

Charlie's new project

Popular television host Charlie Pickering will be looking for laughs in Brisbane. Interview by Chris Herden



A self-confessed “political junkie” and “news geek”, Charlie Pickering (*right*) has always had time for a good gag. He will be flexing his funnybone when he brings his stand-up show, *Rodeo, Burqa, Circumcision* to the Brisbane Comedy Festival on 17 March.

The three words in the show's title stayed with him after reading a collection of news stories one day. “I thought they were catchy words and that if I put them together everyone would pay attention,” Pickering says. “But once I did that, I knew I had to write material about rodeos, burqas and circumcision. It turns out burqas and circumcision were the easy ones.”

To Pickering, a memorable story offers so much more than a good joke and his main instinct when performing at festivals and comedy clubs is to speak his mind. A typical show is a mixed bag of anecdotes about himself or whatever is in the news. “When I do stand-up there is no language restraints or PG rating. I'm fairly free to do the kind of jokes I've always

done. I don't talk too much about my TV day job because I think it's relatively dull in stand-up. I make the same dumb mistakes as other idiots, I break Ikea furniture trying to put it together and I forget to pay my parking fines and phone bills – I think that stuff is more interesting.”

However, it's his TV “day” job that has made Pickering more a household name in the past year, as co-host (with Dave Hughes and Carrie Bickmore) of Channel Ten's program *The Project* which now airs six nights a week at 6pm. This year promises to be a hectic one for Pickering. In addition to *The Project*, he returns to captain the Generation X team in *Talkin' 'bout Your Generation* and a follow-up to his 2010 book, *Impractical Jokes*, is in the works.

He credits his prankster father with teaching him the importance of having a laugh. “I think my dad is in every joke that I tell and in the way that I speak,” he says. “When I was growing up he made me feel like jokes were important and, although I'm sure he never wanted me

to become a comedian, he unwittingly gave me my career.”

Pickering studied law at Monash University in Melbourne but his first stint as a practising lawyer convinced him his future lay elsewhere. “I was looking around at the senior partners and they were all depressed, 50 pounds overweight and didn't know their families. I thought if that's what success looks like then I'm in the wrong business and so one weekend I just walked out the door and never came back. I was committed to making a go of comedy and from there it was 10 years of bustin' my arse on the comedy circuit.”

Swapping law for laughs has worked well for Pickering. In 2002 he and Melbourne-based comedian Michael Chamberlin performed their collaboration, *Boiling Point*, at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. Pickering took his full-length show *Betterman* to the 2005 Edinburgh Fringe Festival where he was nominated for the prestigious Perrier Award – Best Newcomer. “I was beaten by Tim Minchin which was probably

fair enough.”
Throughout

Rodeo, Burqa, Circumcision, Pickering points out the amusing similarities of cultures rather than the differences and he takes a comical swipe at controversial subjects.

“I'm gonna talk a little bit about the things we get offended by and whether we should be offended by them and how we have more in common with everyone in the world than we realise. Like when I was entertaining troops in Afghanistan I played cricket with some Afghans on a military base in Kandahar and I'd been there five minutes before they were teasing me about England beating Australia in the Ashes.”

This affable everyman is going from strength to strength and it wouldn't be surprising to see him hosting some of TV's big gala events this year. The Logies perhaps? He gets my vote.

Brisbane Comedy Festival, 28 February to 25 March, see www.briscomfest.com. Charlie Pickering will perform on Saturday 17 March, 5pm, at Brisbane Powerhouse.

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