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Showtime's 'Desus & Mero': Bronx attitude on the topics of the day

By **RANDEE DAWN**

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"There was this one comedian ... and he's like, 'Yo, we're going to sit down and write some jokes. Do you want to workshop with us?' says Desus Nice, left with The Kid Mero. 'And we're like, 'Oh, nah, we're about to go smoke weed. We're not writing anything.' (Michael Nagle / For The Times)

"Desus & Mero" is not your typical late-night talk show. Sure, there are jokes.

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There are personable hosts. There are interviews. But Showtime's new series starring Daniel Baker/Desus Nice and Joel Martinez/The Kid Mero is faster, fresher, more anarchic — and about 100% less white. Longtime friends, Desus and Mero bring Bronx attitude and humor to the topics of the day while hosting guests such as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Spike Lee. The Envelope sat down with the guys after a recent taping of their show in New York City to discuss going freestyle, self-policing — and who their No. 1 most wanted guest is.

You really have a freestyle feel to your show — but it's comedy, not rap. Is that intentional?

Desus: In the early years of the ["Bodega Boys"] podcast, I would do like a "run of show" of topics to discuss. Our show was like six lines; we have nothing planned. We don't write jokes. If someone yells something out, that shifts.

Mero: We do crowd work mixed in with the material, but yeah — it's all freestyle.

Desus: A lot of our shows are basically like what happened on the way to the show. The crowd doesn't know what's going to happen. We don't know what's going to happen. We just start riffing.

It's funny, because you hear comedians talking about how, "I've spent a year crafting five jokes."

Mero: That's so weird.

Desus: There was this one comedian, and we were on set and he's like, "Yo, we're going to sit down and write some jokes. Do you want to workshop with us?" And we're like, "Oh, nah, we're about to go smoke weed. We're not writing anything."

Have you ever just, off the top of your head, thought, "Oh, that's too far."

Desus: All the time. On the podcast, we self-censor. It's like a siren. If you watch the growth of the podcast, there are certain jokes we might have done when we first started, but we don't do that same joke now. Like, you can't say "midget." That's a slur.

Mero: Then there's stuff that flies under the radar.

Desus: The podcast is raunchy and all over in places, but there's moments where you're learning something. We've had people come up and say, "Yo, I stopped saying 'crazy' because that's a slur."

Why was that important, to self-police? Some comedians make pretty good money offending people.

Mero: Because you don't want to fall into that pool of aging comedians who are mad they can't do the same jokes they did in 1989. Everything evolves. And that includes comedy. Not to toot our own horns, but we are the evolution of comedy.

Desus: That's definitely not tooting.

Mero: We are tootable.

Desus: We're from the Bronx, but at the end of the day, we're good guys. We're not trying to fly off being controversial. We say wild stuff. But there's no malice there.

When you brought your show from Vice to Showtime, Vice's CEO Nancy Dubuc commented to the Source that you were "going to a platform that their audience doesn't pay for." Which felt a little —

Mero: Dog-whistly.

Desus: We saw that quote, and we were in the middle of planning our new Showtime show. And it was like, "Fam, we literally don't even have time for this."

Mero: We didn't have to say anything. The fans said it for us. They were like, "Yo, get out of here. Of course we're following them. We love them." There was no reason to get into a messy back-and-forth because it was like, "Yo, we're doing, we're progressing, we're following the path."

You must have some dream guests you'd still like to have on the

Desus: You must have some dream guests you'd still like to have on the show.

Desus: Our top three would be Obama, Trump and Putin. I would love to interview Donald Trump. I feel like Putin could low-key watch the show. He'd be like, "I don't get the references."

Mero: "I do not understand but they are funny."

Desus: The Bronx is like Russia.

Desus: So what would you ask Trump if you did get him in the room?

Mero: "How the ... did you pull this off?"

Desus: We'd be like, "Are you serious? Are you kidding?"

Mero: "Are you ... around? Or was this a dare that just blew up in your face?"

Desus: We'd just ask what it felt like to be the stupidest president of all time, and he would go off, and we'd just keep interrupting him.

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