**TAKING THE MIC**

A turbo-charged Tina Turner Tea Lady, a red wine arts trail and an Alexander Park evil ghost walk – yay, the Bath Comedy Festival is back with a bang at the end of this month. Here, we catch up with director Nick Steel to find out what’s in store...

**By our reckoning, nothing comes quite like a trip to a comedy club, so we can only imagine the health-giving benefits involved in nine days of mild hysteria, full-body-hearing, belly-aching laughter at the sixth Bath Comedy Festival. We can expect all the usual festival frizzles to the ‘stranged fandom’, but what makes this the best line-up yet?**

“There are exciting new developments for 2014 with more shows for families and kids, plus a chance to spot up-and-coming stars of the future with a weekend-long student comedy showcase,” explains festival director Nick Steel. “Then there’s the ‘new act competition’. And in Widcombe a brand new pop-up venue will be created in the natural theatre studio, featuring plush velvet curtains and top-notch solo acts.”

Of course, Nick’s loath to give too much away when we ask what tricks and surprises he has up his sleeve. “That would be telling, wouldn’t it?” he says mischievously. “There’s a surprise around every corner on the red wine arts trail of course, and heavens knows what will be lurking behind the bushes on Arthur Smith’s Alexander Park evil ghost walk.”

All comedy gurus have to start somewhere, so does Nick have any tips on who is set to be the next household name? “We are very proud to have helped launch Henning Wehn on the unsuspecting public in the past and this year the likes of Larry Dear and Matt Richardson are doing really well. But the festival is not so much about household names, but more to do with quality acts in intimate venues. Real live comedy unfettered by dressing down for TV.”

As well as the new kids on the circuit, →

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**Tina Turner Tea Lady**

Q. Describe your show in three words.
A. Eclectic, fresh, and filthy.

Q. Have you been to Bath before? If so – what do you like about the city?
A. Yeah, I came here in the 90s to buy some rings with my good friend Sharika Khan. I was most impressed with the selection.

Q. Where do you get the inspiration for your material?
A. Music, tea and sexual tension are my inspirations.

Q. When did you know you wanted to be a comedian?
A. As soon as I could walk.

Q. What’s the most memorable gig you’ve done?
A. Too many to choose from! Leicester has always been amazing for me. Playing Glasgow is also very special.

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**Hardeep Singh Kohli**

Q. Describe your show in three words.
A. It’s your love.

Q. Favourite thing about bath?
A. It’s very calming. And architecture is beautiful. And I’d eat all the sausages!!

Q. Where do you get the inspiration for your material?
A. Life. I watch it. Truth.

Q. When did you know you wanted to be a comedian?
A. I don’t think I did, I just needed a gig.

Q. How do you deal with hecklers?
A. I don’t really get hecklers but if I did I’d probably get worked up and shout... Then they’d buy a drink.

Q. What’s the most remarkable gig you’ve done?
A. There’s so many! Staying up late to perform in the six days of mild hysterical, full-body-hearing, belly-aching laughter at the sixth Bath Comedy Festival. We can expect all the normal festival frizzles to the ‘stranged fandom’, but what makes this the best line-up yet?

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**60 SECONDS WITH**

**Larry Dean**

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Q. Who are your favourite comedians?
A. Comedy obviously. Dick Jall, Agnieszka Osowska, Jane Garvey.

Q. What are the best and worst things about your job?
A. Meeting fans is amazing and getting to see the country. The travel is really dull.

Q. Have you got any hidden talents?
A. No. So they must be really well hidden.

Q. What’s next for you after Bath Comedy Festival?
A. I have a tour coming up, more radio work and then the build-up to a full run at the Edinburgh Fringe. And lots of fun!

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**Emily Rose**

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there’s also the much-loved comedy dynamos that return year after year; “Things wouldn’t be the same without a contribution from the aforementioned ‘Arfur’,” says Nick. “He’s signed up as a patron of the Comedy Festival along with joke-meister Barry Cryer, who is also one of our regular sell-out stalwarts. Our other famous patron, Terry Jones, is busy with the Pythons tour and sadly won’t be with us this year, but he has sent massive good vibes!”

So can be name three events or acts that he’s most looking forward to?

“This is difficult as I’m personally producing 26 shows – marked with a smiley bath plug in the programme – and can’t be seen to have favourites, so pick any three: says Nick, sitting on the fence with aplomb. “I’m probably most looking forward to the big Closing Night Gala show at the Cricket Club,” starring John Moloney, The BelleFleurs, Stephanie Laing, Nick Hall with Nick Page as MC, “so by then my work will be over and I can relax and enjoy the fantastic line-up of comedy and music.

“There really is something for everyone: 10 days of comedy in every shape and form: cabaret, music, women’s comedy, mystery tours, student comedy, cutting-edge stuff by side with old-fashioned fun, shows for kids and intriguing new venues. All at very affordable prices, folks! (And some of it is even free!)”

• The Bath Comedy Festival runs from 28 March – 6 April 2014 at various venues across the city. See bathcomedy.com for the full laugh-out-loud line-up.