

AHEAD OF THE GAME

MATT LUCAS TALKS EXCLUSIVELY ABOUT HIS RETURN TO TELLY AND HIS NEW HOLLYWOOD LIFE

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LUC WHO'S TALKING

Shy, retiring mummy's boy? Big-shot movie star? Or both? Matt Lucas exclusively opens up to *TV Magazine* about his double life

WORDS PAUL SIMPER
PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD GRASSIE

David Williams calls him The Funnier One. He's the man behind some of the most memorable comedy characters and catchphrases of the 21st century, who has followed up his *Little Britain* brilliance with his own TV show and Hollywood roles in the smash hits *Alice in Wonderland* and *Bridesmaids*. But for all his success, Matt Lucas remains one of the world's quietest comedy geniuses.

"I don't have that desire to be better known than I am," he says, thoughtfully. "I'm grateful for what I've already been able to achieve and have no ambition to be a massive star."

While he might be too late there, refreshingly there's no big, look-at-me behaviour from Matt on our photoshoot. Sure, he can turn it on for our photographer as he trumpets the return of his offbeat comedy chat show *The Matt Lucas Awards*, but away from the camera lens, he's careful, considered and still. Despite 18 years in showbiz, Matt - who's relaxing with a can of Diet Coke and clasping a retro sports bag - still looks more like someone you'd stand behind in a Post Office queue than a guy who makes movies and jets between London and his Hollywood home. "I have a house in LA, which I live in with my friend Rebel Wilson [the Australian comic actress he co-starred with in *Bridesmaids*], and a flat in London - and I split my time between the two," says Matt, who turns 39 this week. "I'm a little bit famous in the States, but compared to when I'm in London, it's a much quieter life."

It's an arrangement that clearly suits him. "It's nice, because I can go to the local supermarket - which is very expensive - and get into an argument about the price of apples

without worrying that it's going to be in the paper," he says, smiling. "I have a terrace where I can sit and write, plus a little garden where I can grow satsumas, lemons and limes. To make fresh lemonade using my own lemons is the most exciting thing in the world."

He pauses, then says: "Actually no, it's not - but there's a real novelty to it. I'm very happy with being under the radar over there."

That's certainly not the case in most other parts of the world, thanks to the extraordinary success of *Little Britain* and its follow-up *Come Fly With Me*.

"*Little Britain* was life-changing - and continues to be," says Matt. "It's ten years old now but is still shown in 140 countries around the world. I went on holiday to South Africa and was as well known there as I am at home. What surprises me is when I meet kids who were too young to watch *Little Britain* when it first came out, but are now discovering Vicky Pollard on Netflix."

PERFECT PARTNERS

Such was the influence of the show on their career, Matt's writing partner and co-star David Williams has called him "the man who changed my life forever". It's a sentiment Matt shares. "We met when I was 16 [at the National Youth Theatre in London] and worked together for 16 years," he recalls. "Everything we achieved we did together. Neither of us would have been able to do it on our own, so I'm grateful for the good times. It had a huge influence on my career." Matt stops to reconsider his words. "It was my career," he says. "I'd done *Shooting Stars*, obviously, but the vast majority of anything I did that anybody would know about was done with David. "People will always associate the two of us with each other. I feel lucky that I had the opportunity to work with someone where we were so in tune. We really complemented each other." David, of course, is currently busy on *Britain's Got Talent*, while Matt has found a surprising new

MATT WENT TO THE SAME SCHOOL IN HERTFORDSHIRE AS COMICS SACHA BARON COHEN AND DAVID BADDIEL

"I DON'T HAVE THAT DESIRE TO BE BETTER KNOWN THAN I AM"



Suits you: Matt with comedy partner David



The funnyman with his leading lady, mum Diana

comedy partner - his mum Diana, 67. She's back as his right-hand woman on the second series of *The Matt Lucas Awards*, which sees star guests nominate candidates for gongs like Most Annoying Queue or Most Miserable Day Of The Year.

"It's nice having Mum there because she brings a different energy to the show and keeps it cleaner - I don't like to be rude in front of Mum," he says. "She never used to like it when *Little Britain* got too rude. She didn't approve of the character who vomited over people."

