



THE A-Z OF COMEDY

B IS FOR... BRITISH COMEDY AND THE BOAT THAT ROCKED...

... starring Nick Frost, out of the Wright/Pegg comfort zone and into Richard Curtis' sure-to-be hit comedy.

WORDS MATT MUELLER

→ "I don't like watching comedy," declares Nick Frost. "I know that makes me sound like a miserable old bastard but I just don't."

Filling, as he does, the second slot in the comedy A-Z, it's only natural to question the burly funnyman on his own particular heroes of British comedy during his youth in Essex. "The thing is," Frost continues, "I was a very different person as a kid. I only watched slasher pics. When mum and dad were in the pub, they'd let me go and hire *Halloween* or *Friday The 13th*. The first time I remember laughing like an idiot was *The Young Ones*. So that and *Blackadder*, I guess."

And now? "I try not to watch any comedy. It's like a busman's holiday for me because I see the mistakes and I break it down. I don't enjoy it and nor does my wife. I'm more of a documentary person."

This is promptly followed by a Jim Royle moment, as Frost emits a whiffy belch in the Soho hotel we're ensconced in, then pounds his fist firmly on his chest. "Pardon me... Fuck me, I had falafel at lunchtime and they're awful for me!"

Set to provide a more nourishing boost to the 36-year-old actor, without any accompanying heartburn, is Richard Curtis' latest breach of the Brit-com frontlines, *The Boat That Rocked*. Forever uncool and scorned by the edgier stratas of the UK's congested comedy scene (of which Frost is a bona fide member, although he doesn't do sneering), Curtis cranks out cuddly films with cracker casts that suck in money like banks in the bail-out era.

Delivering a nostalgic wink to a '60s pirate radio station operating from the North Sea and starring Philip Seymour Hoffman, Bill Nighy and Kenneth Branagh, *Rocked* is no exception.

Even Frost admits it's as soft-centred and gooey as Curtis' previous labours. "What else do you expect from a Richard Curtis film? This is the most uncynical, nicest piece of cinema that you'll probably see this year. It's lovely. And I managed to watch it without just thinking, 'Oh fuck, I look fat.'"

Curtis, an admirer of *Hot Fuzz* and *Shaun Of The Dead*, wrote the part of cretinous DJ Dave for Frost. "I was tremendously touched," the actor enthuses. "He's British comedy's headmaster! And he wrote in a love scene with Gemma Arterton. Thank you very much, Richard Curtis! We can't really mention *Quantum Of Solace* in my house now as a result."

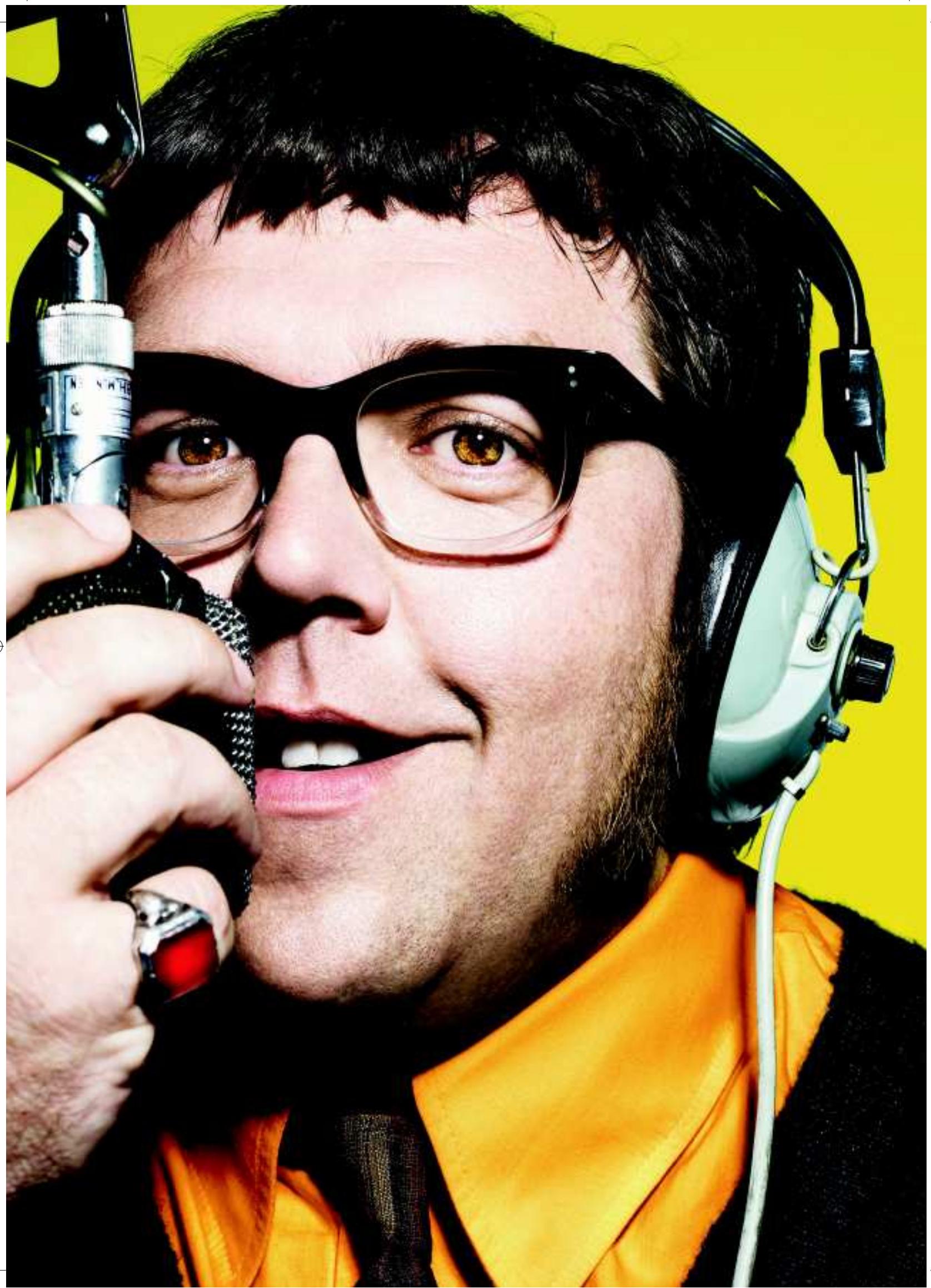
The trailer certainly depicts Dave as a corpulent love god... "Well, that's one way of putting it – some seedy perv preying on 20-year-old women. When I knew that was gonna happen, I was leaving open men's magazines with Gemma in them and [feigns nonchalance], 'Oh, Gemma Arterton! Sleeping with her...' I wouldn't class myself as a sycophant but I wanted to be near Richard, I wanted him to like me. He's like the anti-Woody Allen, you know? He's never not cheery."

