

'Stand-up is where the heart is'

No stranger to TV and radio, comedian Lucy Porter has recently finished a 40-date one-woman comedy show and a UK tour. **Shaun Shackleton** met her on a whistle-stop visit to Guernsey

Comedian Lucy Porter talking to the GP's Shaun Shackleton. (Picture by Adrian Miller, 21489906)

'SHALL we sit in these?' said Lucy Porter, walking towards the two zebra-striped strandkorb chairs in the hotel lounge. Then she quickly changed her mind. 'Oh, no,' she said. 'That would just be weird.'

The well-known Croydon-born comedian, actor and writer was in Guernsey as the guest speaker at the annual dinner of the Guernsey International Insurance Association, which was fundraising for The Hub, Guernsey Employment Trust and the Guernsey Victim Support and Witness Service.

'I've been to Guernsey three or four times before,' she said, settling into a more traditional settee. 'One time the fog was so bad I virtually had to live here.'

Lucy has just finished her 40-date one-woman show. And before that, a UK stage tour.

She has appeared on such iconic TV shows as *Mock the Week*, *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*, *Room 101*, *QI* and *Have I Got News for You*. Her comedy has taken her as far as Hong Kong, Bangkok, Macau, Manila, Switzerland, Paris and Miami. And she will be taking her show, *Choose Your Battles*, to the Edinburgh Festival in August.

It's a far cry from what she set out to do, 20-odd years ago. After leaving Manchester University with a degree in English literature she began working as a journalist on *The Big Issue* in the north.

'I then got a job at Granada Television as a researcher and worked on *World in Action* and *Richard and Judy*, and then *The Mrs Merton Show*.'

She loved working with the late Caroline Aherne.

'She was hilarious, just the same as she was on screen. A really down-to-earth woman. Caroline and Victoria Wood are probably the biggest influences on my life.'

Around this time Lucy took her first foray into stand-up.

'The first [show] was in 1993 in Chester, Alexander's Jazz Bar, the London Palladium of the north. The comedy nights were run by *The Comedy Police*, two guys dressed as coppers. If you weren't any good the audience made a siren noise and the police would truncheon you off stage with rubber coshes.

'I didn't get truncheoned off. And that's when I decided I wanted to continue being a comedian.'

She has gone on record as saying that she chose out-of-the-way gigs so that if she didn't go down

well, no one she knew would find out. 'I'm glad that I started out doing gigs that were few and far between. There were many working clubs, very Phoenix Nights. One night the audience consisted of three spotty youths. I was absolutely humiliated.'

'I actually worked with Tom O'Connor last week. I loved it. We both agreed that when a gig goes badly, there is always a tale to tell. And I've had some shockers.'

As well as Victoria Wood and Caroline Aherne, Lucy has other comedy heroes.

'When I was growing up my mum and dad loved Dave Allen. I used to do an impression of him with a glass of whiskey and my dad's lit fag. Dave Allen was such a quietly funny and wise man. Also Billy Connolly. I love gag merchants. And Mick Miller. He's amazing. He's managed to win a totally new audience since the old days of the *Wheeltappers* and *Shunters Social Club* [a British television variety show produced by Granada Television from 1974 to 1977].'

Lucy holds the title of the highest-scoring contestant on *Celebrity Mastermind* and this reveals yet another of her comedy heroes.

'My specialist subject was Steve Martin. I love Steve Martin. If I got asked to do it again it would be perhaps Gilda Radner or maybe Bill Murray. I love *Saturday Night Live* [an American late-night live television variety show running since 1975].'

As well as fraternising with a host of fellow famous British comedians, Lucy is on drinking terms with Hollywood stars. In 2004 she acted in the West End production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which starred Christian Slater.

'I only had three lines. But I saw Christian Slater recently. Lizzie Roper - Guernsey's Lizzie Roper, her father

was one of the early players in the island's finance industry - she was also in *Cuckoo's Nest*, and it was her birthday and Christian came along. He's quite a maverick. I think he had quite a stormy early life.'

The evening I spoke to her she was the guest at a charity function. How does she gauge her act for something like that?

'You never know really until you get there. I've written loads of stuff about Guernsey, but I might discover it's not right. But it's fun to take chances. Do you do the normal stuff, or do you take a chance? The essence of stand-up is to give it a try.'

She said it's a 'bit weird' being a stand-up.

'When I'm writing I do sit and chuckle at my own stuff. I have some gags about the *Potato Peel Pie* for tonight.'

In August she will be taking her show, *Choose Your Own Battles*, to the Edinburgh Fringe, a festival she is passionate about.

'I first went there as a punter in 1991.

'People say that it's turned too commercial but audiences are still going.'

'I see as much as I can - you can take in five or six shows a day, but you could easily see 20. I go to see all my friends' shows. The festival really needs to be six months long.'

She's done TV panel shows and TV series, radio, plays and countless one-woman shows (and much of this alongside being a wife, to actor Justin Edwards, and mother of two). But professionally, it's being live on stage that she likes the best.

'Stand-up is where the heart is. It's very unusual for any stand-up to stop performing. You never really give up.'

'Radio is my next favourite thing and I've been doing quite a few podcasts, too.'

So what's next?

'Edinburgh, then another *Would I Lie To You* [with Rob Brydon] and a *Radio 4 Stand-Up Special* I did called *In the Family Way*, about having a family, that's available on [BBC] i-Player now. Next stop Hollywood. I'm ready to be discovered.'



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