

## Interview: Nick Kroll Starts it Up in ‘Adult Beginners’

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- [Adult Beginners](#) [2]
- [Bobby Cannavale](#) [3]
- [Bobby Moynihan](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Interview](#) [6]
- [Jane Krakowski](#) [7]
- [Joel McHale](#) [8]
- [Mike Birbiglia](#) [9]
- [Nick Kroll](#) [10]
- [Parent](#) [11]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [12]
- [RADIUS-TWC](#) [13]
- [Rose Byrne](#) [14]
- [Sibling](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Finding the adult button and hitting “on” is becoming more of a challenge as the tech generation morphs into their thirtysomething era. Comedian Nick Kroll (“Kroll Show,” “The League”) ponders this situation in the new film “Adult Beginners,” a primer on growing up and moving on.

Kroll portrays Jake, a entrepreneur whose new tech gadget goes bust. Left with no life and no income, he moves back in with his sister (Rose Byrne) and brother-in-law (Bobby Cannavale). There is a twist – Jake’s nephew Teddy needs a daytime caregiver, and Nick is now available. As he takes on his new duties, he begins to understand that life has different angles, especially when it comes to raising children.



Nick Kroll Portrays Jake in ‘Adult Beginners’

*Photo credit: RADIUS-TWC*

Nick Kroll is a multi-tasker. After graduating from college in 2001, he began his career as a stand-up and in improvisation groups, and soon broke into TV as a writer on Comedy Central’s “Chappelle’s Show.” He began doing small parts and recurring roles on TV shows like “Children’s Hospital,” “The Life and Times of Tim,” “Community” and “Parks and Recreation.” He also has two regular slots on TV, as Rodney Ruxin in FXX channel’s “The League,” and his own Comedy Central series, “Kroll Show.” After doing character bits in several films, “Adult Beginners” marks his first lead role.

The day before his film opened, Nick Kroll was in Chicago to promote and present it at a screening. HollywoodChicago.com got a chance to sit down with him beforehand to talk about “Adult Beginners” and his career in comedy.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The story for this film came from you. What event or observation sparked the idea, and how were you able to



formulate it with your screenplay writers?

**Nick Kroll:** I am the youngest kid in a family of four, and I have 12 nieces and nephews. To me it always seemed like an interesting idea to throw the selfish younger brother into a care giving situation for his nephew or niece. That was the original idea, and I took it to Mark Duplass [Kroll's co-star on 'The League'] because why not have the producer be a dude who knows how to make these movies better than anybody? So I brought him on board, and we found the writers Jeff Cox and Liz Flahive, who brought their own experiences of parenthood. They were genuinely in the middle of the world that I had started to create. That was the basis of it, and everyone filled it in with personal experiences, because generally everyone has sibling stories.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You are used to creating sketch characters. What did you find different about creating scenario characters that would have enough depth to carry the film?

**Kroll:** Weirdly, even though the characters on the 'Kroll Show' are really broad, we did tell longer form narrative stories with them, and they kept recurring throughout the three seasons of the show. The film was obviously a more grounded version of all of it, and trying to make a movie is different from a sitcom or sketch TV show, because in a film you have to wrap it up in 90 minutes. The audience wants a resolution in a film, and although some people like a gray area, the experience of a film is more about wrapping it up neatly. The goal was to keep the characters grounded, and tell a realistic, relatable story.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How did being on the sets of other films help you and first-time director Ross Katz create the atmosphere on set for what you wanted to accomplish?

**Kroll:** Well, Ross had done a great HBO movie, "Taking Chance" with Kevin Bacon. What attracted me to him is that he did tell that story so effectively and beautifully, and as for myself I'd never done a film where I was there from beginning to end. As far as a set vibe, since I've spent some time producing the 'Kroll Show,' I'm a big 'no assholes' guy, as much as I can try to control it. I don't work well under chaos, and I think most people work best in a comfortable environment, where they have the time, ability and information to do whatever their job is as well as possible.



Bobby Cannavale, Rose Byrne and Nick Kroll in 'Adult Beginners'

*Photo credit: RADIUS-TWC*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Much of this film is about the difficulties of your generation settling down and being domestic. What do you think are the reasons that this problem has struck people around your age in general?