Dave – "cruel, smarmy, a bit of a prick, but for all his faults quite fragile" – will be Frost's most high-profile foray beyond the blithering bumble-dorks (Mike Watt, Ed, PC Danny Butterman) that have been his contribution to the inspired laugh-trifecta with Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg. Before

Boat, he'd had a cameo in *Penelope*, and popped up as a gay-hating factory worker in *Kinky Boots* (good) and a fey, gay hairdresser in *Wild Child* (a little embarrassing, truth be told). He also fronted BBC3's blink-and-you-missed-it sketch show *Man Stroke Woman* >>

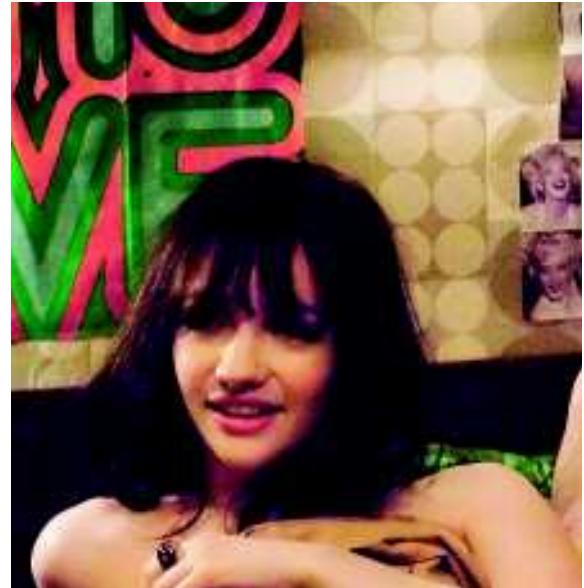
'RICHARD CURTIS IS LIKE THE ANTI-WOODY ALLEN. HE'S NEVER NOT CHEERY'







Setting sail: (below) Frost's DJ Dave gets jiggy with Talulah Riley's Marianne in *The Boat That Rocked*; (bottom) Dave with fellow Boat DJ The Count (Philip Seymour Hoffman).



and BBC2's sci-fi spoof-com *Hyperdrive*, which was canned after just two seasons for failing to be very funny and for criminally neglecting to deploy Frost's roly-poly anarchy to useful comic effect.

After that perturbing detour, it's no surprise he tells his wife, "Film, that's what I do now". It's also telling that, as much as he's basking in the ego-stroking attention being lavished on him by the likes of Richard Curtis and Steven Spielberg, who's cast him and Pegg as the Thompson Twins in *Tintin*, Frost's over-arching ambition is to make the most pivotal relationship in his life 100 per cent monogamous. "What Simon and I eventually want and what we're working towards is to just do our own stuff that we write," confesses Frost. "That's quite important for us, 'cos, you know, I loved doing *The Boat That Rocked* but at the end of the day it's not mine. And Simon and I are both, although we'd be loathe to admit it, massive control freaks."

