



Photo by Nina Barry

## John Wenzel discusses *Mock Stars*

### How did you get the idea for this book?

About two years ago I wrote an article for *The Denver Post* about the increasing overlap of indie music and a certain smart, twisted sort of comedy, like HBO's *Mr. Show* and David Cross's albums on Sub Pop. *Mock Stars* is essentially a 300-page version of that *Denver Post* article, but much more personal and, at times, profane than I could do in a newspaper.

### How would you describe the book to someone in a few sentences?

It's basically an informal survey of a subcultural movement. It features in-depth profiles and examples of people who have helped move comedy out of the stale comedy club and *Tonight Show*-style format and into venues where different audiences—mostly younger ones—can relate to it: rock venues, dive bars, art galleries, record stores, house parties, you name it.

### Why is that important?

I think it's important because comedians like David Cross and Patton Oswalt, and musicians like Aimee Mann, have helped free comedy from the restrictions that retarded its creativity in the 1980s and early 1990s. They're taking a do-it-yourself approach familiar to indie rock and punk kids and breathing new life into comedy.

### So this isn't a history book?

Not at all. Comedy is such a crazy, diverse art form and I'm not trying to ghettoize the people I write about. So many things are changing and democratizing the creation and dissemination of good humor, from YouTube to music festivals like South by Southwest and Bonnaroo. This is just a survey of one swath of the comedy world.

### What makes you qualified to write about indie comedy?

Ultimately, not much else other than that I'm a fan. I've been writing about music and culture for 15 years for different zines, newspapers, and websites, and I've interviewed dozens of comedians for *The Denver Post*. Like a lot of people, I've been into comedy movies and TV shows since I can remember. But mostly it's just something I see examples of all the time but have never read an in-depth article or book about.

### So you came at it from a fan's perspective?

Exactly, and that's the way I approach a lot of writing. Of course, I'm critical in the book, too, but the purpose is mainly to expose people to a lot of great comedy they may not have heard about.

### Who are you trying to reach with *Mock Stars*?

It's fairly specialized subject matter, so the selfish answer might be "people like me," which is to say people between the ages of 15 and 40 with sick, smart senses of humor who are already fans of some of the comedians in the book. Or maybe music fans who are looking for a new fix in the increasingly generic, lame indie rock world. But overall, I think there's enough creative diversity in the scene that someone without prior knowledge of the artists could still find a lot to chew on.

### Do you try to be funny in this book?

Beyond a couple jabs at certain people and places, hell no! The worst thing for someone who is not a comedy writer is to try to be funny, when really he or she should let the comedian or material speak for itself. I have enough respect for real comedians and comedy writers to leave it to them.