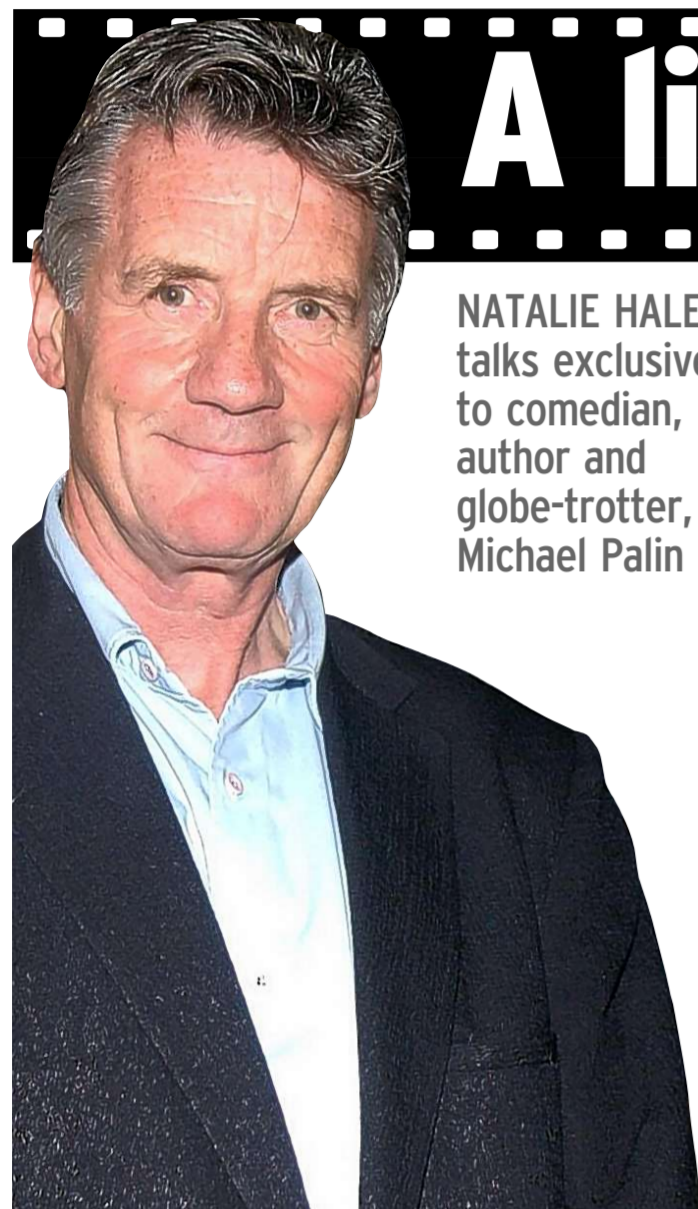


Crackerjack Slapstick Festival

www.crackerjack.co.uk



NATALIE HALE
talks exclusively
to comedian,
author and
globe-trotter,
Michael Palin CBE

A life of laughter

To misquote Monty Python's The Life of Brian, 'He's not the Messiah, he's a very nice boy'.

Who doesn't love Michael Palin? The 66-year-old has been many things to many people in a career that has spanned five decades. As the baby of the Monty Python team, he's played a singing lumberjack, the vendor of a dead parrot and the straight man to John Cleese's eye-bulging fury.

He penned the award-winning Ripping Yarns, got chips shoved up his nose in A Fish Called Wanda, and then we witnessed his globe-trotting journeys from Around the World in 80 Days to his Pole to Pole trek and his adventures in the Himalayas.

And in addition to his all-singing, all-dancing CV, he is also a national treasure. Known as one of the most amiable men in the industry, the nation clasped Michael Palin to its bosom from the start, and we haven't let him go.

With such a reputation, I'm hoping that the star lives up to his hype and isn't a curmudgeonly old miser behind closed doors. Of course, he isn't. When he calls, he's all affability and apologies for being just a couple of minutes late for our interview.

"Sorry I'm a bit late - I couldn't find where I put your number. How's the weather there? It's rather patchy where we are in North West London, but it's snowing quite heavily now."

As well as being widely identified as Britain's Nicest Man, Michael is

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by the people at Aardman, who told me that they wanted to give me an award. I did a bit of a double take, actually. Me? An award for slapstick? What's going on? But they said that they were definitely talking to the right Michael Palin, and I was he.

"I'm looking forward to it actually. I know that I'm doing an on-stage chat with Graeme Garden, which will be fun.

