a lot of the special, you go to some very personal places and some very vulnerable places. How do you decide—like looking back on just different anecdotes that have happened in your life, how do you—how do you decide which events of your life to turn into comedy? Like, how do you recognize where the funny is in things that have happened to you?

[00:29:14] **Sasheer Zamata:** Oooh! I think I just have a long list of things—like, of like stories that have happened, things people have said to me, arguments I've been in. Just like a long list of things in a folder on my phone. And I don't know if it's funny. Like, some things happen, and I don't know what to do with it yet. Like, I had a car accident in college that was years and years ago, and I knew I wanted to talk about it in some way, but I didn't know what was funny about it yet. And it wasn't until this special where I actually was able to talk about it and link it to something else. And so, yeah, I think maybe just time and also an accumulation of other ideas helps me realize, “Oh, this thing might connect to this point that I'm trying to make, or this story connects to this story, and I can actually like turn it into this message,” or whatever.

But I don't know if it's funny until I say it out loud. So, I just kind of try things onstage, and if people are relating to it, then I kind of get an answer of like, “Okay, I think I'm going in the right direction.”

[00:30:27] **John Moe:** So, do you workshop things? Do you do standup just knowing that you gotta see what something amounts to?

[00:30:36] **Sasheer Zamata:** I think there's a different process for each joke. Sometimes I'll go to my friends who are comedians and be like, "Do you think this is funny? Or like do you think there's legs here?"

And they might be like, "Yeah! I think that's great." Or like, "Mm, maybe workshop it a little bit more." And then, I might just like tool around with it onstage, but I kind of have a good idea of what it is before I even hit the stage. Like, I try to like figure out why I am even saying this thing before I get it to an audience. And then, once I get in front of an audience, I try to pay attention to what they're responding to the most in the joke or in the story. 'Cause sometimes I might tell a story where it's like these details aren't important to the point I'm trying to make. Like, I'm like giving extra details that the audience doesn't care about or they're like, "That's interesting but not funny."

And then, I'll like trim and adjust accordingly. But it's a symbiotic relationship between the audience and me, because they're getting entertained, but I'm also learning from them too. I'm also like getting information for like the future of this show.

[00:31:39] **John Moe:** I think of somebody who has dealt with anxiety going up and, you know, talking about very personal things in front of an audience. Does it make your anxiety better? Does it make it more manageable that you're doing—you know, that you can get up in front of strangers and share this stuff?

[00:31:59] **Sasheer Zamata:** You know what's funny? I think I feel way more comfortable sharing anything or just talking in front of an audience than with one person. Like, I would much rather in front of thousands of people on stage and sharing my deepest, darkest secrets than to meet (*laughing*) one new person at a party and just like make small talk. It's—and I don't know how to explain it. And I think that might be a performer thing or an artist thing. There's many people I know who are comedians who also have anxiety or are just shy or get anxious, and I don't know why that is. But yeah, I—for some reason, I've always been like comfortable on stage in front of people, but not the other way around.

[00:32:50] **John Moe:** Right, right. To mingle in the lobby afterwards is dreadful. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:32:55] **Sasheer Zamata:** Oh my god! Yes! I feel like I've been a habitual late person. I'm getting way, way better. If anyone asks, tell them I'm very on time all the time. (*Laughs.*) But I think part of the reason I was late for so much of my life is because I was dreading the interaction I would have before a thing—like, if I had to like go to a meeting or an audition or a lunch or whatever. I don't—I just wanted to avoid the small talk or the awkward like getting in there with another person and interacting. I hated that. I'd rather be the last person there so everything's already established, and I just plug myself in.

Which like is a good strategy for me, but also doesn't look professional at all. So, I changed it, but it's—yeah, I think eventually I was like, "Why am I so late all the time? Like, I know how to leave my house. Like, I know how to—I know what to do to like leave and get to a place, but for some reason I keep delaying myself." And I think that was part of it.