**Kroll:** Yes, we have the trappings of adulthood, but in a lot of ways we're still kids. Part of it is literal survival, as technology and medical care has advanced over the generations, you don't have to focus on sustaining your survival as much. With that impediment removed, there is more free time, which is often filled with fooling around on your phone. [laughs] Technology has also allowed me to not understand how I pay my taxes. We have more time to be childlike.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Both your co-stars, Rose Byrne and Bobby Cannavale, are seasoned actors who can do both drama and comedy effectively. What did you absorb from them that connected you to your performance?

**Kroll:** They are both really good actors. From Rose, I learned how subtle, relaxed and natural her performance can be. When it needs to get bigger it is, but she doesn't really do all that much to deliver it. And with Bobby, he brings the zest of his stage presence. This translate beautifully to film, but he is trained from the stage, and he liked to work lines like we were in a play. He wanted to figure out how to play the

lines as written, and to make them work. They were both great.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What tricks that you've learned from your years of doing comedy and sketch work were most beneficial in creating this wholly fictional world that became 'Adult Beginners'?

**Kroll:** As kooky as the characters on the 'Kroll Show' were, we tried to build three-dimensional people. That was the goal. I had a ton of practice having to decide how to motivate the characters, to fit them within the space of the sketch, and all of that was great practice to chart that type of creation into a movie.

I like to work in ensemble, so building a strong group was important in establishing a collaboration. The sketch show is so much time on a set and on camera, when I got time to go and do the film, there were many variables, but it wasn't so overwhelming because I've done 50 days in a row on the 'Kroll Show.' I knew how to pace myself.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You didn't major in college in performance, but what were you doing beyond studying history that made for a natural transition into showbiz?

**Kroll:** I was a history major, and minored in art and Spanish, but what I really took away from college was doing improvisation. We would do workshops with the Uptight Citizens Brigade, which has roots in Chicago, and was doing long form improv while I was in school. I did monthly shows, a cappella singing and sketch comedy, but by far the most useful thing I learned in college was improv.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You've had an amazing run with the very funny 'The League.' What was the decision to set it in Chicago, and how did that help the dynamic when you were playing opposite Jay Cutler?



Nick Kroll in Chicago, April 23rd, 2015

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

**Kroll:** I think the creators, Jeff and Jack Schaffer, probably set it here because Chicago is such a great football town, with a rich tradition. And because it's in the middle of the country, it has that cross section. You can have guys who are surgeons, lawyers, marketers, stoners and all exist as friends in Chicago.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Are you shooting the last season now?

**Kroll:** Yeah, we start in July. I've been told it's the last season. I don't know what the 'last episode' will be, we don't usually even know who wins the league until about ten episodes in each year.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You seem to specialize in creating recurring characters on notable shows. What comic actor that you remember strikes you as the same type of developer-of-characters in sitcoms or comedy shows that you loved as a kid and teenager?

**Kroll:** I love Martin Short, from his SCTV days, SNL and all the movie stuff. A lot of people don't stay funny, he has. I still love him.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Do you have a specific barometer to what you think is funny, or do you find yourself constantly being surprised as you evolve through show business and performance?

**Kroll:** It does evolve, and it's interesting as I go through this interview process, I'm explaining what I do. [laughs] I do run the risk of repeating myself in style, or being too scholastic about just doing it. I don't mind the question, but it does make me wonder if I'm following a template, or doing patterns.



For example, people like to point out that I portray a lot of douche bags, which is true. That may be a pattern, but they are funny characters to represent. My goal is to do a variety of people, and do them on different platforms and media. It keeps it fun, interesting and exciting to me, and I never take for granted that I do this crazy stuff.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** What can you tell us about Mark Duplass that the rest of the world doesn’t know?

**Kroll:** Mark can’t eat granola, because he gets – what he calls – fart bubbles. How’s that? [laughs]

*“Adult Beginners” opens in theaters on April 24th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Nick Kroll, Rose Byrne, Bobby Cannavale, Joel McHale, Mike Birbiglia, Bobby Moynihan and Jane Krakowski. Screenplay by Jeff Cox and Liz Flahive. Directed by Ross Katz. Rated “R”*



[16]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]  
Writer, Editorial Coordinator  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]

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