

[00:00:00] **John Moe:** Sometimes the rational mind and the emotional mind work well together. Rational covers the basic, factual information. Emotional handles the motivation behind doing stuff and the intuition that comes from reading people and situations. Rational and emotional working in concert—it's like a concert, guitar and bass finding a groove together. Bass is the rational, I think, in this analogy. Emotion is definitely lead guitar. So, anyway, when it works well, they jam, and it's great. But picture, if you will, a guitarist and bassist playing different songs entirely at the same time. The chords don't match. The rhythm is all messed up. There is, to put it mildly, disharmony. And often that's what happens with mental health conditions.

By the way, I used to say mental illnesses, then I would say mental disorders, and that started to feel judgmental to me lately, so I'm now going with mental health conditions here on the show. It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

[00:01:07] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:01:15] **John Moe:** Anyway, yeah. So, people with mental health conditions have this dissonance between the rational and the emotional minds. Because rationally, Aparna Nancharla should be fine. She's a widely respected, popular, acclaimed standup comedian who headlines all over the place. She has acted on several TV series, including a very funny cameo recently on *What We Do in the Shadows*. Aparna has voice acted on *BoJack Horseman* and *The Great North*, and she's an author now, too. Her first book was just published.

But the emotional mind doesn't always listen to facts. And despite her many accomplishments, Aparna still has mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, which she writes about in that new book I was telling you about. And she experiences mental health phenomena like impostor syndrome, as reflected in the title of that book, which is *Unreliable Narrator: Me, Myself, and Impostor Syndrome*.

[00:02:12] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:02:19] **John Moe:** Aparna Nancharla, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

[00:02:21] **Aparna Nancharla:** Thank you! Thanks, John.

[00:02:24] **John Moe:** I'm afraid that we did get notification that we can't go ahead with the interview, because you're a fraud.

(Aparna laughs.)

And you've been exposed for being a fraud, and they're coming to get you. And it's—you know, it's all cancelled. No, not really! Because you're not a fraud whatsoever.

[00:02:40] **Aparna Nancharla:** I say it's about time! It's about time I be held to account.

[00:02:46] **John Moe:** (*Laughs.*) Let's start with the creation of the book itself. What led you to want to write a book called *Unreliable Narrator: Me, Myself, and Impostor Syndrome*?

[00:02:56] **Aparna Nancherla:** I think for me, the idea for the book germinated maybe naturally from what I was going through in my life at the time, which was that—you know, I was doing standup, and I was working full time as a comedian, and this was, quote/unquote, “the dream” that I had been pursuing for so long. And I think the more success I accrued, the more I started to feel that like I didn't fit in or that, you know, maybe I wasn't meeting the audience's expectations.

And so, I think that led to somewhat of a crisis of like this is what you wanted; why is, internally, everything feeling so bad? And that made me kind of want to step back and look deeper into these feelings that I've struggled with since I was a kid. But I think it's not uncommon that the more maybe success or the higher you get up the ladder, the more sometimes those feelings start to be like, hey, wait a second! Hold on. You're not supposed to be here.

[00:04:01] **John Moe:** Right, right. (*Chuckles.*) So, this comes about at a time like—where you said—you're living the dream, you're working as a comedian, you've become nationally known, you're a success. Was it ever a situation where you could kind of hold up that reality to the impostor syndrome and say, “No, look, I have objective proof, and that wins.” Like, was that a technique to actually enter the reality into it, or did the reality not matter?

[00:04:33] **Aparna Nancherla:** Well, I think I could hold up the—yeah, the resume or the specific—you know, like you're recording a special; you can't dispute that, you know, you were given a special to record. Like, that—they're not just handing them out. But I still think—you know, I still have that anxious, depressive brain. So, I'm just focusing on the negative of like, “Oh my gosh, but your set—you know, you don't have like a great polish set right now. Or like, you know, there's some other reason that someone else maybe deserved this more than you at this time, or just like what you do isn't as good as other people.” Like, I feel like there's still always a way to maybe reframe even an accomplishment to make it maybe, for you, less of an achievement than maybe the next person.