"I worked with Graeme a long, long time ago. Before I did Monty Python and he did The Goodies, we worked together on programmes like Twice a Fortnight and Broaden Your Mind, which were very funny shows.

"So it's rather nice to renew my acquaintance and indeed friendship with Graeme. We were very close at one time. And, of course, Neil Innes will be there - I've just been to his birthday party in snowy Suffolk. He's always great company."

Michael tells me that he first fell in love with physical comedy as a young boy growing up in Sheffield where he lived with his sister, mother and father - a steel engineer who suffered from a pronounced stammer, which Michael would later adopt to great effect in A Fish Called Wanda.

"The first films that I remember were comedies. We were either watching Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton or the Three Stooges - but particularly Laurel and Hardy.

"We used to go to the theatre in Sheffield, where they would play the same hour-long programme over and over on an endless loop. Me and my

also one of the busiest, so it's a real coup for Bristol's Slapstick Festival to get him on board - and a coup for us to get the one exclusive interview he has agreed to do to publicise the event.

Michael will be in Bristol on Thursday, January 21, to launch the 2010 Slapstick Festival's four-day celebration of slapstick comedy, which explores why visual humour is such a hit in so many countries and its impact on later generations of comics, including Monty Python's Flying Circus.

The opening event, 'Something ALMOST Completely Different' will see Michael on stage to discuss his illustrious career in comedy with fellow writer/performer Graeme Garden.

In homage to Michael's travelling legacy, the main event will be a screening of one of Buster Keaton's greatest comedies, The Navigator (1924), and there will be appearances from other celebrity guests both on stage and on screen, including the man known as 'The Seventh Python', Neil Innes.

Michael will also be presented with an award in recognition of his lifetime contribution to the noble art of physical comedy.

"I was asked along out of the blue

and Ollie are now considered among the best comedy teams ever.

Tickets: £7/£5 concs
Arncliffe box office: 0117 917 2300

The Real Fred Karno
Watershed Cinema 1
4pm
Tim Brooke-Taylor and Tony Staveacre (author of 'Slapstick!') investigate the legacy of the Exeter-born showman and impresario, Fred Karno. Credited with discovering Charlie Chaplin, Stan Laurel and even the

Tickets: £6.50/£5 concs
Watershed box office: 0117 927 5100

Slapstick Festival Special event:
An Evening with Neil Innes - The Seventh Python (PG)
Arncliffe
6.50pm

This UK premiere is a recent documentary based on the life, work and unplanned career of musical satirist Neil Innes.

The Seventh Python traces one man's winding path of whimsy as he flirts with destiny at the edge of fame with incredibly influential and unusually lasting work that keeps one foot planted in the worlds of comedy and the other in rock 'n' roll.

Neil Innes has proven to be the greatest musical comedy satirist of the past 50 years. He has brought us delights from the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band,

live musical accompaniment from The Slapstick Boys, four of the finest musicians in Europe for silent film accompaniment and an onstage discussion with film historian and filmmaker Kevin Brownlow and avid Lloyd fan, Withnail and I actor Paul McGann.

Tickets: £7/£5 concs
Arncliffe box office: 0117 917 2300

Saturday, January 23
Slapstick International: Pordenone Silent Film Festival Italy: The House On Trubnaia Street (PG)
Watershed Cinema 1
11am

The big surprise hit of the 2009 Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy was this delicious comedy from (improbably) the classic era of Soviet cinema.

True to melodrama tradition, a simple peasant girl (along with an obstreperous duck) arrives from the country, a ripe victim for all the perils of the big city

Tickets: £6.50/£5 concs
Watershed box office: 0117 927 5100

Laurel & Hardy:
Classics & rarities
Arncliffe
2pm

With an eclectic programme of classics and rarities from Laurel & Hardy, Graeme Garden (The Goodies) and silent comedy expert David Wyatt demonstrate why Stan



Girl Shy (U)
Arncliffe
8pm
One of Harold Lloyd's finest and funniest films, this rich character comedy about a bashful stutterer who is chronically shy of women is packed with extraordinary sight gags, brilliant intertitles and hilarious performances. Including

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This year's programme

Thursday, January 21
Slapstick Gala with Michael Palin
Something ALMOST Completely Different
Colston Hall
7.30pm

Bristol's Slapstick Silent Comedy Festival invites you to a star-studded evening of classic comedy and live entertainment for its sixth Slapstick Gala.

This unique event presents comedy legend and national treasure Michael Palin onstage to discuss his illustrious career in comedy with fellow writer/performer Graeme Garden.

