

My nearfield

Nick Steel

The Bath Comedy Festival organiser – once declared the fourth-most-powerful Bathonian – guides us around funnytown

How did I get into comedy? In a word: Edinburgh. I met a chap called Brian Hennigan at a party in London, and he ran this venue under a pub during the Fringe. He invited me to stay with him during the festival and help out – making posters, manning the stage door, drinking the sponsor’s beer.

It was there that I started meeting comedians, many of whom were just starting out, like Jon Richardson and Greg Davies. I met Doug Stanhope, too – he was a revelation. I started to understand how important an art form live comedy is. Brian eventually became Doug’s manager and moved to LA, but by that time I’d made quite a few

connections and was bringing comedians down to headline cabaret events at the old Widcombe Social Club. One thing led to another, and now I run the three-week Bath Comedy Festival every April, plus year-round Bath Comedy Club nights.

I don’t think any live comedy scene gets the support it deserves, and it probably would be easier to create the festival in another city. Bath needs it, though. We bring it to life with a mix of comedy in all its many guises: standup, street theatre, film, art, workshops, music and our annual The Wine Arts Trail – or TWAT for short. As well as household names and stars of tomorrow, we also present events involving children and disabled performers, and run the

New Act Competition. There’s a burgeoning amateur scene in Bath, and stacks of open mics in Bristol. Go to as many as you can, and when you have a tight five-minute routine, you can take part in the competition.

I’ve been very lucky to be pals with some comedy greats, like Barry Cryer, Terry Jones, Neil Innes and Jeremy Hardy, and I feel privileged to still be discovering talented, funny people. It gives me a life rich in laughter and job satisfaction – if not money. John Moloney introduced me once, with: “You should work with Nick – he’s from the heart, not the box office.” I like that.

Bath Comedy Festival runs from 3-19 April. nfd.io/bcfest

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Pram pusher
Bath Comedy Festival's
Nick Steel in his guise
as gramophone DJ, the
Wind-Up Merchant