[00:05:25] **John Moe:** You talked about how this was an old feeling. This goes way, way back. When is the first time you remember experiencing impostor syndrome?

[00:05:34] **Aparna Nancherla:** I think even—I think definitely naming it as impostor syndrome came later, maybe when I was in comedy. Because then, it literally was like, “Oh, you are being accepted as a member of a group that maybe you don't feel like you always meet the qualifications of, or you don't feel maybe naturally as funny as other people or some of your peers.” But I guess when I was younger, it was more the feelings just of maybe not quite fitting in and feeling like everyone else maybe had some sort of guide or pamphlet that they were going off of that I didn't have access to. So, always feeling kind of one step behind everyone else in terms of knowing what was going on or like the social codes that everyone else was going by.

[00:06:24] **John Moe:** Did you ever hit moments where it felt like your fears were being confirmed? That you did run up against things where, yeah, it just didn't work out, and it was a result of being an impostor?

[00:06:39] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah. I mean, I've always been a perfectionist, and I would say I was a good student growing up, but not by virtue of like really loving to learn or loving school, but just because I thought that was kind of just what you did. Like, you know, I grew up in a—my parents were both doctors and immigrants. And I think there was just this mentality: you work hard, you do what's expected of you, you read and learn every moment you can. And I didn't necessarily feel passionate about those things, but I was like that's just what you do. Like, that's what life is. But I think sometimes that would catch up with me because I didn't really care about schoolwork. I would leave everything until the last minute, which is another, you know, perfectionist tendency to procrastinate, because nothing's ever good enough.

And sometimes that would, you know, lead to things where I wouldn't start a project until like the night before, even though I had two months to work on it. And then, usually I could get it done under the wire, but I remember one time I like couldn't finish this paper, and I had to like go to my teacher and ask for an extension, and I think it just—it was moments like those that kind of confirmed, oh, you're like barely holding this farce together, like at any moment, it could just all come crumbling down.

[00:07:59] **John Moe:** What do people not understand about perfectionism?

[00:08:03] **Aparna Nancherla:** Hm. I think maybe that it's unrelenting. Just—I mean, I don't know. I feel like that's probably the case with anything you experience in your brain that someone else doesn't, but just that it—for me, it can frame like every single second of my day, you know. It's like what I'm doing, what I'm not doing. Like, at the end of the day, sometimes my brain is like, “Okay, like was today—like, can you give yourself a sticker for today or not?” Like, it's like everything is kind of rated and charted and—yeah, it's like you're kind of trapped in this system that never gives you a break.

[00:08:42] **John Moe:** Yeah, I mean, it's always struck me that I had always thought of a perfectionist as being the person who gets a perfect report card and who's, you know, everything is tidy around them, and everything is just like someone who's really got their shit together. And it surprised me as I learned more about it that that's not really the case at all. It's somebody who is always working towards that ideal but coming up short of it. So, it's not a feeling of satisfaction. It's a feeling of constant frustration.

[00:09:17] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah! But there are different kinds. Like, I will say, I think there are perfectionists who are, you know, from afar just everything looks perfect, and they are turning in everything on time. Like, I have a friend of mine who's also a perfectionist, and she's like, “Oh, you save everything until the last minute? I have to finish everything super early, because otherwise I get like freaked out that it's not gonna be done or not be good enough.” And I'm like, oh, I wish I had your kind! (*Laughs.*)

[00:09:47] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, then what kind do you have? Like, how does perfectionism manifest in your life?

[00:09:55] **Aparna Nancherla:** I have the kind where you procrastinate a lot and where you kind of have these fantasies of—you know, like the way any time you have a great idea as a creative, you suddenly—like, suddenly I go from the idea to just like, “Oh, and this is going to be a one-hour show, and I could take it to Edinburgh or—” You know, whatever. Like, it goes all the way 0 to 60. And then, you know, if I actually sit down and start to try to write it, I’m just like, “Well, this is horrible, and I cannot believe I thought this was a good idea.” Like, it just—like, the expectations of what I think it should be never match up with the reality of actually like sitting down and doing the thing.

