

Being someone else: Barry Humphries, Harry Enfield, Dick Emery, Sacha Baron Cohen

When comedians develop a performance, they call it various things: their *spiel* (German / Yiddish = talk), their *gig* (– this is very much from the 1980s ‘alternative’ comedy period when comedy saw itself as the ‘new rock music’ and comedians expected to be as over paid as musicians), their *routine*, and, usually, as their ‘act’.

‘Act’ is an interesting choice, because only comedians and variety performers (jugglers, conjurers, acrobats and similar) call what they do an ‘act’.

Theatrical and movie actors (thespians) don’t call their work an act. It’s a part, or a role, with lines to learn and deliver.

So comedians aren’t actors, and they call what they do an act, and actors are actors but they don’t call what they do an act. This is because actors take the role of a character in a play or a movie (or a TV commercial). Whereas comedians usually play themselves. A comedy act is usually *about* a comedian or a comic duo, and the character they are is a kind of narrator-observer, and their success depends very much on whether the audience likes them, not their portrayal of someone else, their acting skill.

People don’t say of Charlie Chaplin, ‘Chaplin is superb as Chaplin’, or ‘Hancock is superb as Hancock’ – although obviously Charles Chaplin and Charlie Chaplin were very different (Hancock was a special case: he and his scriptwriters created a character based on the real-life Hancock – his delusions of erudition and artistic sophistication, his snobbery, his idealism). The regular Peter Cook and Dudley Moore act, ‘Pete and Dud’, in their raincoats and flat caps, in the pub, speaking cockney – was an act, insofar as they weren’t like that in Real Life, but not an act insofar as Dudley Moore did come from Dagenham.

Fantasy lives, parallel universes, Walter Mitty, Billy Liar – we all want to be someone else. There’s a whole line of humour in there, because of the potential for failure. Fantasy puts fun into failure (hoho).

And then there the comedians whose act is being someone else.



1. Dick Emery:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArFIVggQ2Hk>

From 07:23-09:56: Hetty the man-eating spinster, then Toothy Vicar, then Mandy the bottle blonde ("Ooh, you are awful ... but I like you!"), and Hetty again from 0:17:06 to 0:18:34 – tries to get into prison. Dick

Emery also did Clarence, (catchphrase "Hello Honky Tonks"), witless yobbo Screwsby (catchphrase "Dad, I fink I got it wrong again"), crusty pensioner Mr Lampwick.

2. Barry Humphries, whose two greatest creations are, first, **Dame Edna Average**, a middle aged Melbourne housewife who gets her own show (all in Australian):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV3qiljfBBM>

and Humphries' cultural ambassador for Australia, the toothy, idiosyncratic **Sir Les Patterson**:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tD_8LqLoOGQ



3. Harry Enfield: When Harry Enfield started out he was so calculated, he says. "I thought, I want the biggest audience possible so I need to get catchphrases, because kids control the telly – that's when we all only had one telly. And then I thought, once I've got

the kids, I'll put something in for the older people – we'll do the DJs, that's probably a bit more highbrow." (Guardian Sep 2010)

<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/sep/25/harry-enfield-interview>

The mild-mannered Mr Cholmondeley Warner on Arsenal 1933 Vs. Liverpool 1991:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc2To-pKMSg>

The vulgar plasterer Loadsamoney

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXuRvthgn4U&list=RDomYssEXILjc>

The nauseating DJs Smashie & Nicey

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaQCr4PIsHE>

The upper class twit Tim Nice-But-Dim

Air guitar: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4OuzhwtHg>

Upper class lunch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tekXxB6dosQ>

The perfectly disgusting Slobs (Wayne and Waynetta)

Quiz show: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYEMNaboobw>

The broadminded father - meets son's boyfriend:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cTj--MjC7k>

The American tourists, Ronald & Pammy from Diddyboing, Ohio

On the bus: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meWRJ35Rm4Q>

Meeting Japanese: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs-7fBoimjo>

In the corner shop: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEEx3oUuiII>

Richer than you: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8Kum8OUTuk>

4. Sacha Baron Cohen: He's Jewish, speaks Hebrew, went to Cambridge and enjoys a prosperous intellectual family background, and he's very strangely, usually dangerously funny.

As Ali G. Interviews South LA gangs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLN3RWfNMSG>

Interviews David Beckham and 'Posh' Spice

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P842Tmi6lrc>

As Borat Sagdiyev

Dog contest:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZGGWy8G-GAV>

Learning American comedy:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZkRV2UqqDsv>

Cricket at Cambridge:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txfHVG3ioAsv>



As Brüno Gehard

Interviewing skinheads:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajMsfw8-RUY>

In Alabama:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSTukGu-Ut4>

Interviewing & fashion:

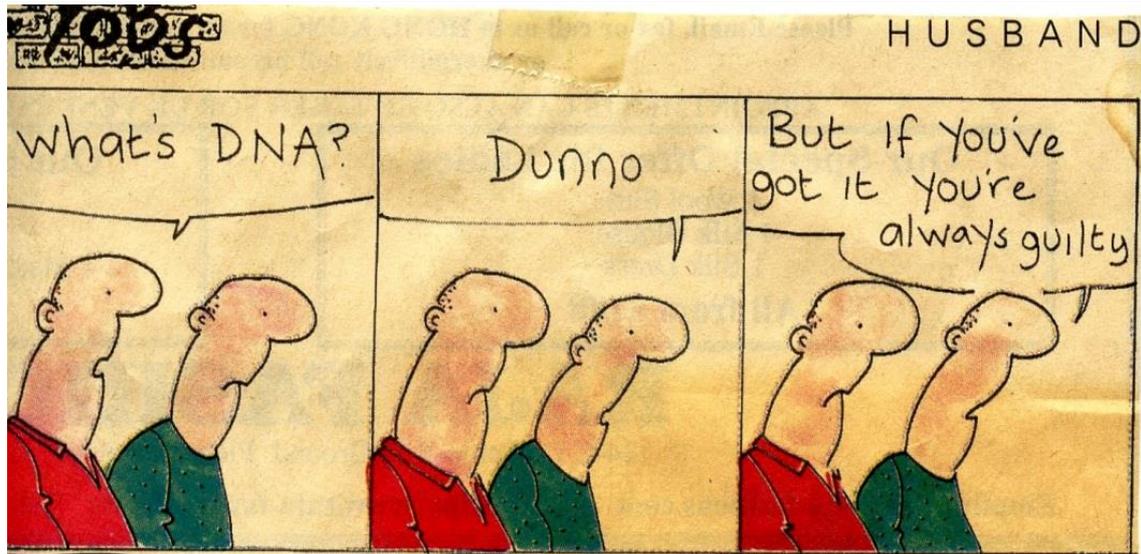
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cO7Oh-4jHXc>

On Dig Dialogue:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ShveDJN_uPM

And finally, as Admiral General Aladeen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIptM8ABEnY>



Cartoon bonus