

Hell's

belle

**Difficult People** honcho Julie Klausner skewers the folks who make NYC a nightmare—and we couldn't be happier about it. By *Jillian Anthony* Photograph by *David Williams*

**PART OF THE** fun of *Difficult People* is watching struggling comedians Billy Epstein (Billy Eichner) and Julie Kessler (Julie Klausner) say the sort of deplorable things that many New Yorkers could only dream about saying. When Julie says, "You know what *understudy* is? A fancy word for disappointment," we feel her. Klausner, the creator, writer and star of the Hulu series, takes the awful, oh-so-New York situations and human beings she encounters and creates highly memorable, uproarious television. On Tuesday 12, the show returns for its second season, a 10-episode run that finds the duo back at their caustic best—like

when they try to scam Nathan Lane into helping their fake charity, or when Billy pretends he's recently out as gay so that hot guys will give him more attention. While the characters use people to get their way, everything usually blows up, fantastically, in their faces. On a recent Monday afternoon, Klausner walked into Think Coffee on the Bowery, near her apartment, wearing a flowing blouse and perfectly coiffed curls and immediately bought me a cookie—not a bad way to start our chat. So even though her character is based on a version of Klausner's real-life, rather acerbic self—à la Larry David on *Curb Your Enthusiasm*—she ain't all bad.

**You have amazing guest stars this season. Any stories from the set?**

Well, something horrible happened. A Boar's Head truck hit Billy's trailer. I met [guest star] Joel McHale for the first time trying to cross the street to make sure Billy was okay, and Joel was like, "Hey, free ham." I was like, "Oh, okay, this is who you are. Nice to meet you, Joel." And then I spent the rest of the day flirting with him shamelessly. It was a nice distraction from the fact that Billy could have died if [the truck] had been inches closer. We kept joking about how if this were Mindy Kaling, Hulu would have sent a cookie platter by now. If this were James

Franco, forget it, they would have shown up in a private jet.

**Nathan Lane said your show was the most fun he's ever had working on television.**

I will add that he had just come from working with Ryan Murphy. No, I'm just being shitty. Film or theater actors are always the lofty gets, and when we got Nathan Lane, it was so exciting. He's irreplaceable. He could have been successful or famous working in any era.

**Speaking of theater, you have got a lot of opinions about Broadway. What did you think of the Tonys this year?**

After a horrible, gut-wrenching, emotionally devastating day, I felt like it was exactly what the theater and LGBT communities needed. And also, this was the year *Hamilton* was the show to see, and it's a very positive show. During a day when you aren't sure if you hate your country or not, the whole thing came together beautifully.

**You've tweeted about your love of *American Psycho* a lot. Are you mourning its closing?**

Yeah, I am. After what's happened, it was not the right year. This year, we're winding down a two-term Obama presidency, and he has brought so much hope into the national conversation, so I think a show that is as cynical and shallow and funny and mean as *American Psycho*—as much as I loved it, I can see why it's not in the zeitgeist at this particular moment. I think of *Assassins* and how they didn't put it up right after 9/11, but then a few years into Dubya's presidency, it was the perfect dark response to an administration that people were really alienated by. God forbid, if Trump becomes president, I do think *American Psycho* has a solid future on Broadway. People will be bitter and disillusioned again. That's my neutral on a given day, so it appealed to me. I'm lucky I got to see it five times.

**You've also devoted a lot of time to the topic on your podcast, *How Was Your Week*, on which you discuss pop culture with guests. Did the talk show propel your career?**

The podcast was very helpful for me creatively because I was able to draw from so many of the stories from my podcast on the show. Life is garbage. We went into the second season thinking, Who are some people we hate who people will enjoy seeing our characters eviscerate? I'm an equal-opportunity misanthrope, but the stuff that seems the meanest is usually stuff that is really about me. Ultimately we hate ourselves more than anyone [else]. I also have the quote, unquote advantage—and I say that with a huge grain of salt—to have begun my television career late in my comedy career, which is to say that I've tried

a lot of things that haven't succeeded or made me financially independent.

**How did you and Billy meet?**

He hired me to be a writer on *Billy on the Street*, but before that we were mutual fans of each other. We figured out pretty soon that we had a similar sensibility, and whenever Billy laughed at something, it always felt better than if someone else had.

**"I'm an equal-opportunity misanthrope."**



Eichner and Klausner in *Difficult People*

**I ran into Elena, a recurring guest and resident curmudgeon on *Billy on the Street*, and she told me a story about you. She was outside an event, and you saw her and said, "Would you like to come in?" And she said, "Okay, I guess," and you were like, "Okay, I'll come back and get you." And she said you never came back.**

No, that's not what happened. I said, "I'm going into this premiere. Are you coming in?" And she said, "I don't know," and I was like, "Okay, well good luck." I think we all know what really happened. I'm glad she managed to throw me under the bus.

**She threw Billy under the bus, too.**

Oh, she loves talking shit about Billy. I enjoy Elena saying, "Oh, he's in GQ, but he can't return a phone call." She's a shady bitch.

**Even though your character Julie can be pretty shady, Cole Escola, who plays Matthew on the show, said he feels like you're an old gay man.**

I was very flattered he said that because it means he loves me. It's almost like when cats rub their head up against you, and they're like, You're a cat too, and you're like, Aw, no, I'm not, but I love you. I just think gay men are the best kinds of humans, and I have a better connection to them. Every day, I try to be more like the best kind of people, so maybe I'm getting there. God willing, I'll be an old theater queen.

→ The second season of *Difficult People* premieres Tue 12 on Hulu.

## Difficult dating

Klausner, author of the dating-in-NYC memoir *I Don't Care About Your Band*, helps our writer swipe smart on Bumble.

↑ "This one's holding a fish. That's men and their dicks. They like to make the fish big."

↑ "What the fuck is adult summer camp? Rehab? No, absolutely not. That sounds very Williamsburg to me."

↑ "He's pretty cute. He likes carrot cake, bourbon and astrophysics. He used the specifics of someone who wants to seem intelligent and find someone intelligent. I would swipe right on him."

↑ "[Being pictured] with like a wild animal? What are you doing? Animals should be left alone. Now he's making the Jesus pose. Yeah, this guy's a nightmare. If there's a picture of you scuba diving, I don't know what you look like, I just know you like adventure, which I find repellent."

↑ "This guy's outside with his bros. He's wearing a Misfits shirt, which is cool, but he's biting into fast food like an animal. He has a beautiful dog. I would date the dog. Swipe right on the dog, left on the guy."

↑ "I think he's the one in the middle? These pictures are the worst. I hate ski pictures. I think Joe is five guys. Joe is a sixsome opportunity, so I would swipe right on that. Just kidding, don't! Oh, no, you're fucked!"