[00:10:40] **John Moe:** Yeah. Yeah. So, then what does that—what does that mean to the functioning of your life? Because, you know, when you get to the definition of a disorder—you know, it's interfering with the proper functioning of your life. Does your perfectionism like rise to the level of a disorder, do you think?

[00:10:58] **Aparna Nancherla:** I don't know. I feel—I'm definitely that person who's reading all the online articles where it's like, “Go through the checklist. You might have, you know, chronic overthinking syndrome,” or whatever it is. Like, I am just like that's me! Like, I'm very suggestible. So, I'm happy to call everything and anything I have a disorder.

But for me, my perfectionism kind of—it sucks the joy out of things in that, you know, anything I do, I'm sort of either holding up an example of someone who did it better, or I'm saying like, “Oh, you could have done this better if you had started it earlier.” Like, I'm both self-sabotaging and sort of self-prophesizing that anything I make will be bad, but then I'm kind of setting myself up to fail.

[00:11:47] **John Moe:** Well, so then does writing a book help you overcome some of these things?

(They laugh.)

Like, I'm sure you've gone to therapy and talked about some of these issues, but writing a book is an intense, very time-consuming process. Did that help?

[00:12:03] **Aparna Nancherla:** I think it was exactly what I mentioned earlier, where I had this grand idea that I would write this book and heal myself through the gentle process of creation, and obviously we know none of that is real. And so, when I wrote it, I really struggled like through the whole process, both with kind of committing to it and just being like, oh, is any of this worth like reading, let alone publishing it for a wider audience? Like, it really forced me to kind of confront these things head on, on a daily basis, in a way that I've been doing for most of my life, but then also having to kind of be like, okay, but you have to kind of frame them for an audience and explain them to someone else.

[00:12:50] **John Moe:** And you write about a lot of different things. It's not just perfectionism. It's not just impostor syndrome. You talk about depression. You talk about anxiety. Was it a goal to try to understand those things and like knowing your enemy and figuring out how you could then conquer your enemy?

[00:13:09] **Aparna Nancharla:** I think so, but I also think I wanted to write a book because, you know, I have talked about mental health in my standup. And I think with standup, just the concision of a joke, and you need to have a kind of smooth polish to getting from the setup to the punchline. And I feel like with a lot of these topics, like anxiety and depression, like they're much messier, and they operate a lot more in the gray areas. And I thought a book might be a better way to explore some of that lack of resolution that often happens with these things, where it's not always like a neat, tidy landing.

[00:13:47] **Transition:** Thoughtful acoustic guitar.

[00:13:51] **John Moe:** More with comedian Aparna Nancharla in just a moment.

(Music ends.)

[00:14:00] **Promo:**

Music: A bouncy beat.

Dave Shumka: *(Rhythmically.)* If you need a laugh, and you're on the go, try S-T-O-P P-O-D-C-A-S-T-I—ugh. *(Sighs.)* Hm.

(Music stops.)

Graham Clark: Were you trying to put the name of the podcast there?

Dave: Yeah, I'm trying to spell it, but it's tricky.

Graham: Let me give it a try.

Dave: Okay!

(Music resumes.)

Graham: *(Rhythmically.)* If you need a laugh, and you're on the go, call S-T-O-P P-A-D—ah, it'll never fit!

Dave: No, it will! Let me try.

(Music resumes.)

(Rhythmically.) If you need a laugh, and you're on the go, try S-T-O-P P-O-D-C-O-O-UGH! We are so close!

Graham: *Stop Podcasting Yourself.*

Dave: A podcast, from MaximumFun.org.

Graham: If you need a laugh, and you're on the go.

(Music ends.)

[00:14:39] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:14:42] **John Moe:** We're back with Aparna Nancherla, author of the new book, *Me, Myself, and Impostor Syndrome*, about her experiences with various mental health conditions, including dysthymia.

(Music ends.)

You write about dysthymia, and I was really glad that you did, because I've been hosting shows about depression for a long time, and I feel like I don't give dysthymia kind of the spotlight that it deserves.

(Aparna laughs.)

Tell me what it is and what it has meant to you.

