

jordan brookes method madness

an exclusive Edinburgh Fringe 2016 special by col howarth for standupforcomedy.co.uk

'I HAD A STEAK AND EVERY MOUTHFUL SURPRISED ME WITH how nice it was. After finishing each bite I'd forget just how nice steaks are and then I'd eat the next bite and I was like oh my god steaks are amazing and it would remind me again. It was like a dream. The benefits of being an amnesiac just aren't discussed often enough because it was an incredible experience. It was magic in my mouth.'

JORDAN BROOKES, 2016

Prior to our chat I'd read somewhere that Jordan Brookes doesn't like to dwell on the past too much (*I look back at those times very fondly, the days when I didn't like to dwell on the past*) but it would be entirely remiss not to take him back at least to his first full Edinburgh Fringe experience last year in which his debut hour saw him nominated for the Chortle Comedians' Choice award.

For an entire month Jordan's name flew around social media with acts, promoters and audiences alike agreeing that if there was any one show to catch that year, it was *Adventures in Limited Space*, about which Chortle said:

'...with performance skills to spare and an innovative approach running through this assured debut like lettering in seaside rock, the limits of the spaces Brookes plays in future are likely to get bigger and bigger.'

The experience springboarded him all the way up the M4 with a relocation from Cardiff to London, and since then a string of double-bill previews with the likes of Tony Law and Simon Munnery on the way to the Fringe 2016.

'I was always going to move to London. I almost did it in February last year but I panicked a bit. It was all very quick and I didn't have any bases set up in London.'

'I was worried about plunging into the open mic circuit and trying to scramble my way up. It felt like a silly time to put myself at a disadvantage in a developmental sense, especially five months before Edinburgh. So I waited.'

'I went up with what I knew wasn't a full show. My last preview before going up was awful. But I was also excited. There was no pressure on me. I was just going to go up and develop the show. That has actually been the approach this year also. I will never feel satisfied with it. It will never feel complete. So in that sense I'll always be changing it and moving it around which keeps it fresh and exciting. Regardless of what I've got, that is the show. It has imperfections but it is comedy and that is what my comedy is.'

A Jordan Brookes show is not just an hour of stand-up. It is an experience in which he has re-written the act-audience contract and where stand-up, clowning and theatre create an intricate venn diagram. Whilst most of us discuss the process of writing material Jordan describes building frameworks and developing methodologies. Where many of us strive to make audiences laugh time and time again, Jordan seeks to engineer atmospheres and reactions. Where most of us dream about smashing it at every gig, every night, Jordan...well...doesn't.

Show And Tell

★★★★★

'Superbly crafted... one of the most creative but funny shows seen this year'

The Mirror

★★★★★

2016
Chortle Award
nominee for
Best Newcomer

★★★★★

'Takes all of the stand-up rules in the book and proceeds to snap them in two'

The List



JORDAN BROOKES The Making Of

FREE
NON-TICKETED
SHOW



LAUGHING HORSE @
THE CELLAR MONKEY
15 ARGYLL PLACE EH9 1JJ (VENUE 293)

5.00PM
AUGUST 4 TO 28
(NOT 16)



'I find it really hard to write. The previews I've had that I've written for, they haven't always gone that well. Then there are moments where I've followed my impulses and messed around, and tried to make myself laugh. A lot of my writing isn't me sat at a computer. It might be me on my own in a room rolling around or thrashing about making stupid faces until I can make myself laugh. I still make the mistake of writing stuff sometimes and it's not really funny and people can see it. They can sense when you are glazing over and going into the autocue in your head. They instinctively recognise something that is fresh and exciting, and of the moment. I still want to make sure it is defined as stand up. I still want people to enjoy it.'

In terms of influences, one of Jordan's is Hans Teeuwen, the Dutch cabaret master whose style is both absurdist and confrontational, and whose material appears entirely disjointed, but delivered with great skill, aplomb and complete confidence. Jordan's admiration partly comes from Teeuwen's expectation of an audience to either laugh because they get it, or to accept that it is their own fault when they don't.

'If you don't sell it confidently enough then people won't invest in it. When audiences think *I don't know why I was laughing but I was*. That's when it works on another level. That unknowable element is what makes it exciting. Sell it confidently enough and people will go along with it.'

Much has been said about the long awkward moments that punctuate Jordan's shows, and the unease experienced by his audiences. Is it fair to suggest that rather than seeking the laughs he is engineering a reaction or an atmosphere?

'I didn't want to be an awkward act. I didn't set out to make people feel uncomfortable and this year I've tried to make a show that doesn't do that but actually it has ended up being that again.'

'This year it will still be me stumbling around not knowing what's going to happen next and the audience not knowing what I'm going to do next, just creating this sense of hysteria of *who's in charge here?* If I don't know then how are they supposed to know?

'It is an inevitable part of my act. If I said something that was particularly heartfelt and thought nobody would laugh then I'm still going to say it. I'm going to stand there until they laugh. Like *yes I fucking said it, now you decide how to react*. It's almost out of necessity. It gets boring after a while. You get a positive response but you are seeing peoples' minds break.

'When people do invest in it and go along with it you can see they are losing their minds! It might not be the most popular form of comedy and you might never fill an arena with thousands of people but what does it matter? As long as you are doing what you think is funny. That's way more rewarding. And you'll surround yourself with people who are similarly-minded. It's like a calling card. You feel better connected. I'm confident that something good will eventually come out of this approach. You always feel like you're chasing something better.'

How was writing a whole new hour in one year and what can we expect from *The Making Of*?

'Whilst writing last year's show I went through a traumatic break-up which gave me a lot of material and a framework that the show was stuffed into. It gave it an emotional resonance and a power that wouldn't have been there. Overall it was about four years in the making in terms of honing the persona. It was like writing a framework or a methodology.

'This year I found some notes to myself that said *you should do a show about the year you lived in Dorset with your parents, doing nothing*.

'For that year I wasn't working. I was miserable and I became super-introverted. I'd already started doing stuff about identity and finding yourself. So the year spent with my parents became a gap year except rather than going off to find myself, I went off to lose myself. I lost my mind. So what we're seeing for an hour is a depiction of my year spent in Dorset and you watching me turning in on myself and commenting on my behaviour, and lambasting myself for saying or doing something that was wrong. That's the loose framework really. You're seeing it actualised in that there is no grand conclusion or philosophy. You are literally just watching a man struggling for an hour and then you leave.'

You can catch Jordan's 2016 Edinburgh run at The Cellar Monkey (Argyll Street, Venue 293). The show is free at 5pm throughout the full month (not 16th).

If, for you, the Edinburgh Fringe is all about experiencing something entirely different, as told by an entirely unique voice, then add this show to your list of things to see!



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