

## Live and let laugh

*Joe Cochrane by Shivani Kochhar*



Joe Cochrane has an incongruous laugh. It's higher pitched than his usual, Liverpoolian-coated tones. Lines around his eyes crease like crinkle cut crisps as he lets out the gleeful sound of a child.

29-year-old Joe is still fresh on the comedy circuit. A disastrous debut ("I was pissed as a fart") on the night of the 2018 FIFA World Cup final didn't deter him. Exactly a week later, at his second gig, he won a "piece of shit" trophy which now sits on top of his TV. Persistence, Joe believes, makes for a successful comic.

Enveloped in a long camel coat, Joe sits in his favourite Irish pub in Stoke Newington cradling a Guinness ("it makes you zen"). Here, Joe explains, they pour Guinnesses the proper Irish way (he's originally from Irish stock). He points to a queue of pint glasses on the wooden bar, three-quarters full of murky liquid, waiting to settle before the second pour.

This comic has a handsome face: elegant nose framed by short brown hair (studded with grey) and a trimmed beard. On his right forearm the tattooed tentacles of an octopus curl out from beneath his rolled-up sleeves. “Not an octopus, actually. A ‘sept-opus’. My wife drew it wrong.”

Batman vs the shark (an iconic scene from the 1966 eponymous film) tussle on Joe’s left arm – he’s a comic book kid. With a degree in animation from the University of East London, his first love is writing and reading comics. What would Joe’s superpower be? “Magic. I want it all. Like the DC Comic antihero John Constantine – he’s a Scouse magician. We even have the same initials.”

A master fidgeter, Joe is continually rubbing his beard, pulling at his shoulder, folding the beer coaster. “I did everything backwards,” he muses. He’s right. First came the kid (he was 21), then the wife (not the kid’s mum) and, after that, he got his degree (second attempt).

But right now, it’s all about stand-up, which he likes because his work gets immediate feedback from the audience. Joe thinks his seven years managing bars gave him more than enough time to practice his jokes. Thirty – fast approaching – was the impetus he needed to give up running a Dalston bar and try comedy out. Now, he works and performs at Islington comedy institution The Bill Murray and is trying to get a run at the Edinburgh Fringe.

Growing up in Liverpool was his comic apprenticeship. From providing material (“all the stupid shit we did”) for his shows, to teaching him how to deal with hecklers. Bullied at school for being a goth teen with greasy hair (they called him Rainbow Roots), Joe is now very good at a fast comeback. “Me mum taught me this way to deal with bullies,” he says affectionately, “you have to wear an imaginary bubble while you walk around.”

Joe’s hippy parents divorced when he was a teenager (he blames this for the aforementioned “stupid shit”). It’s his mum, a ‘lay Buddhist’ – “exactly like a Buddhist except you can get pissed” – and prison psychologist who he credits for showing him that “there’s goodness in humanity”. Five seconds later, however, he adds: “I get my meanness from me mum.”

What’s he like as a father? Joe describes his seven-year-old daughter as his fifth limb (“Do you get what I’m saying? Once you’ve held her you can’t let her go”). Honesty is his parental motto, otherwise he’s “quite relaxed” as long as she isn’t acting spoiled. Fatherhood, he

insists, has made him change his ways – apart from swearing, which he does a lot in front of his child. He can't shake that.

Although he can't practise stand-up routines on his daughter (they're not PG-13), Joe loves to take her to pantos where adult/kid humour is merged. Comic heroes include the Ugly Sisters and Stewart Lee ("who lectures you and takes the piss at the same time"). Not that he's in a position to preach yet. "I mock meself a lot," Joe emphatically jabs at his chest with his fingers.

Grinning, he takes another sip of beer – the white foam clings to the hair around his lips. Guinness moustache. "Every bad joke is a lesson not a failure, but I am scared if people reply to my comebacks," Joe laughs. Why? "In case they say, 'you're shit'. And then I'll think: 'maybe I *am* shit.'"