

drew taylor is the grafter

an article by col howarth
for standupforcomedy.co.uk

'I always wanted to do comedy. I admire people who can stand there and entertain a whole room of people. It's a bare-naked thing to do. You haven't got a band backing you. You are literally on your own. It's you and a mic. That is something I've always admired.'

Drew Taylor has found some breathing space in his busy schedule for a chat about all things stand-up. At just over a year at the time of writing, Drew's is a pretty short journey but one that has put him firmly on the comedy map both as an act and a promoter. Check out the Cardiff Comedy group among others on Facebook and its hard to find a gig poster that doesn't have his face on it! Here he reflects on a massive year!

'I've always been someone who needed a push. The push into stand-up came when I made myself enter the Welsh Unsigned Stand-Up Awards (WUSA - the national stand-up competition in Wales) in 2015. I had the email to say I'd been accepted and I was like wow. It hadn't occurred to me that it was open to anyone as long as there were spaces! I'd written on and off for about 6 months and WUSA made me take it forward, so I put together what I thought was a good 5-minutes of material. I did a preliminary heat which was my first gig. I was really raw, very nervous. In the same heat were Andrew Rutledge, Jamie McGowan, Chris Kelly and Costas Lukaris. They were all just new faces at the time but a year on they are all people I know and gig with regularly.'

'I didn't get through but the feedback was positive and it came down to me needing more experience. I took that advice and respected it, and I did it - I became more experienced. I did pretty much any gig I could.'

Drew's first year has seen him progress from being an open-spot newbie, to a confident opening and middle act in no time. He has absorbed that experience and built upon it at every step, proving to be a keen networker, confident self-promoter and something of a grafter, clocking up an insurance-bothering mileage along the way, with full-time teaching commitments also in the mix. Not only are the spots getting longer but flash forward to 19th July when Drew will be teaming up with fellow upstart Steffan Evans to perform their first hour *Tales From Wales* as part of the Cardiff Comedy Festival.

'The first ten or so gigs were on open mic nights where you didn't have to know anyone. You could just walk up, put your name down and do it. I did get frustrated in the first two or three months as I'd email or message promoters and wouldn't get a response. That's no judgement on you - it's just that promoters get lots of requests for spots, and you are just a name and an unknown quantity. Why would a promoter put their neck out for you? I know this being a promoter myself. You just have to chip away at it and one gig follows another.'

'A lovely combination of charm, confidence and great jokes!'
Nathan Caton

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As well as the fast-track on-stage progression, Drew's credentials as a promoter have enjoyed the same kind of curve with an empire that spreads across South Wales, starting in the valleys, including Clwb y Bont in Pontypridd about half an hour outside of Cardiff, a legendary venue that sadly is about to close but where Drew's Clwb Comedy found its home and had a great year-long run. More recently Drew has added the RedHouse Theatre in Merthyr, dabbled in Barry and Newport, and then up to Abergavenny where Drew runs an absolute dream of a night, all culminating in his semi-regular pro-night at the iconic The Muni Theatre in Pontypridd. With this, was promotion considered a way in from the start?

'My thoughts were if I can't join that football team then I'll make my own football team.'

'Yes! There's an unspoken agreement for better or worse where acts meet and say *I'll do your night, and you can do my night*. People don't say it but it is like that. As soon as I set up my own gigs people started treating me differently. People spoke to me differently. People were quicker to add me on Facebook. My thoughts were if I can't join that football team then I'll make my own football team.'

From left to right: opening night at The Muni; The Death Hilarious at Clwb y Bont; Live At the Muni; Tales From Wales

'I wasn't getting the number of gigs I wanted though I didn't realise just how many mouths there are to feed on the bottom rung of the stand-up scene. It's the biggest tier that props up the rest of the triangle. So you have to break through that and put yourself into the promoter's sub-consciousness so that when they are deciding who to give a gig to, they know you.'

So how has Drew's first academic year been? Approaching 100 gigs already, how has all that effort paid off? And what's next?

'I've done a range of nights. I'd do any gig I could get to. This led to open spots on pro-bills with the likes of Nathan Caton and Lloyd Langford. I feel honoured to share a stage with them but the next step for me is to convince the audience into believing I fit into a line up like that. That I deserve to be there and that I'm part of it.'

'This is the year where I'll be giving competitions a good go. As a promoter progression in competitions is like a seal of approval. For any booking you get you have to give the promoter some kind of confidence that you are going to do a good job because they are going to give you their mic and you can say whatever you want for the next ten minutes.'

With Drew just into his second year the strategy is already playing out rather nicely. He recently competed at a Wye Valley Brewery Comedy Scratch Night at the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford walking away the deserved winner.

At the time of writing he is also a Stand Up For Cider Finalist, the big duel to be fought out in mid-July, and breezed his way into the WUSA semi-final - WUSA being the competition that kicked everything off a year ago in which the journey started and ended in a preliminary heat for the newest acts. Surely a year isn't even enough time to find the elusive voice?

'There's a danger when you see a lot of fantastic acts and you want to be like that. I don't think you can be. I think you can only be who you are. Unless you are a character or a sketch act I think it's important to be yourself. I like to think that on and off stage I'm the same. Don't try to be something you are not. You know yourself best. That in itself can give you a uniqueness. There's only one you.'

At this point Drew's *Tales From Wales* partner-in-crime (and WUSA finalist 2016) Steffan Evans interrupts us to provide us with free drinks. He hasn't mine-swept. Steffan works in the pub we're in.

With this, a final question for someone who is quick to turn his hard-earned first-hand experience into useful advice for the newcomer. What would Drew's key pointer be to those thinking of giving it a go?

'If you want to get into it just go for it. I did and there was a fear of *Will I be shit? Will people laugh at me in a bad way?* So just go for it. There are a lot of very supportive people out there who will help you along, pat you on the back, give you advice. It is one of the best things I've ever done.'

You can follow Drew on Twitter @DrewTaylorLite or find him on Facebook to keep up to date with his forthcoming gigs, his first show and those all important competitions!

Article by Col Howarth for standupforcomedy.co.uk. Check out the website for exclusive interviews, news and events.

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