



Laugh your
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off

VERONICA LEE talks to comedian Ed Byrne ahead of his show in Portsmouth.

Mock the Week star Ed Byrne is an established touring favourite, and despite his youthful looks the Irishman recently marked up 20 years as a comic.

His latest show of observational comedy, *Outside, Looking In*, covers a wide range of subjects – from a recent gastric illness to the success of UKIP – but he talks a lot about his family and it's his most personal yet.

"I didn't make a conscious effort to write a more personal show, but that was what was coming out when I started writing it," Ed says.

"People come to see me for a laugh and I would like to think they go away thinking the show is quite heartwarming.

"A lot of comics may talk about the same stuff, but what makes it mine is that what I'm saying is what I genuinely think on this subject, and I try to make it as funny as I can."

Ed is adamant that he will keep his two young sons out of the celebrity spotlight, so don't expect an 'At Home With Ed Byrne and Family' in *OK!* any time soon.

But in *Outside, Looking In*, he shows a picture of one of his sons – the denouement of a bittersweet story about buying new shoes – which not only illustrates it perfectly, but produces an 'Aaaaah' moment.

"I'm aware that they haven't given me permission to talk about them and that there will come a point when I can't," Ed says.

"John Bishop, for example, has stopped talking about his [much older] children on stage because people know who they are.

"I talk about them in pretty abstract terms, because what I'm discussing is the act of parenting, and you can't talk about that without mentioning your own children.

"And there isn't anything in this show that would make them at a later date say, 'I don't like this!'"

But while there is a lot of personal reflection in his new show, Ed also ponders on matters political – the story about his son sparks a passionate section about how we label young children, for instance, and he also talks about feminism and transgenderism.

I ask Ed if dipping a toe into the transgender debate (for which some have been vilified on social media) isn't a little risky.

"It has become such a big subject because of Caitlyn Jenner [the former athlete Bruce Jenner, who transitioned earlier this year] and some Twitter trolls were refusing to acknowledge her as anything but Bruce.

"I thought it was interesting that it stills divides people. I call it the thorniest issue since Jesus was fitted for a hat."

The feminist slant to the new show was

Ed Byrne will appear at the New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth, on January 23 at 8pm. Tickets cost £20. To book, call 023 9264 9000 or visit www.newtheatroyal.com

To WIN a pair of tickets to the show just answer this question:

WHAT COUNTRY DOES ED BYRNE HAIL FROM?

- a) Spain
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sparked by Ed's reflections on his early days in comedy and, strikingly, he admits to being a little uncomfortable about some of his more laddish material back then.

"My comedy reflected my life at that time – single and enjoying myself – and most of it was fairly harmless 'the difference between men and women' kind of thing.

"But some of the stuff about an ex-girlfriend I can see was a bit angry and I wouldn't do it now."

He says he is more aware of how men and women interact in the modern world and is sometimes surprised by the difference in his reactions to things as a man in his forties to when he was twentysomething.

"I started watching *Californication* [the US dark comedy starring David Duchovny as a sex addict] but I found it insulting because I'm expected to empathise with him.

"His character behaves so unconscionably that I couldn't watch the second series.

"I don't how much of that is simply getting older, or that times have changed, or mixing with a broader group of people.

"Interestingly I find Twitter can expand your horizons; I've started following all sorts of people on it and it's good to get a different take on things."

I ask Ed, 43, if he still likes touring after two decades.

"Apart from the travel involved, which no comic likes, I love it, because you have people responding to something that you have written alone in your office, and the work comes alive in a room of people.

"I like the television things I do, but nothing can beat a live comedy audience."

In any spare time he has, Ed is a hill walker; when in Scotland he 'bags' Munros (peaks above 3,000ft, his count is at 75) and the completist, slightly geeky side of him, he admits, means that elsewhere in the British Isles he also collects 'county tops' – the highest point in the county.

"I've downloaded an app for them," he says with a laugh, "and have started making a list of those I've done."

He's currently writing a sitcom set in an outdoors shop, and I ask if he plans to introduce his sons to the pleasures of outdoors.

"My wife, Claire, and I already have. So far they love it, camping and canoeing, that sort of thing.

"As they're growing it's hard to be apart from them when I'm on tour, and I try not to be away for more than a couple of days at a time, but one of the great things about my job is that it means I can spend a lot of time with them when I'm home."

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