



With three international comics taking to the stage in one weekend, we've declared March 'Dubai funny month'. Rob Garratt grills top draw Tommy Tiernan and gets a few tips on how to make people laugh

TOMMY TIERNAN: IRELAND'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL COMIC?

Tommy Tiernan is known as one of Ireland's angriest and most outspoken comedians. He is also renowned for his on-stage rants and for being splashed across the papers for saying inappropriate things. His name is frequently mentioned in the same sentence as 'racism' and 'prejudice' following some ill-timed jokes about the Holocaust and Down's Syndrome. Even his own website acknowledges Tiernan has been dubbed 'the most controversial comedian in Ireland'.

Despite the media reputation, after just five minutes in conversation with the comic we're convinced he must have a troublemaking evil twin who was responsible for the headline-worthy escapades. Delve deeper and instead of an embittered soul berating the system, mankind, and the whole darn world, we're met with a softly spoken gent who tells us that before going on stage he meditates and listens to piano jazz. 'Improvised music puts me in a frame of mind for the best ideas,' he says.

When he talks at length about his comedic methods, he speaks with the air of a fine artist and the finesse of a university professor. Confessing an unflinching commitment to the moment, it becomes easier to understand how he might have found himself in hot water. 'The spirit needs to be in you,' he says. 'You have to be honest to that – you have to trust whatever comes through your mind. If I'm on stage and I have an idea, I have to follow it. If I don't, all ideas stop.'

Growing up in Ireland, with spells spent in London and Zambia, 43-year-old Tiernan's

comedic career took off in 1998 when he won both the Edinburgh Fringe's Perrier Comedy Award, and the Best Stand-Up Award at the British Comedy Awards. His international career was further boosted by appearances on the *Late Show with David Letterman* in the US and *Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow* in the UK.

Wryly branding his comedy as being 'what you'd expect from a man who's been heavily drinking for a week, but hasn't had anything to drink that day', the Donegal-born native is now unarguably Ireland's most successful comic. In his home country he's sold more DVDs than anyone, and only U2 have sold more concert tickets (a comparison he describes as being between a 'multinational corporation and a door-to-door salesman'). In 2009, he set the (since broken) world record for the longest stand-up set in history, following a cathartic 36-hour Easter show, which he claims was not for publicity, but to 'talk out' his anger.

In other words, Tiernan is a pretty major draw, and it's a pretty big deal that he's playing at Dubai Tennis Stadium this month as part of The Irish Village's St Patrick Day's celebrations.

Still, inevitably, the conversation turns to his controversial reputation. Does he have any regrets? 'Once you become tarnished, it always comes up,' he says. 'I have made mistakes, but you're almost obligated to make mistakes when you're being creative. It wouldn't be something I regret – that would be like if the Sex Pistols had never

THE IRANIAN INVASION

There's a double header of Iranian-American comics in Dubai this month...



On Wednesday March 20 is **Maz Jobrani**: best known as a member of the 'Axis of Evil' comedy tour, his stand-up deals with the stereotypes he encounters being an Arab in modern America. **March 20, 7pm and 9pm, Dhs295-450. Jumeirah Beach Hotel, www.timeouttickets.com**



Two days later, **Max Amini**, who normally frequents Los Angeles' Comedy Store and Laugh Factory, takes to the same stage to showcase his best material. **March 22, 7pm and 9pm.**

Dhs280-395. Jumeirah Beach Hotel, www.timeouttickets.com

split up and were now doing folk music. I haven't lost my punk.'

With all that punk still wound up inside him, we wonder if Tiernan has been briefed about 'appropriate material' for the UAE. It doesn't sound like such a warning would be much use. 'I have a Tourette's thing where whatever I'm told not to say, I end up saying. If I do wander off set, I expect protection,' he laughs. 'I expect to be smuggled out of the city by like-minded individuals.' We hope it doesn't come to that.

Tommy Tiernan plays at Dubai Tennis Stadium in Garhoud on Thursday March 21; doors open 7pm, show starts 9pm. Tickets Dhs175, at www.timeouttickets.com