[00:15:13] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah. So, dysthymia—as I learned—is kind of maybe a form of depression that isn't the kind where you maybe can't get out of bed for days, and you kind of fully disappear from normal life. Like it's—you're still functioning, and you're still able to kind of maybe go through the motions of showing up to things, but internally it's like a much different experience. But I think because it's not maybe quite as extreme, people may be relegated as not quite as worth concern. For me, it's like I've been having those feelings for so long, like so consistently in my life on and off that it does make you start to question like is life just kind of like a series of waiting periods in between the next rut?

[00:16:07] **John Moe:** Yeah. Is life a series of waiting periods between the next rut?

[00:16:15] **Aparna Nancherla:** *(Laughs.)* Oh, I see you're the interviewer just turning my words back on me!

[00:16:19] **John Moe:** Well, you know, when you spot a good question in the wild, you have to grab it. It's like a Pokémon.

[00:16:25] **Aparna Nancherla:** I mean, that often feels like that. I think if you're prone to, you know, general periods of malaise, you do—I think if you're in a better mood or like you're in a up period, you are kind of waiting for that shoe to drop. And it kind of takes practice to not only be living kind of in anticipation of when it's all going to crash down on you.

[00:16:51] **John Moe:** Hm, I experience dysthymic depression as well. It's—I guess this is my coming out as a dysthymic person.

(Aparna laughs.)

I feel like it's such—I always think of it as such a hassle. Like, I'm trying to get through my day. I'm trying to run the errands I need to run and get to the appointments I need to do and mostly get the work done that I need to get done. And it's just this cloud of gnats that's just buzzing around my head.

[00:17:18] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah, and I think because it maybe doesn't, you know, present in the same way as a more severe version of depression, people maybe—you can't see it as clearly to other people. So, that makes me question its validity. Because depression often can also come down to, you know, a battle in your own brain of like are you just being, you know, a wimp, or can you just like show up and suck it up? And so, I think I, you know, have those same impostor-y feelings that come up around even my experience of depression sometimes, where it's like is mine real? Is mine as worthy of concern?

But I am living a life where I know like how easily it can sap joy out of things. And I also know, you know, when I've been on a new antidepressant or like done a new thing that's been working, I experience life so markedly differently that I'm like if this is what everyone else is living like, no, I am—this is not, you know—this is not the meal I ordered.

[00:18:25] **John Moe:** *(Chuckles.)* Is it too much?

[00:18:27] **Aparna Nancherla:** No! It just feels like like that thing where like wait a second, this isn't fair! Like, everyone else has been going off of this playbook?! Like, this is way better!

[00:18:38] **John Moe:** Everyone else has had a good prescription for eyeglasses and has been seeing things this entire time that are all smudges to me?!

[00:18:45] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah, because it's literally like—to me, it's like things taste better, the colors are brighter, like it's like things where you're just like I didn't realize even those things were being, you know, sapped of their full potential.

[00:19:01] **John Moe:** How long does that last for you?

[00:19:03] **Aparna Nancherla:** Well, see, that's what I—I've gone through a lot of antidepressants where it's like it works for a while, and then it stops working. So, I just—I've kind of gotten used to a thing of like, okay, this is—you get this one for now, but then it's like, you know, sort of like a great TV show. It's like it's inevitably the series finale, *(chuckling)* and then, it's back to figuring out what's next.

[00:19:26] **John Moe:** There's going to be a third season where they don't really know what to do with the characters.

[00:19:32] **Aparna Nancherla:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah. Everyone just gets kind of flat.

[00:19:35] **John Moe:** Yeah, there's an episode where you get locked in a refrigerator and then... Well, how far back do you go with depression? When did that first become part of your life?

[00:19:45] **Aparna Nancherla:** I mean, depression for me—I've always had those sort of melancholy feelings, even when I was a kid. But I think where it first really started impacting my ability to function was college, I would say. Early college? I think because I was like that kid who kind of was like let me just check off all the boxes everyone around me is doing; I'll figure this out when I get to college. Like, high school seemed just like this constant grind of, you know, padding your resume to get into a good school. And then, you know, I got there, and I was kind of ready to be like, “And now, someone will tell you what your dream is and what you're going to do with the rest of your life!” And then, that didn't happen. And so, I kind of spiraled at that point.