In homage to Palin's travelling legacy, Slapstick presents one of Buster Keaton's greatest comedies, The Navigator (1924), set to the world premiere live musical accompaniment.

Tickets: £16/£12 Concs
Colston Hall box office: 0117 922 3686

Friday, January 22
The Italian Straw Hat (U)
Arncliffe
5.40pm

An hilarious misadventure, heralding the beginning of 'screwball comedy', this early classic of French cinema is full of wonderful character gags and situation comedy. On the way to his wedding Ferdinand (Albert Préjean) discovers that his horse has eaten the straw hat of a married woman (Olga Tschechowa) canoeing in the bushes with her lover, and his big day begins to go rapidly downhill.

Tickets: £7/£5 concs
Arncliffe box office: 0117 917 2300



Friday, January 22
Something ALMOST Completely Different
Colston Hall
7.30pm

“Laughter brings people together, and that's why seeing a comedy film with a large crowd of people is a completely different experience to seeing it on your own”
Monty Python's Michael Palin



An early shot of the Monty Python team; from left, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, Graham Chapman, Michael Palin and John Cleese

pals would go and watch that and loved it.

"In the 1950s, you had either silent comedy films or war films, of course. I think one needed the comedy as a contrast to the unremitting gloom of the war films.

"Then along came these English comics who tried to do the same sort of slapstick comedy as Chaplin and Keaton, like Norman Wisdom. You had to go and see a Norman Wisdom film every week - it was absolutely obligatory, just like buying Beatles records in the 1960s.

"I used to love Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis films as well. Any good yet silly slapstick that was crisply and inventively performed, I was a sucker for. It really used to make me laugh."

Little did the young Michael know that a decade or so later, he would be making audiences across the globe split their sides with his own subversive brand of humour. Monty Python's Flying Circus ran from 1969-1974 and saw Michael and fellow Oxford alumnus Terry Jones unite with John Cleese, Graham

Chapman, Eric Idle and Terry Gilliam to create what was to become one of British television's most influential comedy series.

Launched with minimal fuss or publicity, the ground-breaking series quickly drew a cult audience for the sheer originality of its humour, turning the writers/performers into arguably the most internationally renowned and lauded comedy team on television.

For many, the key to the show's success was in the diversity of the Pythons themselves, with their individual skills and personalities ensuring a delicate balance between satire and surrealism.

Michael and Terry Jones had the gentler, more whimsical style of comedy; Cleese, Idle and Chapman - all former Cambridge students - were edgier and harder.

"John and Graham wrote these quite aggressive sketches with pent-up emotion pouring out, but they could also be quite silly, too.

"For example, one of my favourite Python things is John doing the fish-slapping dance.

enough, Neil will be screening the premiere of his recently discovered student art film from 1965 featuring footage of Viv Stanshall performing his famous mock striptease.

Tickets: £7/£5 concs
Arncliffe box office: 0117 917 2300

Monday, January 24
Will Hay - Master of Comedy
Watershed Cinema 1
11am

Will Hay was Britain's best known film comedian of the 1930s and 1940s and his film Oh Mr Porter is one of the funniest of the period. Join David Wyatt and Graham Rinaldi, author of the recent Will Hay biography, as they discuss and explore his films and theories while showing extracts starring

"Similarly, Terry Jones and I were particularly interested in making short, fun and often surreal films and sketches that involved more warm and whimsical humour. But we could write some dark things as well if we wanted to. I think that was one of the great things about Python - we could all mix and match.

"But I think that yes, I have always found life slightly less complicated than John has, for example. I'm not saying that one approach or attitude to comedy or to life is right and the other wrong, but I do see a lot of silliness and wonderful absurdity around me, which I respond to and celebrate. I think that's a good way of dealing with a lot of the other problems of the world.

