# John Oliver warns UK Saturday Night Live risks losing its unique cult appeal



**John Oliver Questions Viability of UK Version of Saturday Night Live**

John Oliver recently weighed in on the ambitious yet contentious proposal to launch a British version of the iconic American comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), during an interview with Seth Meyers on his late-night talk show. While reflecting on the show's distinct cultural phenomenon in the United States, Oliver expressed scepticism, dubbing the idea “a terrible idea.”

He elaborated on his viewpoint by describing how SNL operates as an insular “cult,” characterised by its intense dedication and unique camaraderie among cast members. “We have had sketch comedy before, and I just feel like something like this is such a unique group,” he noted, emphasising the challenges of replicating SNL’s environment and ethos in the U.K. “It’s a cult. I’m trying to not say the word — it’s a cult,” he reiterated, cautioning against trying to impose such a framework onto British humour.

Oliver’s critique surfaces amidst Sky's recent announcement to produce a British edition of SNL, marking the first time the format will be adapted in the U.K. This new series, titled *Saturday Night Live UK*, aims to mirror the original's dynamic live format while showcasing a British cast and addressing local cultural nuances. Sky’s initiative comes in response to changing consumer interests and an evolving media landscape, particularly following the end of its exclusive programming deal with HBO, which encompassed major shows like *Succession* and *The White Lotus*. Such adaptations allow Sky to bolster its content arsenal within a fiercely competitive market increasingly dominated by streaming platforms.

The new SNL edition promises a roster of celebrity hosts, musical performances, and the original’s hallmark sketches, including its celebrated “Weekend Update” segment. Oliver's comments highlight the potential pitfalls of attempting to recreate a format that, although adored in the U.S., may not resonate in the same way across the Atlantic. The British television landscape has a robust history of comedy, but its character often diverges significantly from American sensibilities.

SNL’s creator, Lorne Michaels, will serve as executive producer for the U.K. version, ensuring that the core elements of SNL’s identity are retained. However, the critical question remains: can the essence of a show born from an American context translate to Britain's sophisticated comedy scene? Discerning audiences may find it difficult to embrace this new iteration if it appears to be a mere replica of what has already been successful overseas.

Historically, other international adaptations of SNL have struggled to find enduring success. Notable failures in France, Japan, and Italy starkly contrast with a still-running South Korean version. The U.K. version is part of an increasing trend towards localised adaptations of global hits, but producers remain cautious, acutely aware of the sensitivities and tastes specific to British viewers.

Adding to the complexity, previous attempts at localising notable American comedy have highlighted cultural differences that can make or break such ventures. For instance, comedies like *The Office* faced unique challenges in transitioning between cultures; while the U.S. adaptation achieved commercial success, its U.K. counterpart remains a cornerstone of British television history.