[00:20:31] **John Moe:** What happened when you spiraled?

[00:20:33] **Aparna Nancherla:** Well, my depression first manifested as an eating disorder. Like, you know, as a perfectionist, I do love control. So, I was like, well, I seem to have no purpose in life. Maybe I can just like control everything that I eat. (*Chuckles.*) So, that's our—I feel like the grand American dream—besides, you know, making a small business—is just like fully mastering your body. So, yeah. So, I think my—I was running track and cross country at the time. So, I think it was easy for me to, you know, just sort of mimic some of the eating behaviors I saw around me, and in that sense, kind of go down a not great path in terms of losing weight and like running all the time. So, that made me lose weight faster.

And that kind of reached a point where I had to take time off of school to address that. And pretty quickly, 'cause I went to an eating disorder treatment center. The psychiatrist there was like, “Yeah, it sounds like you're depressed.” (*Laughs.*) Yeah.

[00:21:40] **John Moe:** Okay. Like, the depression was causing the eating disorder?

[00:21:45] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah, the eating disorder was like a mask for the fact that I was like deeply unhappy.

[00:21:50] **John Moe:** It's so tricky to me, the idea of—if you've got multiple things going on, if you've got anxiety, if you've got eating disorder, if you've got depression, like it's the chicken and egg question of the whole thing. Like, what is causing what? And is there a root cause you can treat that would go out and branch out and help everything else that's going on?

[00:22:12] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah, and I think it's also like—you know, I've been in therapy for many years, and you talk a lot about, you know, your origins of like family dynamics and what could have shaped your thinking in a certain way. And it is like—sometimes I am like, ugh, like can we not keep talking about my family? Like, is there any chance, like some of this I caused myself?

‘Cause it just does feel like sometimes every, you know, disorder you have like basically crystallized when you were five or something, in therapy. And I'm just like is that true? That in and of itself feels depressing to wrestle with.

[00:22:56] **John Moe:** So, did you figure out—like, do you have a theory on what your root thing is?

[00:23:03] **Aparna Nancherla:** I mean, I think it is kind of related to the impostor syndrome of just this like persistent nagging feeling that I don't fit in, like the sort of everyone else is like living a life, and I'm kind of like behind a pane of glass observing them but not able to fully like join the rest of the group. And I think that kind of influences all the other things I struggle with, like depression, anxiety, perfectionism, but it's just this persistent feeling that I'll never like quite know what everyone else is talking about or sharing with each other. Like, I'm just somehow separate in a way.

[00:23:45] **Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

[00:23:47] **John Moe:** More with Aparna Nancherla about standup and about not wanting to stand up to do standup, right after the break.

(Music ends.)

[00:24:00] **Promo:**

Music: Exciting, upbeat music.

Ify Nwadiwe: I'm Ify Nwadiwe, the host of *Maximum Film*.

Alonso Duralde: I'm Alonso Duralde, also the host of *Maximum Film*.

Drea Clark: And I'm Drea Clark, yet another host of *Maximum Film*. Every week, we hosts huddle up.

Ify: Usually with an illustrious guest.

Alonso: And we talk about films.

Ify: We have film news!

Alonso: We have film quizzes!

Drea: We answer your film questions!

Ify: It's like the maximum amount of film talk. That's why we call it—

All: *(In unison.) Maximum Film!*

(Drea laughs.)

Speaker: *Maximum Film*, the movie podcast that's not just a bunch of straight White guys. New episodes weekly, on MaximumFun.org.

(Music fades out.)

[00:24:38] **Transition:** Peaceful acoustic guitar.

[00:24:42] **John Moe:** We're back with comedian, actor, and author Aparna Nancherla.

(Music ends.)

When I interviewed you last, it was on my former show, and it was a few years ago. You were having a hard time doing standup—of just getting it together and feeling good about going on stage and telling jokes. How is that doing today?

