



Heard the one about the right-on comics who HATE the funniest man in Britain? Nice guy Michael McIntyre endures jealousy of rivals

By JAN MOIR

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At this very moment, Michael McIntyre is Britain's most successful and popular comedian. Without question, he is the number one funny guy out there. Everyone loves Michael. Or, as we shall see, nearly everyone loves him.

His smiley, currant-bun face and floppy hair are instantly recognisable. His television appearances are a smash hit. Sales of the DVDs featuring his stand-up comedy routines have broken all industry records.

He even replaced Simon Cowell as a Britain's Got Talent judge this year — a prime-time telly residency that cemented his elevation to the national showbizocracy.

Next year, the 35-year-old comic takes his success even further by embarking on a terrifyingly huge tour.

He will skip, skip, skip around the country, selling out massive, big-city arenas such as The 02 in London and the National Indoor Arena (NIA) in Birmingham.

So it is all going well. Whatever way you look at it, Michael McIntyre has



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Backlash: Michael McIntyre is comedy's nice guy

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arrived. Things couldn't be better for him. Except that, actually, they could.

This week, the mild-mannered comic has admitted being shocked and rather hurt by the persistent ordure heaped upon him by his fellow comedians. For some reason, many of them hate Michael, who is known as one of the industry's nicest nice guys.

There is something about his success and the good cheer of his clean-cut, wholesome routines that drives many of his contemporaries into a foam-flecked frenzy.

Through no fault of his own, McIntyre has been vilified by the usual cabal of foul-mouthed Left-wing comics determined to do him down. Their devious resolve and bottomless capacity for nastiness reveals what deeply unpleasant people they are.



Success: Michael McIntyre will play the O2 next year as part of a massive comedy tour

The comedian Stewart Lee described McIntyre as someone 'spoon-feeding his audience warm diarrhoea'. Elsewhere, his popular routines have been described as unchallenging, safe, predictable and clapped out. And those are the more polite insults.

Reading between the lines, perhaps what the slurs actually mean is that McIntyre doesn't swear (much), doesn't make jokes about cancer or rape, and doesn't do 'edgy'.

He is a family entertainment man, much more likely to joke about spice racks or Post Office queues than Baby P and paedophilia.

In the eyes of his bullying peers, this condemns him as a comedy milksop. He is not 'edgy', therefore he is a failure.



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- No
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- Yes
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To illustrate the heat of the hatred, at the British Comedy Awards earlier this year, the all-conquering McIntyre had to suffer a barrage of spiteful jokes and barracking from his fellow comedians.



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Vitriol: Comedian Stewart Lee described McIntyre's act as 'spoon feeding his audience warm diarrhoea'

'It just made me feel awful, because I am there with my wife and she has gone out and bought a dress,' McIntyre confessed to Kirsty Young on BBC's Desert Island Discs this week.

'And it is my big night and I won, and yet the overriding experience was that of nastiness. For what reason, I don't know. I don't know what I was doing — just making people laugh.'

Of course, comedians have a reputation for being thin-skinned and unable to cope with being the butt of the joke themselves.

Yet the gladiatorial hostility aimed at McIntyre has a taint of something really hateful about it, something beyond mere teasing. You don't even have to be Michael McIntyre's biggest fan to be appalled at the treatment meted out to him and his wife; the pair of them turning up fresh-faced and excited to an awards ceremony that would crown him Best Male Comic on television — then being roasted in the ferocity of the backlash that ensued.

It is so unedifying. It is so un-British. It is not even funny.

Yes, one could argue that comedians are a beastly lot by trade. And McIntyre is a big boy. Indeed, he said on Desert Island Discs that he has toughened up inside and grown an extra skin. McIntyre knows that the bile comes with the territory.

But the question is, why should it? Especially to someone like him, who would never dream of dishing it out.

It is just another indication that there is something rotten at the heart of the comedy industry and its practitioners in this country.

Yes, it is meant to be a bit of a laugh, but instead we are increasingly confronted by a slime-pit of bitterness and vaunting unpleasantness.

Stewart Lee, McIntyre's chief tormentor, has form in this department. Referring to the car accident that left Top Gear presenter Richard Hammond with



© Rex

Fresh-faced talent: Michael McIntyre and his wife Kitty

TODAY'S POLL

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- Yes
- No

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Is it possible to feel like a middle Briton on less than £45,000 a year?

- Yes
- No

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TODAY'S POLL

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- Yes
- No

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brain damage, Lee quipped: 'I wish he'd been decapitated, and that his head had rolled off in front of his wife.'

When fellow Top Gear presenter Jeremy Clarkson described the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown as a 'one-eyed Scottish idiot', Lee responded by saying he hoped 'Clarkson's children go blind'.

Lee claims he was making a point about bullying, but the viciousness is breathtaking. Which brings us to Frankie Boyle, the malcontent Scottish comedian who thinks it is funny to make jokes about child rape, Madeleine McCann and, famously, Katie Price's blind, autistic son, Harvey.

Although his Tramadol Nights series was finally taken off the air by Channel 4, neither Boyle nor the station ever saw fit to apologise to Miss Price.

Now there are signs that once the fuss dies down, Boyle will be back on the small screen in a trice. For in a newspaper interview published yesterday Jay Hunt, C4's new chief creative officer, made it clear she wants Boyle to return.

'He hasn't been recommissioned, no, but he's a talented comedian and if we were to find the right kind of show for him then we would have him back,' she said.

You might think there would not be a rock in the country big enough for Boyle to crawl under and disappear for ever, but in this brave new world of cruel, malevolent comedy, monsters such as he are welcomed with open arms. Elsewhere, on panel shows, game shows and live shows, audiences guffaw at the kind of loathsome observations and poisonous asides that masquerade as comedy in the modern world. The darker the better. Odium is heaped upon opprobrium.

The amusingly risqué is replaced by what is calculated to offend. And to watch some of the uglier performances is to understand that more and more of today's comedians are out to impress each other with their black-hearted jokes and daring, rather than entertain us.

It is a contest of machismo, not a cavalcade of fun. And as they compete to see how low they can go, they are spurred on by an eager fan base desperate to be titillated by new heights of affront.

For, sadly, there will always be an audience out there ready to titter and text the sickest jokes around.

For someone like Michael McIntyre, who has no place on the approved axis of liberal cool, there is nothing but derision and loathing.

He ticks none of their boxes. He is not foul-mouthed, scatological, blasphemous or rude. He does not have issues. He does not patronise his audience.

Instead, he is a happily-married, middle-class chap from Hampstead who makes gentle, observational comedy about toasters, humanity and the absurdity of everyday life.

He favours the well-crafted routine over the quickfire blast of showy invective. And sadly, all this has made him a marked man.

Let us hope that the next time Michael McIntyre is puzzled or hurt by another cruel putdown from his peers, he will remember that his greatest sin was to dare to be more successful than all of them put together.

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