(INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC)

BEC DEAN:

Hello. Welcome to The Big Anxiety podcast series. We're recording on Gadigal land, in the studios of 2RPH, a community radio station and radio reading service in Sydney. In this series of podcasts for The Big Anxiety Festival, we're talking to different folk about mental health and their lives and how these things intertwine. My name is Bec Dean and I'm the curator of The Big Anxiety Festival, and I'm joined by Nat of Nat’s What I Reckon. Hello, Nat.

NAT:

Good day! How are you?

BEC DEAN:

Welcome to you. Just by way of introducing you, for those of you who aren't one of Nat's 40,000 plus Instagram followers and 100,000 plus Facebook followers, Nat is a comedian, among other things, and conducts most of his business online.

NAT:

That's correct.

BEC DEAN:

And being online, and being an online personality, and the implications of these things for mental health, are some of the things that we'll be talking about today. I'm a big fan of your work, Nat. You got me through some incredibly tough times last year while I was finish writing a thesis, and your humour is kind of deadpan, situational, taking the piss out of things that are really absurd in our culture.

NAT:

Yeah.

BEC DEAN:

Would you… Is that kind of like an accurate description?

NAT:

That’s about, right. (LAUGHS) Yep, I think it's more or less just me with the camera.

BEC DEAN:

I've got a few other titles I've made for you, as like a raconteur of cultural disenchantment.

NAT:

(LAUGHS) Oops, got to press the 'Off' button.

BEC DEAN:

Yeah, press that 'Off' button. A dandy of, I guess, lifestyle dissatisfaction.

NAT:

I'm up for all that.

BEC DEAN:

Yeah.

NAT:

Oh, headings.

BEC DEAN:

(LAUGHS) So, tell us what you do. What - the sort of the - I guess, the basic mechanics of Nat performing in the world.

NAT:

In the world... just in the world?

BEC DEAN:

Well, in general, yes. (LAUGHS)

NAT:

Ah, well, at least for the channel, it's I suppose, it's a kind of review of the world as I see it. I don't know. I find a lot of the world around me fairly mediocre. What I'm at least, forced into. Either you're really ordinary or you're being told that things are supposed to be more exciting than they really are. So, I don't know, I kind of grabbed the camera and the microphone and just clipped it to a stick and just started wandering around, making sarcastic remarks about it all. As soon as I started doing that, people started watching my videos, so I've kept doing that for a while now. (LAUGHS) It seems to be the way to go. And it works for me because I just do that anyway. I'm constantly whinging about stuff all the time, so it works out well for me.

BEC DEAN:

So, basically, it's you but someone started to film you, and you started to record what you were saying.

NAT:

Yeah, yeah, pretty much, yeah. I mean, I turn it up a little bit but yeah, that's more or less it. It's a good format for me to be able to put my music and my friend's music on videos and stuff, too, so it's kind of worked in favour of a few things there.

BEC DEAN:

Yeah, that's really nice. I like that about your - you're putting people out there. And so, what are some of the situations that you subject yourself to? The first one that I saw of your videos was a review of the Mind, Body, Soul Expo.

NAT:

Oh, Mind Body Spirit Festival, yeah. (LAUGHS)

BEC DEAN:

Oh, yes. (LAUGHS) I believe you were smudging the air with sage outside the venue.

NAT:

That's a desert sage smudging stick, yeah. Cost me $25, I think. Yeah, I went to that expo in - I think it was in Olympic Park or something. Yeah, with some friends of mine and find all that stuff really hilarious. I like it - I'm into alternative lifestyle and new age things. I'm cool with all that. I just find it all fucking hilarious, to be honest. I think it's a lot of - I don't know. I think that there's a lot of stuff in there, like all of the snake oil stuff or something, the snake oil review. There's people taking photos of your aura and stuff like that and...

BEC DEAN:

Oh, that was good. How much did that cost you?

NAT:

That cost me $50.

BEC DEAN:

Yeah. Good scam. (LAUGHS)

NAT:

Yeah. I asked them how the camera worked on that and they said they didn't know. It's unreal. Yeah, that was lots of fun. You know, I never like making fun of people at things that I don't - I don't know. I think it's hilarious. I think a lot of people think it's really funny, that stuff. And I think when stuff starts to take itself too seriously, then that's where I kick in.