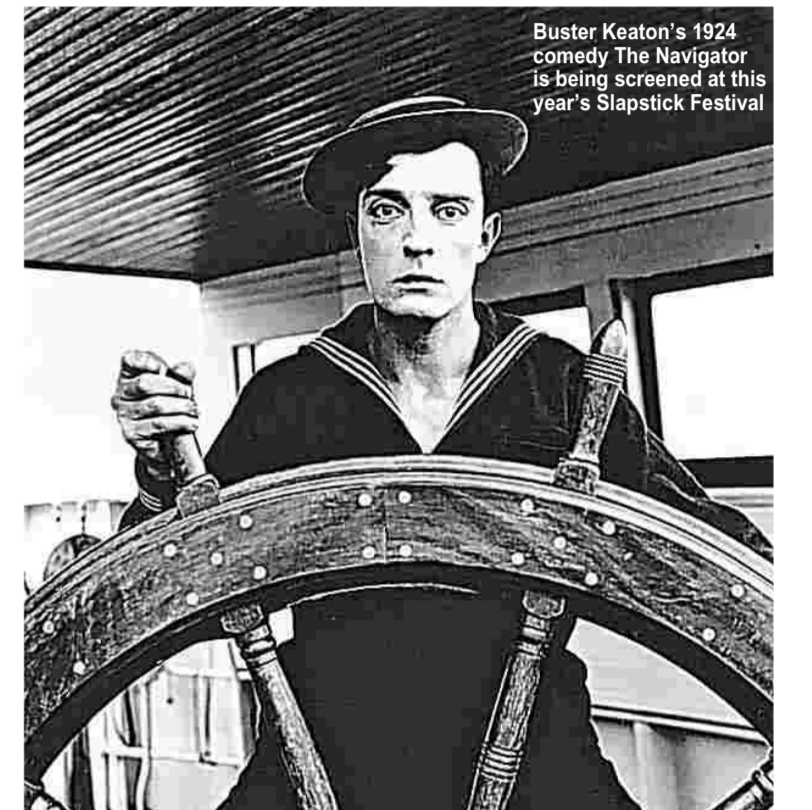
"I like comedy to be a joyful experience. Comedy can be dark and a lot of comedy, such as The Thick Of It and The Office, is all about our capacity for humiliation. That can be funny, but it also makes you feel slightly concerned about the human race. Whereas the kind of work that certainly I enjoy doing is more open, generous and silly. I think comedy should make you feel good rather than feel bad."

Not content with being a comedy legend, in the late 1980s Michael made the seemingly giant leap from undisputed comedy royalty to globetrotting documentarian.

In fact, today he is as famous and well-loved for exploring foreign climes as he is for being a Python.

"It's good for someone who is chronically unable to decide what they're really good at to end up doing things that are so well regarded," laughs Michael.

"I've really enjoyed doing those travel shows. It was only supposed to be one - Around The World In 80 Days - but we kind of hit on a good delivery, which was basically to be myself and not to be judgemental or to try to be too heavy about it all. We show that things can - and do - go wrong. There's a lot of humour in the travels. Again, humour is a great



Buster Keaton's 1924 comedy The Navigator is being screened at this year's Slapstick Festival

communicator - a great way of getting on with people.

"For me, it was a very, very enjoyable process - give or take some serious stomach upsets, frostbite and poisoned camel meat!"

Returning to the matter in hand, Palin is characteristically upbeat about the Slapstick Festival and explains why he's looking forward to making his debut at this year's main event.

"Laughter brings people together, and that's why seeing a comedy film with a large crowd of people is a completely different experience to seeing it on your own.

"That's why this Slapstick Festival sounds so wonderful. I hope I'm not in a bad mood that day! That's the thing about comedy - sometimes people say 'come on Michael, cheer us all up' but it's hard if you feel completely tired and miserable for whatever reason. One has to grin and bear it - or bear and grin it.

"No, of course it won't happen at the festival - I love a laugh and I'm extremely amiable."

No kidding.
Something ALMOST Completely Different appears at Colston Hall on Thursday, January 21. Tickets cost £16 - call 0117 922 3686.

one-liners, W.C. Fields is here revealed as one of the great silent visual comics.

Tickets: £6/£4.50 concs
Watershed box office: 0117 927 5100

Double Bill at Jesters: Desert Island Slapstick
Jesters Comedy Club
6.30pm
If you were stuck on a desert island with only one silent comedy to keep you company, which would you choose?

Join three of Britain's best loved television and radio personalities as they each in turn choose their favourite silent comedies for our viewing pleasure.

This year's panel features three members of Radio 4's I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue team including festival regulars Tim Brooke-Taylor and Graeme Garden plus, for the first time at the Slapstick festival, comedy writer and performer Barry Cryer.

Desert Island Slapstick is followed by: The Rutles: All you Need is Cash
Jesters Comedy Club
9.15pm
One of the first films of its kind,

The Rutles is primarily a series of skits and gags that each illustrate a different part of the fictional Rutles story, closely following the chronology of The Beatles' story.

Introduced in person by Neil Innes aka Rutle Ron Nasty, this is a unique opportunity to see the inspiration for successful Rob Reiner cult comedy film, This Is Spinal Tap which followed in 1984.
Tickets: £12/£10 concs - includes both events
Jesters box office: 0117 909 6655

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