

Johnny Vaughan

Broadcaster, 37



There's something about spontaneity. When you go along to see a comedian, the thing you remember is a put-down to a heckler or a flight of fancy, even if it's not as good, clever or observant or high-minded as their written material. It's what Ken Dodd called the laughter box. Really good comics can just open that up.

My favourite piece of trivia is the origin of the word "trivia". "*Tres viae*" – "three roads". It's a place where three roads met outside Rome, where the women used to work, wash and gossip. It's one of those few words, like "lexiphanic", where to know it is to be it.

Radio is really liberating. It's eyes-free entertainment. You can say, "Oh, we're all dressed in Speedos this morning in honour of Prince William," and no one's any the wiser.

We've totally bought into this idea that celebrities feel pressure.

Just before I took the Capital Radio job, I was constantly asked: "How much pressure do you feel? It's been 17 years, everyone loves Chris Tarrant..." I'm just some guy doing a fucking breakfast show. Ask a squaddie as he patrols Basra with someone's sights trained on his bloody head how much pressure he's under.

I'd love to tell founders of world religions how it's going to end up. "Listen Jesus, I come from 2,000 years down the line, this is how it is: does this make you happy?" Dubya Bush is a big Christian, but I wonder whether he asks himself whether Jesus would see bombing people as a goer. I can't see it myself.

I feel proud of the elements gathered in Britain that everyone else seems so heated about. Yesterday, we had Abu Hamza, Jean-Marie Le Pen and Desmond Tutu all in this country at the same time. You've got a man in the

middle with Tutu, someone of almost definitive goodness, then white intolerance in the shape of Le Pen and Islamic intolerance in the shape of Hamza. And they're all allowed in Britain.

I used to be radically against the Royal Family. Now I see the genius of having an unelected, purely symbolic figure at the top of a democracy. She's got no agenda, isn't corrupt, isn't loathed, hasn't shut hospitals down, hasn't ordered men to their deaths in Iraq, says little, is completely unquoted, has no opinions on anything and can be everything to everyone.

Everything you need to know about Britain is in 'Porridge'. You've got a governor at the top who's an ineffectual figurehead. You've got Harry Grout – the only one with real power – representing corporate muscle; he even lends money, gives people tobacco and loves gambling. Fletcher and the cons are us. The question is: do you go with Mackay or Barrowclough – the right or the left, stability or progress?

I'm obsessed with corporate mind control. Noam Chomsky pointed out that the only things that hold a society together are inner repression or an outside enemy, and without those the only way to control how people think is corporate mind control. Now I've started to see everywhere what corporations do and how they change the way we think.

Ignore the rattle, enjoy the ride. My mother once told me a parable. She said: "Your granddad once had a good year and bought a Jag, but he never enjoyed the car because he was always listening for the rattle." That's what we "as a society" do. People will travel from India clinging to the fucking undercarriage of

a DC10 just to get to Britain, but all we can say is, "Ooh, what a shithole. Ooh, the streets are filthy. Ooh, the traffic in London."

We're a nation of problem-solvers. That's why the Scots invent more than any other people on earth. Only a Scotsman could have looked at a kettle and thought, "Wot a wiste of steem."

Whatever substance you're doing, ask yourself whether you'd treat a bottle of Claymore in the same way and then judge between use and abuse. When I was a pothead years ago, I'd smoke it at nine in the morning – I wouldn't have dreamed of opening a can of Tennents Super.

When you're young, you're vulnerable to the gang thing. I used to play the violin, but I went to quite a nasty school up North, and anyone who did music was a "poof". Later, I felt I'd really had something taken from me and thought, "I'm never going to let that happen again. If I like something, I'm going to do it." It gave me a real sense of consequence. Although I did later get jailed.

You see a prison, I see a massive Victorian incubator full of eggs with a hot light over them, waiting for young criminals to hatch. A lot have lost their partners, have a criminal record and the smell of jail with them, and they're hard. They've learned how people got caught – you don't learn criminal techniques in jail, you learn police techniques. Life's going to be a big struggle. **I don't think I've changed since my youth,** but I'm no self-analyst. I find the world more interesting than I find myself. ☺

Johnny Vaughan hosts Capital FM's breakfast show every weekday morning from 6-9am. 'The Johnny and Denise Show' is on Saturday nights on BBC1

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