BEC DEAN:

Yes, it's sort of like Sydney Olympic Park doesn't strike you as a centre of mind, body and spirit, really.

NAT:

No, it's not a real cultural hub, no. (LAUGHS)

BEC DEAN:

And so, while you're at these things, do you tend to keep a bit of a low profile? I mean, you've just got a microphone on a stick. You don't have a massive entourage.

NAT:

A mic on a… I always have it on something different. I try to theme it to wherever I'm going to. That time, I bought a tea-sipping spoon. It's the only thing I could find that was on a stick. I was going to have it on a crystal, but I couldn't find a crystal.

BEC DEAN:

You could have had it on some incense, I guess, it might have snapped.

NAT:

I could have had it on some incense, some lit incense, yeah. Yeah, that makes it kind of easier to keep it on the down low. Stuff like that is hard to get like a media pass to because people don't really want media to that kind of stuff. You know, that's more for like sponsors and things of the - that day, that expo was on at exactly the same time as the homemaker expo, and I had no idea. You just walk to the end of it and suddenly, it went from smudging sticks to Tesla and attic ladders. I was like, this is fucking awesome. I want to make two episodes in one day, but, yeah, spewing. Anyway, I went back and got that one, anyway.

BEC DEAN:

Yeah, brilliant. So, are you starting to kind of get recognised at these things now that you're getting more of a following? Do people kind of clock you, at all?

NAT:

Yeah, it does. It depends what the event is, but yeah, it does happen. It happens a lot now. Again, it depends where I'm going to. If I go to something like the Summernats, then I get recognised a lot, but I kind of like that. I like when people spot me. it just depends what the video is or what the event is. If it's a Summernats, it's fine. If it's at a renovation super show…

BEC DEAN:

Yes.

NAT:

I think they know what I'm there for, you know. (LAUGHS)

BEC DEAN:

Do you feel like you slip into Summernats a bit more easily than the renovation home show?

NAT:

Yeah, I suppose so, yeah. It's more like younger people there, I suppose, than there are at the renovation super show.

BEC DEAN:

There's landowners, landlords.

NAT:

Yeah.

BEC DEAN:

So, I guess one of the things about being online, I guess, is that there's a certain point where it makes sense to do it continuously, or to do it even thinking about it as a living or some way to make your way through the world. When did that start to become apparent to you that that was something you could do?

NAT:

Yeah, I suppose it's where I'm working towards at the moment. I mean, when people want to participate in your video stuff, like so when I release some T-shirts, people want to buy the T-shirts.

BEC DEAN:

I love the T-shirts.

NAT:

Thanks very much. When that kind of stuff started to happen, so when I realised like - and there's options for things like Patreon and asking people to donate to you, to your page and stuff, I haven't done so much of that, mainly because it's, I don't know, I haven’t felt comfortable doing that yet, but it's definitely, yeah, it's definitely the goal to live off doing this. It is possible, but you've got to push, you've got to push pretty hard and be fairly consistent.

BEC DEAN:

So, it's a lot of admin behind the scenes, I imagine, with that, too.

NAT:

Yeah, there is a lot of that. There's a lot of talking to a lot of people all the time. I get messages all day from all sorts of people, which is awesome, but it's a lot of work. It's a lot of work for free, too 'cause I do it all. I pay for all the - I edit all my videos myself.

BEC DEAN:

So, a career for a comedian online is obviously really different to the career of a comedian, I mean, maybe performing even in the last century, where you have your audience on the other side of a microphone and they're in the dark heckling you, and there’s kind of a situation, you've got your hecklers and supporters and trolls and everyone in your feed continuously. You can't turn it off. So, how's this been for you as the audience has grown?

NAT:

It's been pretty intense. Wonderful, obviously, having so many people comment, depending on what those comments are, but most of them are nice. Yeah, it can be pretty overwhelming. It's a lot of people saying a lot of stuff to me every day, commenting on what they think about me and what I'm doing. The more people that are seeing the videos and following me in doing that stuff, it becomes slowly more and more overwhelming, but I'm trying to manage that as best I can. Yeah, it's pretty - it's full on, putting yourself out there, trying to make people laugh. If people don't find it funny on the Internet, they'll let you know on the double.