[00:33:56] **John Moe:** So, are you more comfortable in this conversation because we're recording, and it'll go out to listeners?

[00:34:04] **Sasheer Zamata:** (*Cackles.*) Um, that's funny. I may be more comfortable because we're on screens. I'm just in my own environment, and you are wherever you are. If we were in person, who knows how this would go!

[00:34:16] **John Moe:** Oh my god. We'd—like, there'd be drinks and snacks and it would just be—we wouldn't know what to do.

(*Sasheer laughs.*)

I'd be looking at my shoes. You know.

[00:34:25] **Sasheer Zamata:** I'd be looking at the door. I'd be like, "When do we get out of here?"

[00:34:26] **John Moe:** Right, right. One of us would fake an important emergency phone call that we had to deal with. Well, what's your plan for the anxiety going forward into the future? Is it something that you want to move past? Is it something that you're just gonna be managing forever? Like, what's the perspective on it?

[00:34:45] **Sasheer Zamata:** So far, I'm just working on management. I think if it gets worse, I will try to like see what I—if I need like some sort of specific therapy or medicine or something like that. But so far, it is manageable. And I don't know if it's something I can move past. I have no idea. I'm not sure if I've ever heard of anyone being like, "I have no more anxiety!" (*Laughs.*) Like, "I'm done with that. Left that behind years ago."

I think it—I think the goal is just to like experience it less, or at least to just acknowledge it when it happens. And so far, when I acknowledge it, it does make me feel better. So, I think I just wanna like stay on that train and hope that that means that it's like getting easier to understand as opposed to like questioning, "What is this? Am I dying? What's happening?" (*Chuckles.*)

[00:35:43] **John Moe:** Do you still get the heart irregularity?

[00:35:46] **Sasheer Zamata:** Very little. Every so often, but like immensely lower since I've acknowledged that it could be linked to my anxiety.

[00:35:56] **John Moe:** Okay. And how about the panic attacks?

[00:35:59] **Sasheer Zamata:** I also haven't had a panic attack in a really long time, which makes me feel really good. Yeah, I feel like the last one I had that I can think of was like two years ago, which is nice. Yeah.

[00:36:07] **John Moe:** Okay. Alright, knock on wood. The special is called *The First Woman*. Sasheer Zamata, thank you so much.

[00:36:16] **Sasheer Zamata:** Yes! Thank you for having me.

[00:36:21] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[00:36:27] **John Moe:** Sasheer Zamata’s standup special, *The First Woman*, debuts next month. Our show relies on donations from our listeners. With the donations, we continue to exist. Without them, we don't exist any longer. We like existing. And if you've already become a member, thank you. You are making the show possible. If you haven't become a member, don't worry. It's easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you, and then select *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. Be sure to check out MaxFunStore.com. We have all sorts of *Depresh Mode* merchandise, all sorts of “I'm glad you're here” merchandise happening over there. We got shirts and mugs and blankets and sweatpants, because what's *Depresh* without sweatpants? That's at MaxFunStore.com. Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews, helps get our show out into the world.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 for free in the United States by calling 988. The Crisis Text Line, also free and always available. Text “home” to 741741. Our Instagram and Twitter are both @DepreshPod. If you're on Facebook, look up our mental health discussion group, Preshies. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram @JohnMoe. Our electric mail address is depreshmode@maximumfun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. I went to a baseball game last week. I like going to big baseball games, because you can yell, “Come on!” in a big crowd without any explanation or apology, and I enjoy doing that. *Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our production intern is Clara Flesher, and we get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”.

[00:38:17] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

[00:38:54] **Nath:** Hello! This is Nath, from Tacoma, Washington, and I'm glad you're here.

[00:39:01] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music ends.)

[00:39:14] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:39:15] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[00:39:16] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[00:39:18] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[00:39:19] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[00:39:20] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[00:39:21] **Speaker 6:** —by you.