And how does she feel about meeting the great and good of the telly? "She tends to only know who people are if they've been on *Corrie*, *The X Factor* or *Strictly*," he says. "I did take her to the British Comedy Awards once and she ended up in a corner chatting to Noel Gallagher. I don't think she had a clue who he was."

"There's an episode in this series where [former MP] Gyles Brandreth guests, and he flirted with Mum incessantly. I had to take him aside and point out that my stepfather was in the audience, and that even though he's 81 he's a man to stand on the right side of!"

STARS IN HIS EYES

Matt, who used to write fan letters to Eighties pop stars like Rick Astley ("I got a photocopied autograph back") and Bananarama, admits he can still get awestruck himself on occasions, but it's by a pretty diverse bunch. "I've just made a film called *Thérèse* with Jessica Lange, who is one of the greatest actresses on the planet," he says. "But I was just as excited to meet Michael Cronin on it who played Bullet Baxter in *Grange Hill*. I get nervous when I meet footballers [Matt is a massive Arsenal FC fan], but I probably get more anxious when I meet a handsome gentleman than when I meet a celeb. I'm not very good at chatting someone up."

Matt's following up *The Matt Lucas Awards* with his first big-screen lead role - alongside Billy Crystal in thriller *Small Apartments* - and there's more TV in the pipeline both here and in the States. Yet, modestly, he insists he'll never take his success for granted.

"No one has a divine right to be on television," he says. "I never assume that, just because I thought of an idea, it's going to be made. There are a lot of very talented people out there. If someone else comes up with a funnier idea and they're better and they get more viewers, they should have a show and I shouldn't. I don't believe I've earned the right to make average stuff just because I once made something that people considered quite good."

"That's why we've tweaked *The Matt Lucas Awards*. This time we've got all the guests revealing a hidden talent each week, and rather than me giving out the awards we've got a different panel of judges doing it. In one episode it's four of the original *EastEnders* cast, another has former *Grange Hill* stars [including Michael Cronin, of course]."

"I know it's not fashionable to say this, but I don't think we got it right last time - I do think we've got it right this time, though. I'm very fond of this series." For once, Matt seems happy to put modesty to one side. "To be blunt," he says, while grinning. "The show is now much funnier."

WATCH IT! *The Matt Lucas Awards* Tuesday 10.35pm BBC1

MATT'S TV TREATS THE COMIC ON THE SHOWS HE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT...



SPLASH! "I thought it was really charming, kind of brilliantly British. But it was odd, because people were competing at very different levels - Omid Djalili was pretty good, but Helen Lederer had to be sort of rolled into the pool. It was like she was mechanically tipped."

FOOTBALL "I still watch all the Arsenal matches. Funnelly enough, far more British football is televised live in the US than it is in the UK. But I'm not going to lie, I'm not a martyr. I record them, wake up at 9am, have a cup of tea and toast before going back to bed to watch the match."



CATFISH: THE TV SHOW "This documentary series is brilliant. Each episode is like a detective story. What's interesting is that you sympathise with the person at the beginning (who is being duped by an online 'friend') but you also sympathise with the fantasist. It's trashy fun."

HERE COMES HONEY BOO BOO "Honey Boo Boo is a seven-year-old pageant queen from Georgia in the US whose family are very bizarre. You're sort of invited to sneer at them in this reality series, but personally I find them very charming. They're like a real-life Simpsons."



LIMMY'S SHOW "It's a Scottish television show. Brian Limond [who writes, directs and stars in it] is just so daft, he's brilliant. I'd love to work with him at some point. His show makes me laugh my head off. He plays lots of silly characters."

CELEB CV MATT LUCAS



SHOOTING STARS (1995) Matt played the babygro-wearing George Dawes in the quirky quiz.



LITTLE BRITAIN (2003) Helped the show become a smash hit with characters like Vicky Pollard.



ALICE IN WONDERLAND (2010) Was Tweedledum and Tweedledee in the fantasy film.



BRIDESMAIDS (2011) Matt and Rebel Wilson shone in this hit comedy as very odd siblings.

Grooming: Victoria Barnes; Styling: Nicole Ahmed; Matt wears: boater, braces and belt by M&S; Suit by James & Co; Shoes by Peter Werth at Schott; The red pocket square by Austin Reed