[00:25:05] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah, so when I was writing this book, I had to stop doing standup just because I found it was really hard to write this sort of vulnerable, raw book—which did end up being kind of a tortured process—and then getting up on stage and, you know, whatever the audience thought of me that particular set, like I really internalized it even more in a way that was not sustainable. So, I really had to step away from it. And with my timing, it was weird. 'Cause I started to, you know, just focus on the book, and then the pandemic happened. So, then it was like everyone had to sort of take a beat with performing. But I ended up taking a full, I guess, three-year break from performing.

(John “wow”s.)

And I feel like even saying it, there's like a little bit of anxiety that comes up. Because, you know, as a standup, you're told, you know, you get on stage, no matter what you—you know, if you are offered stage time, you don't turn it down. So, like the idea of taking a month off, let alone three years, just feels like inconceivable. But in saying that, I will say it is honestly the best thing I've ever done for my relationship to stand up. 'Cause I think it just made me reevaluate like why I like doing it, what I care about, like what excites me about writing, even just my relationship to the audience and their expectations.

I wouldn't say like I've come back and I'm like a fully new person, but I will say it just clarified so many things for me that I could not make sight of when I—you know, when I first stepped away. I was like too caught in my own tunnel of despair.

[00:26:51] **John Moe:** Well, it's such a vulnerable position when you think about doing standup comedy and to go up there and, you know, in front of strangers who've been drinking (*chuckles*) and tell your truth or tell your story or tell your observations. Do you see it as a different thing now than you did before you took the three-year break?

[00:27:12] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah. I mean, if anything, I think sometimes comedy or anything you're really, you know, passionate about can subsume your life in a way where it kind of becomes indistinguishable from your—you know, it just fully consumes your identity. And I think that's—like, I didn't really know who I was without comedy. So, stepping away from it kind of forced me to live a life without it and be like, “Okay, is this

something that you want to go back to? Or like what does your life look like without this thing? And I started to miss it, but that—I don't think I would have made that realization had I not put some distance between me and standup.

[00:27:56] **John Moe:** So, then why exactly did you take the break? Was it because you were working on the book, or were there other reasons?

[00:28:03] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yeah. I mean, I think it was—the book definitely was the straw that broke the camel's back, but even before that. Like, I think I talked about in our last interview, I was just struggling so much with performance anxiety and really like that cycle of dread of like if I had a show that night, it would start as soon as I woke up in the morning. But then it's like if you have shows every night of the week, then yeah, that never ends.

[00:28:30] **John Moe:** Right. So, then is the book a different experience? Because I mean, you lay out—I feel like I know a lot about your brain.

(They laugh.)

I think I know a lot about your emotional life and your vulnerabilities. And it's published with, you know, an attractive blue cover and a spotlight on there and a nice quote from Amy Poehler on the back. Is it a vulnerable thing? Is it a scary thing to put this book out into the world?

[00:28:59] **Aparna Nancherla:** I think so. I mean, I know it is, but I don't know. It's the first time I've ever written a book, so I'm not sure how other people relate to personal things they've written. But for me, I think I frequently will read passages of it now and just like—*(laughs)* like, the reactions will range anywhere from between like neutral acceptance to just like all full-on disgust at myself.

(They chuckle.)

So, I think—I think I've just made peace with the fact that I might never like love the book in a way that maybe a reader might love a book that they've read. But like, that's okay. I think it had to come out. It was like a demon. I had to exorcise it. And now, it's the world's problem.

(They laugh.)

[00:29:51] **John Moe:** Did it feel like you needed to make it funny, or did you feel like you just needed to make it honest?

[00:29:57] **Aparna Nancherla:** I mean, I was worried about the fact that I wasn't writing just like a full-on comedic thing, because I was like that's kind of what I've, you know, hung my hat on. And so, I don't know if people want to hear me be just like more serious or thoughtful. So, I think I have to make jokes. That's sort of like my defense mechanism. But I—yeah, I was still worried. I was like is it...? Uuuh, it's not funny enough.

(They chuckle.)

[00:30:28] **John Moe:** You write about the difference between introverts and extroverts in the book, and which of those two are you, and how did you arrive at that knowledge?

