

# Vy

FROM PAGE 18  
comedy and stuff that'll get laughs?

"Like what?"  
Like some of the more earthy comedy in *The Young Ones*. Jokes about ...

"Bottoms ... bottoms and farts. They're good jokes, I like them. We generally do whatever we find funny. We don't write to any kind of formula or anything."

But in a film like *Gino* (a Comic Strip film unscreened in New Zealand) there was a certain weird element, like a bad dream.

"Yeah. Peter [Richardson] writes much more serious films — he doesn't like gags as much as we do. They're all funny in a way. The Comic Strip films as a whole aren't outrageously funny, they're sort of wryly funny."

Morrissey from the Smiths opined in a bout of social commentary that you were trying to do the same sort of ensemble comedy as the *Carry On* team in the 60s.

"Did he? There's no attempt to be like anyone but I suppose you'll be compared to any group of comedians if you're a group of comedians. *Carry On* films weren't very funny as a whole. It was all innuendo — a very boring style of humour."

Do you see yourselves as part of any tradition of English humour?

"I'm sure we're very English because we write about what we know about. That's the problem we've had with ideas for feature films. We've had quite a few ideas for feature films that never got made because the



people with the money are generally American and they'd say, 'Wouldn't it be great to set it in LA?' And we said we don't know anything about LA. We couldn't make jokes about LA. We could only make jokes about an English person's perception of LA, which would only be funny to English people.

"I'm of the opinion that British humour is exportable, if you make it distinctly British. If it's exactly what you find funny, someone else will find it funny. I mean, we find American comedy funny and the Pythons go down well in America and they don't make any concessions to American money at all. *Life of Brian*, there's nothing American about that and it went down very well over there. They just take a long time to catch up. And apparently

they're going a bomb on *The Young Ones*, which they show on MTV. I find that extraordinary, because the field of reference in *The Young Ones* is so British. I don't see how they could understand a word Rik says. His jokes are all about English politics and Cliff Richard, who they've hardly even heard of in America."

There was a similar problem when New Zealand TV couldn't pick up *The Young Ones* for two years because Australian TV wouldn't have it.

"And now Australia have gone a bomb on it, haven't they? Yeah, and it's strange the way they carefully select episodes of the Comic Strip to show as well. I can't see why one is any different from another. The whole beauty of the Comic Strip series is that it's a series of

entirely different films with the same cast. As individual films they can be good or bad — as a series they get better in comparison to each other. One-offs are stupid."

## The Big Screen

How did you feel about making the step up from the short films to a cinematic feature? It's just that much bigger, there's always the chance of making a real turkey.

"Yeah. I think if you make feature films cheap enough ... I mean, films necessarily do have to be a commercial proposition, but the way they've gone about that commercial proposition is to pour £40 million and make £90 million, rather than pour in one or two million pounds and make £10 million. And it's not good for the whole business — it's not good for anyone who works in the industry and it's not good for the punters either because they get such a limited field of films. I mean, all the films that come out, all the blockbusters, they're good films. Your £2.50 is extraordinarily well spent, you don't feel cheated or anything. But it's just a shame that more films aren't seen. You get one film, *Rambo*, and it stays in the cinema for 10 weeks. It should be there for three or four weeks then let's show the next film. London's quite good for that because there's such a diverse audience that at any one time there's about 200 films on, which is nice. There's been a few British films lately which have made a slight impact — *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Letter to Brezhnev* and *Supergrass*; they're all sort of out there and they're films to go and watch. It's all become too important, the film industry."

And *Supergrass*, through

necessity, was low-budget.

"Oh yeah, about one million. But it's a good way to work. Things like *Morons from Outer Space*, which they got joint backing on and sent one of the characters to America, which completely ruined the film. It was a complete turkey of a film — it cost about seven million quid and made nothing! We could have made seven films for that money and even if only one of them had hit it would have been a better percentage than they did. And you couldn't see the money being spent on that film either — it was ludicrous."

*Bad News* will be your second directorial job — are you happy to carry on acting indefinitely or can you see yourself backing out of it?

"Oh no, I love acting. I love acting, writing and directing! I'd prefer not to do them all at the same time ... I'd like to direct someone else's feature film. I think that would be a great job. But no one will give it to me until I've directed enough. And the only way I can get to direct is to direct my own things. But it's shot on film, so it's alright — same process."

Do you have any ambitions towards, um, serious creativity?

"I've done the odd bit of serious creativity (laughs). I'd like to make more feature films. I think with feature films you get greater scope. Most feature films are funny in a way, they've all got jokes in them. It's just a question of how little you put in."

You work with people like Alexei Sayle, who have very public political beliefs — do your politics have any relevance to your work?

"Not directly, no. I mean, we're all broadly socialist, but we're not preachers of any sort. You could make the

assumption that our audience is broadly left-wing as well. And I don't think you can really be overtly political as a comic — you can behave as a socialist and not make any sexist, racist or Irish jokes. Don't offend your own morality — which is a political statement in a way."

You've never done anything you've regretted, jokewise?

"I don't think so ..."

One criticism that could be levelled, particularly against *The Young Ones*, is the amount of cruelty in the comedy — is it practical to make comedy without cruelty?