As the announcement of *Saturday Night Live UK* approaches its launch, the infusion of Oliver's critique introduces valuable discussions around cultural translation in comedy. Will British audiences embrace this new show as a familiar rite of passage into late-night television? Or will they see it as a poor imitation of a beloved original? With the U.K. debut geared for the upcoming year, the countdown has begun, but the outcome remains uncertain.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/john-oliver-saturday-night-live-uk-b2746632.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/354cbcd5-87df-42fd-852b-26847e22a75e), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/387278be89d0292c36a362258c086844)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/354cbcd5-87df-42fd-852b-26847e22a75e), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/387278be89d0292c36a362258c086844)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/387278be89d0292c36a362258c086844), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/sep/13/jokes-about-the-queens-death-cut-from-uk-version-of-last-week-tonight-with-john-oliver)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky_Comedy), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday_Live_%28British_TV_programme%29)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/john-oliver-saturday-night-live-uk-b2746632.html), [[5]](https://www.vulture.com/2022/02/watch-john-oliver-rate-british-food-stephen-colbert.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/john-oliver-saturday-night-live-uk-b2746632.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/354cbcd5-87df-42fd-852b-26847e22a75e> - Sky has announced plans to produce a British version of the iconic US comedy show Saturday Night Live (SNL) in collaboration with NBC, marking the first time the live sketch show will be officially adapted in the UK. The adaptation will feature a British cast and retain the original's fast-paced, live format with celebrity hosts and musical guests. Sky aims to boost its lineup of in-house productions to compensate for the end of its exclusive HBO programming deal, as content like Succession and The White Lotus becomes available via Warner Bros Discovery’s Max streaming service and rival platforms. SNL's creator Lorne Michaels will serve as executive producer for the UK version. This initiative is part of an expanding partnership between Sky and its parent company Comcast, which acquired Sky in 2018 and is integrating its content and technology operations. The collaboration has yielded past successes such as the co-produced series The Day of the Jackal. This new SNL UK project highlights efforts by Sky and Comcast to address competition from major streaming platforms, rejuvenate Sky's programming slate, and leverage NBCUniversal’s global entertainment assets.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/387278be89d0292c36a362258c086844> - Saturday Night Live (SNL), the iconic American sketch comedy show celebrating its 50th anniversary, is set to launch a British version produced in collaboration with Sky Studios. Titled "Saturday Night Live UK," the show will feature an all-British cast of comedians and follow the same successful format as the original, including celebrity guest hosts and musical performances. Lorne Michaels, the original creator and executive producer of SNL, will also serve as executive producer for the UK edition, continuing to oversee the original NBC production. The UK version aims to bring the beloved late-night comedy experience to British audiences, showcasing political satire, quirky skits, spoof commercials, and the popular "Weekend Update" segment. Over its five-decade history, SNL has significantly influenced global pop culture and launched numerous comedy stars, including John Belushi, Eddie Murphy, Tina Fey, and Kenan Thompson. While previous international adaptations in France, Japan, and Italy were short-lived, a South Korean version still airs, and producers are hopeful about the UK endeavor. The British version is expected to debut live from London on Saturday nights in the upcoming year.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky_Comedy> - Sky Comedy is a British pay television channel owned and operated by Sky, a division of Comcast. It launched on 27 January 2020, replacing Universal TV. It is the first dedicated full-time comedy station in Sky's channel portfolio since the closure of The Comedy Channel in 1992. Sky Comedy predominantly broadcasts programming imported from the United States, such as from corporate sibling NBC Universal, and premium channels HBO (until the end of 2025) and Showtime (with the rights expiring at the end of 2021). It also broadcasts classic sitcoms as well as comedy films, live stand-up, and talk shows. From 1 September 2021 onwards, Sky Comedy started airing the comedy output previously shown on Sky One (which was replaced by Sky Showcase and Sky Max). Sky Comedy launched in Germany, Austria and Switzerland on 1 April 2021, and then closed on 27 September 2023.
5. <https://www.vulture.com/2022/02/watch-john-oliver-rate-british-food-stephen-colbert.html> - British food sucks! It’s not great; even the best of the Brits can admit that. Comedian and late-night host John Oliver joined The Late Show with Stephen Colbert’s Food Court to discuss how criticism of British food is "warranted." Oliver does share that Indian food in England is his favorite, but not without making a joke about British colonialism. Oliver said, "I was literally about to say we have the best Indian food in the world. But I stopped myself because that kind of imperialist assertion from a British accent is riot inducing. We have excellent Indian food." He encourages his audience to try Indian food when they’re in Great Britain, but not without one more imperialism joke. "It’s basically Britain’s national dish, ‘why is that John?’" He also clarifies that pudding just means dessert in general to the Brits, in contrast to the American custard. It can’t be a British review without the drink that was famously thrown into a harbor: tea. Oliver holds a strong opinion that iced tea is not tea and "should be called something else." Wonder how he feels about gossip being called tea.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/sep/13/jokes-about-the-queens-death-cut-from-uk-version-of-last-week-tonight-with-john-oliver> - Sky has edited the UK broadcast of the satirical news show Last Week Tonight with John Oliver to remove jokes about the Queen’s death. The latest episode, which aired on HBO in the US on Monday night, featured a number of attempts to wring comedy from the monarch dying. The material cut from the broadcast saw the comic poking fun at tonally odd tributes to Queen Elizabeth II from companies such as Domino’s Pizza and the likes of the cartoon character Crazy Frog.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday_Live_%28British_TV_programme%29> - Saturday Live (retitled Friday Night Live for the 1988 series and 2022 one-off special) is a British television comedy and music show, made by LWT and initially broadcast on Channel 4 from 1985 to 1988, with a brief revival on ITV in 1996. A few one-off editions have also been screened sporadically, including a contribution to the BBC's 1993 Comic Relief telethon. It was based on the American sketch comedy show Saturday Night Live but otherwise had no direct connection to the show. The series made stars of Ben Elton and Harry Enfield, and featured appearances (in some cases first television appearances) by Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie, Patrick Marber, Morwenna Banks, Chris Barrie, Julian Clary, Emo Philips, Tracey Ullman, Craig Ferguson, Craig Charles, Josie Lawrence and many others. The pilot show and first series featured comic duo Adrian Edmondson and Rik Mayall in their act The Dangerous Brothers each week. The introductory theme was an original composition by Paul Hardcastle.