Frost doesn't mind saying other people's lines but he'd prefer to say his own. And, in fact, all he's ever really wanted to do is

write, ever since returning to the UK after two years spent on an Israeli kibbutz (a drastic life-jump taken in his late teens to nip a burgeoning drug problem in the bud) and penning a novel about his exploits "on an ironing board because I didn't own a table... I've always wanted to be a kind of angsty novelist, living in a filthy garret in St Petersburg, eating watery potato soup – it appeals to me somehow."

He and Pegg hatched a few stillborn sitcoms in the early days of their best-friendship, as *Spaced* achieved lift-off and Frost wrote and presented survival-spoof *Danger! 50,000 Volts!* for Channel Five. Although he's always chucked a few good jokes into the pot, *Shaun* and *Fuzz* were the Wright-and-Pegg show (as will be *World's End*, the final chapter in the Cornetto trilogy). Frost, however, seized the lead on the upcoming *Paul* – a throwaway brainwave about two comic geeks

picking up a stranded alien in Area 51 that he and Pegg cooked up on the *Shaun* set.

Injecting sci-fi flavours into a road-trip buddy-com template, Frost holed up in a hotel for four weeks and emerged with a 180-page draft that he and Pegg have spent the last two years culling. They just finished the final tweaks "this morning", says Frost, and *Paul* is due to kick off next month in New Mexico with *Superbad*'s Greg Mottola at the helm and a shake-up of their tried-and-tested formula: this time, Pegg will play an unconfident introvert to Frost's obnoxious loudmouth. "We didn't want to keep it as Simon's characters are the bosses

and mine are the semi-retarded village idiots. I don't want people to get bored of us. I'm hoping people will like the chemistry between me and Simon."

As for Paul, the grumpy ET the duo pick up in a rented RV after a sour Comic-Con visit (at which Stephen

'SIMON AND I WANTED PAUL TO BE A LO-FI INDIE WITH AN AMAZING CG CHARACTER'



King refuses to read their script), Frost calls him "a classic 1950s grey" and leaps up to retrieve his iPhone to show *Total Film* the first image of a squat, ash-coloured alien with enormous black eyes sitting in the passenger seat of a car. "He's been on earth for 60 years and just wants to get home, so he's taken on the mantle of being a moody fucker. The point of it is we wanted to make essentially a lo-fi indie film, a *Little Miss Sunshine* but with an amazing CGI character in it. I don't think we've seen that before." But first comes *Tintin*...

Frost is shortly heading off to LA for the shoot and confesses to being deeply nervy. Never mind that he and Pegg have been assigned a movement coach from Cirque Du Soleil who's been bombarding them with homework: "We just keep going, 'Fucking hell, we've got to learn all this!'" It's more the matter of being put through their identical paces in front of two titans of the medium. "I think the worst thing is the first rehearsal is going to be Spielberg and Peter Jackson... I'm nervous that I won't do a good job."

What he won't be is unprepared. Frost recalls the most painfully embarrassing day of his career, during the first series of *Spaced* when he decided to wing a scene so he could go out the night before. It was a catastrophe, taking him half-a-day to shoot a dialogue exchange that should have taken an hour. "It was down to me being inexperienced, lazy and stoned," he admits. "Not in that order. You can see everyone looking at you thinking, 'You fucking idiot.' I work my arse off making sure that will never happen again. Because, as much as I like to think I don't, I do care what people think about me."

The Boat That Rocked opens on 3 April and will be reviewed in a future issue.

C IS FOR... COMEDIAN COMEDY

Comedic sub-genre in which giggle-flick frontliners are the draw. Not plot, not subtext, but the guy up front. Thus, *Yes Man* appears cut to fit Jim Carrey's act-on-impulse persona. We court such comedies to see stars work their schtick, be said star Ferrell or Stiller, Williams or Martin. Resolutely conventional plotting gives room for the lead to flex their funny bones.

SEE ALSO Caper, cross-dressing, *Carry On...*



CARREY'S MADCAP MASKED MONSIEUR IN THE MASK.

D IS FOR... DRAG

One of the funniest flicks ever fired up, 50-years fresh this year, set the standard for cross-dressing comedy: the zinger-licious *Some Like It Hot*, with Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis tottering away from mob gunfire and admiring Marilyn Monroe's wibbly-wobbly walk ("like jello on springs..."). Drag antecedents included *Sylvia Scarlett* as well as Chaplin and Laurel cross-dressed. And of course, there's also *Mrs Doubtfire* or *Nuns On The Run*. And *Tootsie*.

SEE ALSO Dumbing down, domestic comedy, double acts.



"Well, nobody's perfect!"

E IS FOR... EALING

Studio that ditched war movies for a smash cycle of comedies from 1949 – starting with *Passport To Pimlico* and *Whisky Galore!*, often celebrating the small British chap's resilience in the face of authoritarianism. Eccentric whimsy is their abiding rep, but Robert Hamer and Alexander Mackendrick's films bristled with barbed wit. See *Kind Hearts And Coronets*, *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Ladykillers*...

SEE ALSO Embarrassment, errors (as in "comedy of...").



Slaughter most civil in *Kind Hearts*... as Louis Mazzini ushers a boat over a waterfall.