

BY
LUCY ROUSE

RICKY GERVAIS

THE RICHARD DUNN MEMORIAL INTERVIEW

SO RICKY GERVAIS IS MADONNA'S ALL-TIME FAVOURITE COMEDIAN. SHE SAID SO IN A RARE TV INTERVIEW DURING LAST MONTH'S LIVES CONCERT AND GERVAIS' FRIEND AND BROADCASTER JONATHAN ROSS HASN'T STOPPED GOING ON ABOUT IT SINCE. "HOW UNBEARABLE IS RICKY GERVAIS GOING TO BE AFTER THAT?" ASKED ROSS, HOSTING THE BBC'S COVERAGE OF THE GIG.

I talked to Gervais before he'd had this great accolade. He was surprisingly approachable, although reports of diva-ish behaviour are hard to ignore. We stumble over a detail of biography: the question of whether Gervais has ever been a pizza delivery boy, as stated in several profiles including one found on a BBC comedy website.

Gervais is quick to set the record straight. "That was on an 11 O'Clock Show website written by someone as a joke. The full sentence was 'Ricky Gervais worked as a pizza delivery boy but stopped when he ran over and killed an old lady.' Mackenzie Crook worked in Pizza Hut but I can't even work a bike or drive a car."



He seems unfussed, but later his publicist calls to check which website is perpetuating the lie. It seems Ricky and his people like to be in control.

What is out of Gervais' control though, is the critical reception for his new comedy *Extras* which ends this week on BBC Two. To say it was much anticipated after the award-winning success of *The Office* would be an under-statement. But Gervais claims not to be phased. "I'm very pleased with it and that's the only important thing," he says. "I don't feel the pressure for lots of reasons. I'm not comparing it to *The Office* and if people do they'd be wrong to because you can't."

In *Extras*, written with Stephen Merchant, Gervais plays jobbing actor Andy Millman who rarely lands a speaking part. But that doesn't stop him casting a sardonic eye over the action from the green room. "I'm like Andy Millman," says Gervais. "I very much think I'm surrounded by idiots and I'm right."

That explains a penchant for being in control. Gervais and Merchant directed both *The Office* and *Extras*, as well as scripting the comedies. "My teacher said write what you know. I worked in an office for five years and for the last seven years I've been working in TV," he explains. So what could possibly be next? Not pizzas, obviously.

The Richard Dunn Memorial Interview with Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant takes place on Sat 27 August at 14.00, The Pentland.

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