

By Nick Churchill

nick.churchill@bournemouthcho.co.uk

AS much as they're a constant source of irritation, at least life's little frustrations can serve to remind us we're still alive.

Stewart Lee's visit to his favoured high street coffee shop chain earlier this year prompted a whole show in which he ruminates on the human condition from the perspective of a 41-year-old man with a wife and two-year-old son.

He's not angry, just a bit disappointed. He's not cynical either, simply slightly jaded. Crucially though, he is still hopeful.

"I tried to use my loyalty card and they wouldn't accept it because two of the stamps were in a different colour than the others which I found annoying as I hadn't faked it," he tells me.

"On the back of the card it said: 'If you prefer a milder coffee, please ask for one'".

It was April/May time and I had to give the title of my new show to the Edinburgh Fringe so I called it *If You Prefer A Milder Comedian, Please Ask For One.*"

Which is the show he'll share with us at Poole's Lighthouse on Thursday.

"Then I read an interview with Frankie Boyle, the comedian, and he said that people over 40 shouldn't do stand up as they lose their anger which got me thinking. So the show is basically me wondering aloud what I think about as a fortysomething dad. What speaks for me?"

"I don't fit the demographic of *Top Gear*.

"What do I care about? What happens when music I really like is used for adverts?"

"Where do I live? Should I try to live in towns or move to the country?"

"I can't just be cynical, not with a baby because they make your life on a daily basis. You have to be open to the possibility of improvements.

"But then this isn't my dirty nappy show either, that's a real cliché, although obviously children do change you."

Stewart has been performing stand up comedy for more than 20 years.

He's been in and out of fashion a few times – first as half of Lee and Herring in the mid-1990s; then ten years later as the co-writer and director of the ridiculously controversial Jerry Springer: *The Opera*, which saw fundamentalist Christians hamstringing his career to the point where he earned next to nothing for five years of work; and lately, most significantly, in the wake of his well-received series for BBC2, *Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle*.

"We got 1.6 million viewers and should find out in January if we get a second series.

"It's great to get paid for something I'm really proud of and it couldn't have happened at a better time.

"The telly series and this tour will mean I can at last get a



PRECISION COMEDY: Stewart Lee

Picture: Gavin Evans

A fortysomething dad takes a stand

mortgage and sort things out.

"I don't know if we'll get re-commissioned, but just to have done it is something – and to be told by comedians of all kinds how much they enjoyed it is really good.

"I don't know how that will translate to ticket sales on the tour. I get 1.6 million viewers but they're viewers for whom going out is a bit of a pain – they'll have to get a babysitter and all that.

"Whereas *The Mighty Boosh* gets a quarter of a million viewers, but they're a quarter of a million people with leisure time, disposable income and real enthusiasm for life."

Stewart isn't a gag merchant. He doesn't run up and down the stage rabbiting like a demented car salesman.

He's not weird and wacky.

He's not even a raconteur as such. He does ask questions though, primarily of himself. Having identified his subject he twists it and turns it, scrupulously probing its parameters before incisively cutting to the chase. He mentions his admiration for Dave Allen. It's precision comedy.

In a roundabout way.

"I'm playing with the structure of what I do as well – there's only really three routines. I'm hoping that people coming will have seen the TV show at least so they'll know what they're getting.

"It's a bit like when you're at school and they tell you to include your workings out with the maths problems – how you get there is as important as the

destination.

"Having said that you'd be surprised how often people sit through the show then come up to me afterwards and say things like: 'Here's one you can use: There were two Pakistanis...!'

"My stepbrother asked me when I play Worcester could I mention his daughter's birthday – at what point in my show could I say: 'There's a lovely little girl in row F who's got a birthday?' It just wouldn't work.

"The thing is I've always defined myself in opposition and now I'm perilously close to popularity again it feels like I must have made a mistake or something."

A voice of sweet reason in sour times, Stewart Lee makes the world a slightly better place. And no mistake.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Gibb trib-ute

CHRISTCHURCH: A Bee Gees tribute group will be telling the story of the band at the Regent Centre in Christchurch on Sunday October 11.

Jive Talkin' will take their audience through The Bee Gees decades from the sixties' classics through to their sensational 1977 soundtrack to film *Saturday Night Fever*.

Brothers Darren and Gary Simmons with Jarrod Loughlin will front the nine-piece band.

The concert will start at 7.30pm and tickets cost £15.50.

For information contact the Regent on 01202 499199.

Drive for a day

DORSET: Volunteer drivers are needed one Sunday afternoon a month to take two or three elderly people out in their cars.

The driver then takes their passengers to the home of a volunteer host and stays with them to have tea there.

Volunteers are needed to act as reserve drivers and would be needed two or three times a year.

Anyone in the Christchurch, Bournemouth or Ferndown areas should contact Carolyn Dennis on 01202 424482.

Do you submit?

CHRISTCHURCH: The colourful characters from LDN wrestling will be taking to the ring at the Regent Centre in Christchurch on Wednesday, October 14, at 7.30pm.

Stars including Jon "The Don" Ritchie, "The Queen's Favourite" David Deville and "Dangerous" Danny Garnell will be included in the action with a chance to meet the stars at the end of the show.

Brick trick

LYTCHETT MINSTER: Edinburgh Fringe Festival theatre company Dancing Brick will be appearing at Lytchett Minster School this month.

The theatre troupe, short-listed for the Outstanding Graduate Company at the Total Theatre Awards, will put on their 21:13 show.

It centres around an Italian girl and an English boy stranded on a deserted railway platform having missed the 21:13 train.

The show takes place on October 21, at 7pm.

For details call 01202 622413.