BEC DEAN:

Oh, they sure do. And recently, you've also started acknowledging mental health in your Instagram posts and there's been quite a huge reaction to this, and obviously, it's the reason why we're sitting here talking about it today was because I was looking at your feed and seeing how, when you did make these sort of declarations or posts about things that - there were enormous amounts of people getting back to you and kind of acknowledging their own situations, or asking you for advice, or asking you if you're OK yourself.

NAT:

Yeah, a lot of people will message me asking if I was OK and sharing their stuff and what they go through, which is something I've wanted to do with the channel for ages, expand it a bit more into talking about that stuff because it's a big part of my life, is my mental health struggles and stuff. That particular video that I posted was talking about how I hadn't been putting out a great deal of new stuff at the moment because of struggling with some tricky mental health stuff. But in no way am I, like, scared to talk about that or mention that. It's just about how to do that and not put it on them as if they're, you know, I'm asking for their therapy or something like that, but rather just to say, "Hey," you know, just like, "you guys and gals, I'm struggling a bit too, sometimes." It's nice to be able to say that, actually, and get the ball rolling there a bit.

BEC DEAN:

Yeah, definitely. Because, I guess, we know like the science and there's research that shows us that online engagement, in and of itself, has potentially a lot of negative impacts in terms of self-esteem and people's perception of their bodies and all those sorts of things. Do you have any kind of strategies that you're working on to take care of yourself, as like, an online identity? Top tips?

NAT:

Suppose, just talk. I suppose, talking about it. I've got a great support network and friends and family around me, so I'm OK. It's been a lifelong thing for me. It's not anything new, but definitely, with the - like you say, with this Internet thing being a bit more present. I do have to talk to people about it. I've talked to other people about it because I’ve got so many people saying so many things to me that I, you know, I overthink things that people say quite often and it's good to have people to bounce that off and, "What do you reckon about this?” So, I suppose my ways of dealing with that is just to make sure I talk about it to other people offline.

BEC DEAN:

One of the things that it does, I guess, which is really interesting to observe, is to acknowledge that you're not like a one-dimensional superficial Internet person or like this kind of avatar that just exists in this world, but that you're a kind of multi-dimensional human with a whole range of things going on, like all of us.

NAT:

Yeah.

BEC DEAN:

I really love the video that you did as like a gender reveal in your back garden. Can you talk us through that and what led you to do that video?

NAT:

It's one of the search results for 'Nat’s What I Reckon'. If you Google - someone sent me to Google, so you start typing into Google and it gives you the suggested searches and the top one is “Nat’s What I Reckon gender.” So, it was obviously a big question for other people. Lots of people always leave comments. It's always dudes leaving comments saying, "This is, like, one unfunny, fat, ugly chick." It's always, "Is this a guy?" or "Is this a girl?" Big, confusing questions for these champions. And so, in the end it was like, I don't really snap back at them. Sometimes, I'll just use my words, I suppose, to wind them up a bit about that stupid question. So, I had a bit of fun with it and make it a gender reveal video, because I find those pretty ridiculous, so I thought, well I'd make a quick video. I came out of the bathroom with a towel on and I dropped the towel and it's got a sign on me that says, "You're a gronk.” What does it matter? You know. I'm glad you think my hair is pretty or whatever it is that - if that's what you need to know, I worry for you.

BEC DEAN:

Yes. So, those gender reveal videos are kind of getting more and more disturbing as time goes on, really.

NAT:

I saw, I don't know if I mentioned this before, but I think one of my favourite gender reveal videos is this guy deadlifting 130kg, deadlifts up the barbell, and then his mate’s run over and they spin the barbells over and they’ve got these bags on the bottom of the weights and he drops the weight and it goes bang, and it's blue. It's the most, like, overly masculine gender reveal, and of course, it's a boy, so...

BEC DEAN:

Yeah, everyone's super happy about that.

NAT:

Ooh, guys, look at this. Some people, I worry.

BEC DEAN:

And I did want to ask you also about another side of your work, which is your love of music. And you're in a death metal band, you're a singer. You do a bit of that and you do a bit of guitar, drumming, range of things. Multi-instrumentalist.

