

My Doctor is an Avatar

Comedy Central's
squiggly
cartoon shrink,
Dr. Katz,
is in the house
and on
the Net

BY BOB STRAUSS

If ever a celebrity was ripe for an identity crisis, it is stand-up comic Jonathan Katz. Don't recognize the name? Well, you may know him better as "Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist," the squiggly cartoon headsrinker whose on-screen patients have included Garry Shandling, David Mamet, and Winona Rider. Since his show debuted two years ago on Comedy Central, Katz has been in a situation that should ring oddly familiar to die-hard Netheads: more people know him as his computer-generated TV persona (his avatar, if you will) than as a flesh-and-blood human being.

That's what made it so disconcerting to see Katz—who is every bit as short, balding, and self-effacing as his imaginary counterpart—at a live promotional appearance recently at New York's Jewish Museum, where he enchanted a sell-out crowd with one-liners, clips from the show, and a short narrative history of the "Dr. Katz" phenomenon (which had its origins five years ago as a brief, crude animated short called "The Biography of Mr. Katz"). Although he didn't actually squiggle—a computer-generated effect that, he joked, made some people at Comedy Central seasick—Katz, standing calm and motionless behind the podium, radiated the eerie serenity of his alter ego. But that is where the resemblance ended: when asked by an audience member what Mr. Katz shared with

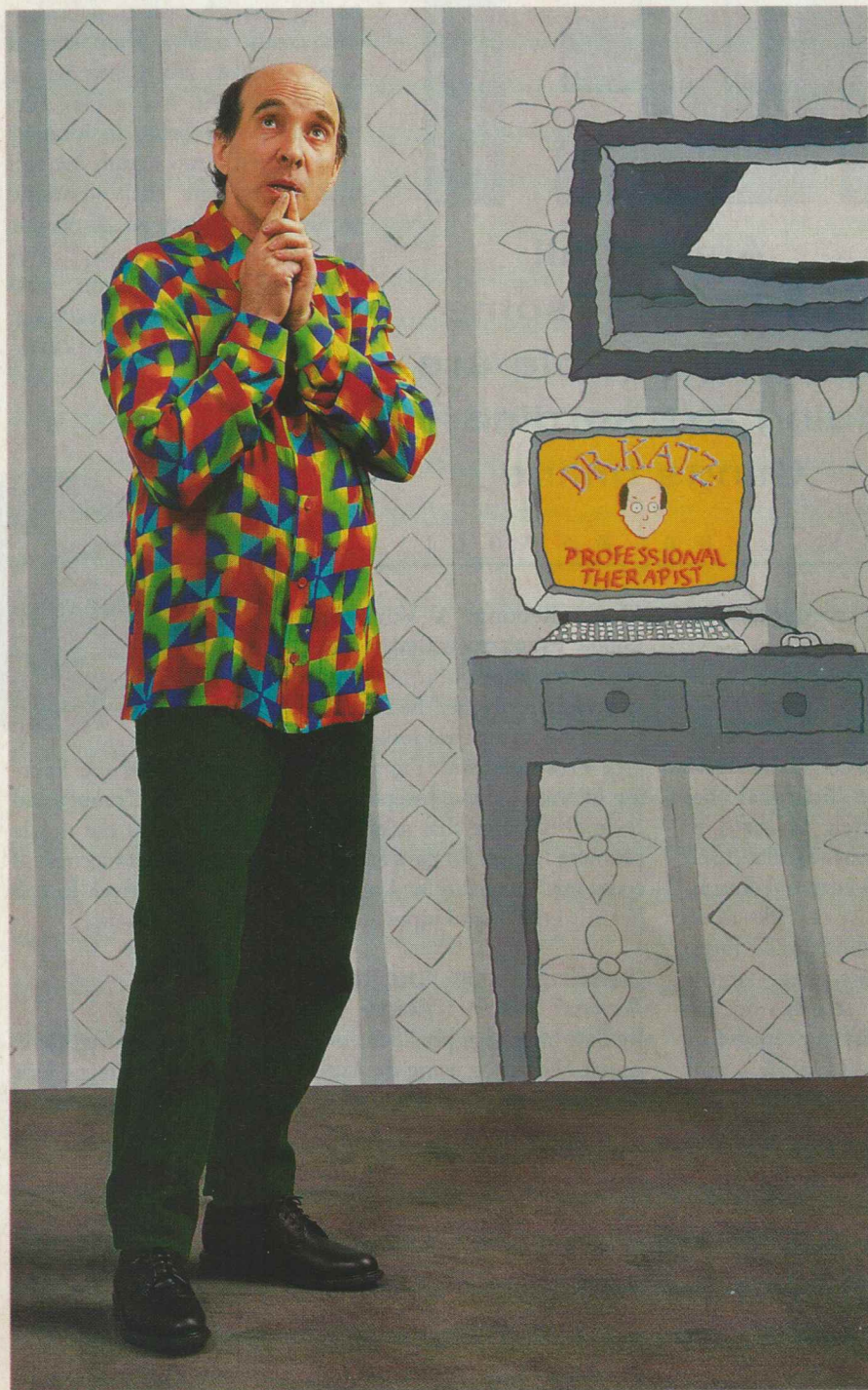


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