[00:30:38] **Aparna Nancherla:** I am an introvert. I think—I don't know if I knew that label early on. I probably figured it out by middle school or high school or wherever they made me first take the Myers-Briggs in school, but I always knew that I kind of was quieter than other people and definitely seemed to overthink things more than other people and maybe was more socially anxious. So, I think I had all the trappings of introversion that can show up, but I—yeah, I didn't necessarily know the term from a young age.

[00:31:16] **John Moe:** So, we have this kid who grows up with impostor syndrome and with depression and is an introvert. How did you get started in standup comedy?

(Aparna laughs and starts to answer.)

I should add, how in the world did you get started in standup comedy?

[00:31:34] **Aparna Nancherla:** I mean, I was getting more interested in comedy over high school and college. And my mom had made, you know, me take public speaking classes when I was a kid, because she was—she thought it would be a useful life skill use, useful soft skill for her children to have. And so, I think I—something I knew about, kind of speaking in front of a group in a more prepared way felt safer to me than like just, you know, day-to-day interaction. Like, I did clock that early on, but then I didn't fully dip the toe into standup until I actually went on antidepressants for the first time. And I think that, you know, it turned the dial up on life a little bit and maybe allowed me some hope that I hadn't had before and maybe gave me the courage to try things that there's no way I would have been able to previously.

[00:32:33] **John Moe:** Was it something that you had always wanted to try?

[00:32:37] **Aparna Nancherla:** No! I didn't—I feel like I knew very little about standup before. Like, I knew about *SNL* and late night, but I didn't—yeah, I grew up kind of pre-YouTube and, you know, pre-social media. So, I didn't—there wasn't the same access to, I think, comedic content that there is now. So, I didn't—I had no idea what the entry point was to doing standup. Like the only way I stumbled on it was like I had a friend in high school who was very funny, and he gave me some Mitch Hedberg CDs. And I think I had seen maybe standup once or twice on TV growing up. But we started going to like a free open mic near my house when I was home from college for the summer. And that was when I was like, oh, maybe this is a thing I could try. Like, everyone just seems to be talking about their lives, and there's no real rules on like what you write or how you do it. So, I was like that feels like maybe something I could do.

[00:33:36] **John Moe:** Yeah. So, having written this book, having taken the time off from standup and written everything that's in this book, do you feel like you understand yourself better? Or are you still a mystery to yourself?

[00:33:54] **Aparna Nancherla:** (*Chuckles.*) I think part of my personality is never fully figuring myself out. Like, I think if I got to the end of that sentence, I would be—you know, I would sort of lose some of my overall drive but—‘cause I think I am a seeker, ultimately. But I do think the book gave me context for, I think, a certain frame of my life I was in. And I wouldn't say I'm in the exact same spot I was when I wrote it, but I definitely still deal with some of the issues that I talk about in the book.

[00:34:31] **John Moe:** Were you able to make connections to parts of your life in the book? Like realizing, “Oh, I—this happened in chapter three, and this explains what happens later, in chapter 15. Now it all makes sense.”

[00:34:45] **Aparna Nancherla:** (*Laughs.*) Like, I wrote a mystery novel, and I was even surprised?

[00:34:49] **John Moe:** Right, exactly.

[00:34:51] **Aparna Nancherla:** I think I did make connections in different areas of my life. I was like, oh, this feeling of “why do I keep doing this to myself?” like seems to show up a lot. Like, it'll show up with “why did I agree to do this set?” or like, you know, “why did I agree to write this book?” Like, I just feel like I'm often at odds with the things that are expected of me. Which I think is part and parcel part of impostor syndrome of just like, you know, the things that people expect from you, you're just like, “But wait! I don't know what I'm doing.”

[00:35:27] **John Moe:** What do you hope people come away with after reading the book?

[00:35:33] **Aparna Nancherla:** Mm. I mean, I think I create standup or, you know, have written this book—like, I think I lean towards being a creative person, because it feels like my way of connecting with the rest of the world, because I often do feel so separate from everyone else that it feels like the—if I write something or make someone laugh, it is sort of like a bridge to connect to them. Because I ultimately feel like I maybe don't—can't fully connect to other people. So, I think in that sense, I hope the book serves as, yeah, like a bridge. A bridge to my brain, as it were.