NAT:

Yeah, I play in a couple of bands. I play in a punk band. I'm a drummer in a punk band, and yes, a screamer and a guitarist in a metal band, yep.

BEC DEAN:

And this is something I'm wanting to explore in another, maybe, iteration of this festival, which is like mental health and metal. 'Cause it seems like counter-intuitive because, I guess, for a couple of decades, we've been thinking about metal, like dark metal in particular, being associated with actually the opposite of good mental health, with the suicidation and Satan worship and human sacrifice and all that kind of stuff. However, there is research coming out - I think Macquarie University did some research into metal and wellbeing, finding that it's actually, as music, incredibly uplifting.

NAT:

Yeah, I think it can be, yeah. It's a very extreme way of being onstage, listening through loud and carry on. That's kind of often what you need when things are loud and carrying on in your head, I think. I think there's an absolute avenue for joy in heavy music. Nice way to purge a bit of head space, particularly in a group of people feeling the same way. There's of course, like, some shitty things about metal and about all scenes but you know, it can be a bit guy heavy and a bit aggressive in ways, but like, for the majority of it, or at least the bands in Sydney and stuff that we play with, it's always super positive and a nice, very positive community thing and, you know.

BEC DEAN:

All the people that I know who are in metal are extremely lovely, kind, often vegans, as well.

NAT:

Often vegans, yeah.

BEC DEAN:

It's not what you expect, but I think that's one of the lovely things about those sorts of communities that give each other strength and support.

NAT:

There's a lot of good politics in there, yeah, to be shared, I think, to a lot of the heavy music scene, particularly in the punk scene. There’s a lot of people saying a lot of righteous stuff, you know. It’s good when they're doing things about it, which means becoming a vegan or whatever it is, you know, and that's positive change and I think that's cool.

BEC DEAN:

So, what's next for you?

NAT:

I'm going traveling for a while, for the next six months, maybe a year or maybe longer. I'm going to go and - I don't know. I'm gonna go and find the expos around the world and I really want to go to a cat expo, and I'd like to touch on some flat earth stuff and some other hard-hitting issues. It definitely is. Just so everyone knows. I'm just going to go and help them along proving that.

BEC DEAN:

Absolutely.

NAT:

Maybe it's hollow, maybe there's...

BEC DEAN:

Hmm, maybe there's a place for us to go. When we burn the top of it, we can go underground.

NAT:

Yeah, into yeah. Or off the edge. Maybe there is a pool around the...

BEC DEAN:

Oh yeah, that would be nice. An eternal pool, yeah.

NAT:

Yeah, I'm already on to it, yeah. So, that's the plan. Shoot off and film the world a little bit for a while, which is good, ‘cause I’ve run out of Sydney ideas for now.

BEC DEAN:

Yes, it's a big place but it's just not big enough for 'Nat’s What I Reckon'. So, you're one of our Ambassadors for The Big Anxiety Festival and we thank you wholeheartedly for that. It's very lovely to have you onboard. Do you have any parting thoughts for us about reducing the stigma of mental health in our communities and online?

NAT:

I think just talking about it. I think that's what's important. I think, just to someone you can say something to over about what's going on, I think that's a good thing. It's never a bad thing to talk about how you're feeling. It's a very isolating and lonely thing, mental health. It's just nice to not feel so alone and say whatever it is that's on your mind, if you can. If there's somewhere that you can go where you've got a mate you can talk to or if you've got a channel that you can fill up saying something to someone about it, I think that's what helps make it seem a little less scary, I think. Get it out of your head a bit. Go listen to some rock and roll. Go for a swim.

BEC DEAN:

Thank you, Nat. Thanks so much for joining us and sharing those thoughts. It's been lovely to speak with you.

NAT:

Thanks for having me.

BEC DEAN:

And you can find out more about 'Nat’s What I Reckon' and links to the YouTube and social media can be found at thebiganxiety.org. And many thanks to our partners at 2RPH for supporting this podcast series. Goodbye, Nat.

NAT:

See you later.

BEC DEAN:

And stay tuned for more episodes.

(OUTRO MUSIC)