"Oh yes, I'm sure it is. But there are lots of different jokes; we just happen to like jokes about cruelty. There's nothing wrong with them — they're not at all offensive. We like the Roadrunner, Laurel and Hardy ... cartoon violence really. I find violence in films like *48 Hours* upsetting and immoral, but I think our violence is always to a comic effect, rather than just to glorifying bloodletting."

Okay, so what's on the agenda for you this year?

"I'm going to make another series with Rik. We don't quite know what about yet, but obviously it's going to be treated as a follow-up to *The Young Ones* in some way. But it won't be anything like *The Young Ones*. But we want to do another sit-com, of sorts."

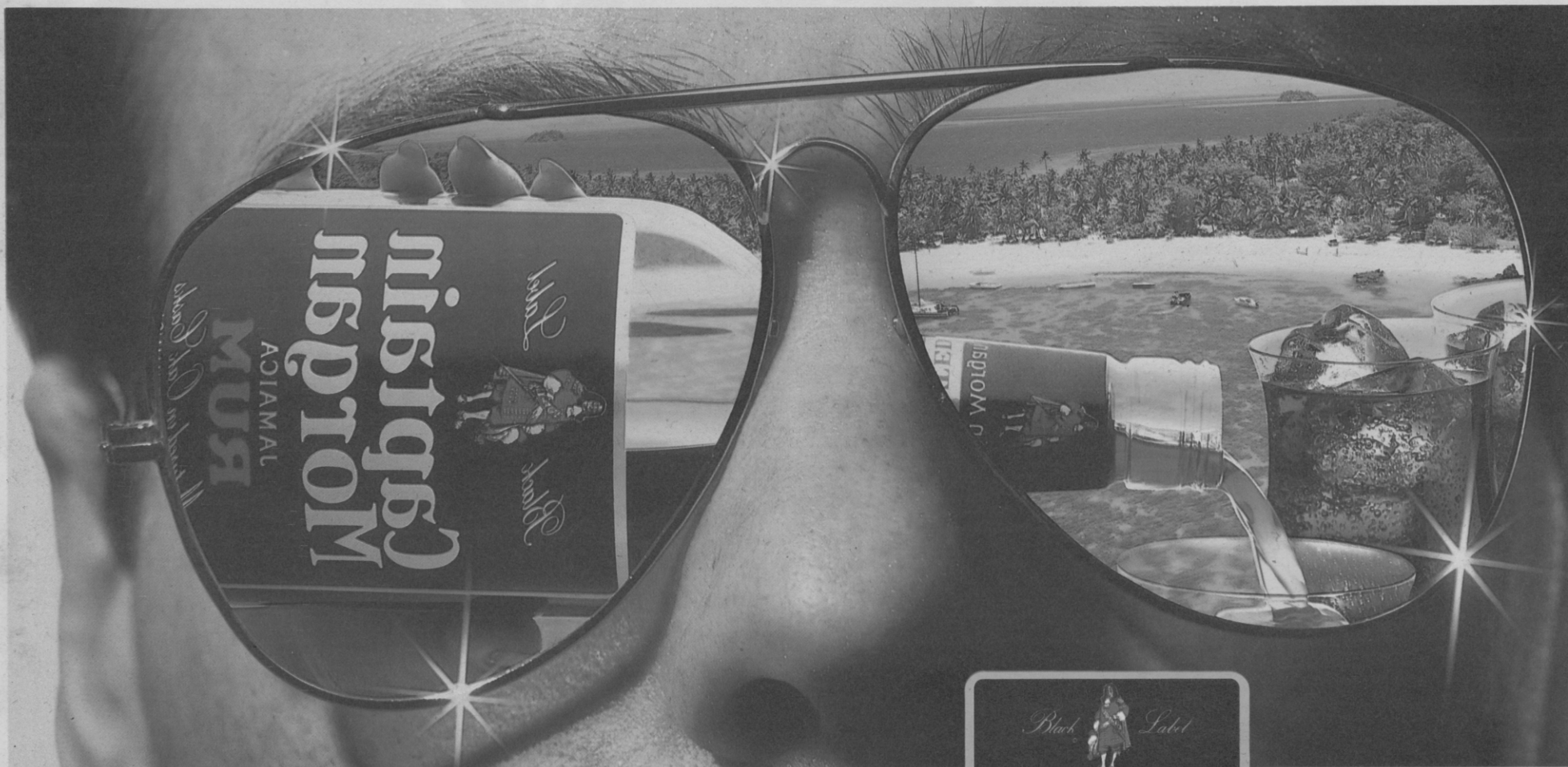
And your fave Comic Strip film?

"*Beat Generation* is still my favourite. It's very well shot. It's beautiful."

And anything in particular you'd really like to base a comedy around?

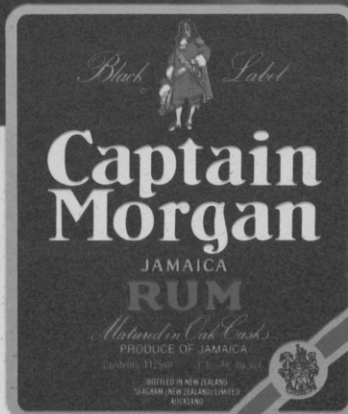
"Mmmmm ... I'd be giving away ideas then (laughs). I could say something, but it's such a good idea someone will rip it off!"

**Russell Brown**



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