[00:36:16] **John Moe:** (*Chuckles.*) Do you see a future where depression, impostor syndrome, the anxiety, is a thing in the past that you have conquered? Or is it just always going to be with you?

[00:36:28] **Aparna Nancherla:** I mean, I turned 40 last year, and I think, you know, a lot of people are kind of like—that's the first point in your life where you're sort of like, oh, I'm probably—I'm probably now (*chuckling*), you know, like this is—

[00:36:42] **John Moe:** This is what I get. This is—(*chuckles*).

[00:36:43] **Aparna Nancherla:** Yes, yes, this is going to be it for me. We're now in act two. So, I do think I've made peace with the fact that I'm not going to transform into some monumentally different person in the rest of my life. But I think there is a peace that comes

with knowing that. Like, I think the maybe really grueling part about your 20s and 30s and your childhood is you are constantly like, “But I'm going to become something! You know, like this is my chrysalis phase, and soon I will fully emerge.” And I think getting to a point where—you know, maybe some people it turns into a midlife crisis. And there's definitely those feelings, but there is also a lot of peace that comes with being like, “This is it. Like, this is what life is.” Like, there is no grand, you know, removing of the towel. And it's like, oh, and there was a rabbit here the whole time or whatever! It's a fully unrelatable magic trick. I don't know what the towel and the rabbit metaphor was.

[00:37:44] **John Moe:** Yeah, the old rabbit in the towel trick that we hear so much about.

(*They laugh.*)

So, the book is out into the world. A stranger can walk into a bookstore and read about your deeper most vulnerabilities. So, that's—you know, that's got to feel good.

(*Aparna laughs.*)

What's next? With all this knowledge that you've gained, with all this self-awareness that you've gained, what are you working on now?

[00:38:05] **Aparna Nancherla:** Well, I am—you know, it is a weird time, 'cause there's a strike. So, the book is one of the few things that I can promote at this time. But I am trying to, you know, focus on stand up right now, building an hour, and I will be doing tour dates alongside the book release. So, that is something I'm looking forward to. I haven't been on the road in a very long time, and I think it'll be nice to kind of put some of the stuff I've been working on, on its feet.

[00:38:37] **John Moe:** Okay. The book is *Unreliable Narrator: Me, Myself, and Impostor Syndrome*. The author is Aparna Nancherla. Aparna, thank you so much.

[00:38:46] **Aparna Nancherla:** Thanks for having me, John.

[00:38:50] **Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

[00:38:57] **John Moe:** And she's an author now, too. Her first book comes out tomorrow. This show exists because people donate to it. That is our model. That is where we get the funding to make this happen. If the funding stops, if people stop donating, then there's no more show. Let's keep having a show. I think it's going well. It's easy to donate if you haven't already done that. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you, and then pick *Depresh Mode* from the list of shows. If you've already done this, thank you. Be sure to visit our merchandise store. We've got t-shirts, we've got mugs, we've got *Depresh Mode* sweatpants. We've got a lot of things that say, “I'm glad you're here” on them, which is a good sentiment even outside the show. Our merchandise store can be found at MaxFunStore.com. MaxFunStore.com. Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars,

write glowing reviews of the show. That really helps get the show out into the world where it can help folks.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 for free in the United States by calling 988. The Crisis Text Line, also free, 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. A lot of good conversation happening there, people helping each other out in the mental health realm. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack, search that up. I'm on Twitter and Instagram, @JohnMoe, with an H. Please use our electric mail address, DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org, to get in touch with us.

Hi, credits listeners. The TSA considers peanut butter to be a liquid. So, always be sure to drink that whole jar while you're standing in line at security.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. The show is produced by Gabe Mara. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our music, including our theme song, “Building Wings”.

[00:40:59] **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

[00:41:35] **John Duvall:** Hi there, my name is John Duvall. My friends call me JD, and I'm from Columbus, Ohio. I just want you to know, I'm really thankful for you. I'm glad you're here.

[00:41:49] **John Moe:** *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

(Music fades out.)

[00:42:00] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:42:01] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[00:42:02] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[00:42:03] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[00:42:05] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[00:42:06] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[00:42:07] **Speaker 6:** —by you!