

The wacky world of Jason Byrne

He's already the best-selling artist ever at the influential Edinburgh Fringe; now the acclaimed Irish comic is heading to Dubai to try his luck with UAE audiences. *Rob Garratt* tried to figure out what makes him tick



Let's shatter a myth: interviewing comedians isn't always a good laugh. Onstage they may be gregarious, hilarious and so very charismatic you're just dying to take them for a drink and a natter. But corner a comic for a formal magazine interview and it's often a different story entirely. You approach the interview expecting a raft of rabble-rousing anecdotes and bountiful energy, and to be made the butt of a few new side-splitting jokes thought up just for you. Instead you often meet short, sly, guarded and never entirely comfortable responses. It's as if they save all their wit, verve (and best jokes) for the stage, leaving interviewers with short shrift.

One such case study is Jason Byrne: onstage he can be side-splitting, spending much of his shows engaging with the audience in elaborate interaction. In our

'The last time I laughed was when I saw a kid fart and snot came out of his nose'

interview he seems ever-so-slightly absent – although that's not to say he isn't funny. In a deadpan delivery, it's not always clear where the jokes start and the confessions begin.

We're convinced the Irish comic is saving all his wit for Dubai: he's visiting for a two-night stint on Thursday May 10 and Friday 11. He'll be performing his new Cirque du Byrne show, which sees the 40-year-old comic take on the role of ringmaster, conducting on-stage volunteers in wacky comedic circus spectacles. Debuting at last year's Edinburgh Fringe – where, during the past 12 years, Jason has become the festival's best-selling artist ever – the show has picked up cracking reviews.

So, what's the Cirque du Byrne tour all about?

It's about the audience getting up to do stuff with me: funny stories, funny props and a monkey with a limp.

Sounds interesting. If there was a dictionary definition of Jason Byrne, it would be?

Red, tall, hilarious, keep out of sunlight.

When was the last time you bombed?

I never bomb – I only learn.

So what did you learn?

I learned that I never bomb.

Right. How would you describe your personality?

Calm, fiery, emotional, stone cold, loving and full of hatred.

You've been doing this a long while now. Can you honestly tell us you still enjoy every night on stage?

I have to enjoy every night. If I don't, then the audience notices and the gig is bad. I literally skip out onto the stage every night. I'm sooooo happy out there.

Surely now the crowds are so enthusiastic that there's no risk?

That's like saying every bungee cord will catch you.

Okay, so what's the secret of good stand-up?

Flour and butter, with a sprinkle of bulls' faeces.

Just why do the Irish love comedians so much?

They don't – they love drinking and dancing and rubbing walls.

What's the last joke that made you laugh?

Jokes don't make me laugh, but the last time I laughed was when I saw a kid fart and snot came out of his nose.

Lovely. You headlined McGettigan's Comedyfest in Dubai last year: what are you looking forward to doing on your return to Dubai?

I'm looking forward to going to the mall and skiing.

What else entertains you besides laughs? Books, music, travel...?

Lying on the couch under a blanket with my favourite plants.

The worst thing about being a comedian is... (and don't say airports).

It's all the travel you have to do. You spend a lot of time in a*****s, I hate a*****s more than anything.

If you hadn't found a flair for humour, what do you think you'd be doing with your life now?

I studied to be an airline pilot. I got half way through, and I was so funny on the intercom, I chose stand-up.

If you could be any comedian who wasn't you, who would you be?

I'd hate someone to be me – I know what goes on in a comic's head. So no thanks to any of them.

And if you could be anybody ever that wasn't you?

A blind monk.

Jason Byrne performs at Almas Tower, JLT, on May 10 and 11. Doors open 7pm, show starts 9pm. Dhs100 (entry only); Dhs190 (with food and drink), www.timeouttickets.com

▶ **NEXT WEEK:** Dubai-based producer and DJ Adriano K on his South American style