

# EDDIE IZZARD: POLITICALLY CORRECT

*Interview by* RACHELLE BERGSTEIN *Photographed by* JEREMY COWART *at* WEISS ARTISTS, INC

EDDIE IZZARD  
EDDIE'S OWN jeans.  
MILES MCNEEL ring, green diamonds set in labradorite.  
DIEDERIK COMTE black french linen jacket.  
VERSACE white shirt.  
UNNUR tobacco fish scale belt.



VERSACE metallic jacket.  
 TECHNOBOHEMIAM scarf.  
 R+DENIM jeans.  
 MILES MCNEEL dog tags in semi  
 precious stones set in labradorite.  
 ANDY PAIKO 3" glass syringe with steel base.

*Eddie Izzard prefers not to do a stand-up routine the same way twice. And that dizzying sense of ambition might just be the perfect insight into this international comedy star: a man who performs full-length shows in his second language (French); who has conquered the worlds of stage, television, and film; who in 2009, ran 43 marathons in 51 days for charity; and who plans, in 2020, to give it all up for politics. Just a week after becoming the first ever solo comedy act to perform in Los Angeles's Hollywood Bowl, Izzard chatted with the DDD about hecklers, the Bible, World War II, Al Franken, Wikipedia, and Harry Potter...and made it clear that one of his greatest pleasures in life is the inimitable rush of a new challenge.*

**DDD:** *I bear Stripped to the Bowl was wonderful. How did that enormous venue impact your performance?*

**EI:** Well, I've done sixty arena gigs before Hollywood Bowl, and I've been pushing—as has Dane Cook—for stand-ups to do them. Rock'n'roll has been playing arenas and stadiums since Shea Stadium with The Beatles, so why don't we go and play in those kinds of places? Getting to the Bowl was great. My heroes Monty Python played there for three dates back in the eighties. And I think it was a very good gig, on my judgment—my judgment is not everyone else's—but I gave it a nine out of ten in my book.

**DDD:** *Well, I read some reviews and they agree with you, so congratulations.*

**EI:** That's very nice of them. Two years ago I started doing an outdoor comedy festival in the UK—again, musicians have been doing outdoor festivals for years, but comedians haven't—and when people laugh in a field, the laughter just goes straight up to the gods. You don't hear it so well. But in an amphitheatre it comes right back at you, and it just makes for a great atmosphere. It was kind of magical: Garry Shandling was out there, Roseanne Barr was out there, Bob Newhart was out there...I wanted to do it again the next night.

**DDD:** *Your approach to stand-up has often been described as improvisational. Is it true that you don't pre-write your routines?*

**EI:** I ad-lib everything, but not in a gig. So, at the Hollywood Bowl, I didn't ad-lib a huge amount: probably just two or three minutes' worth. Everything else had been ad-libbed at one point, but I don't craft it—it's a bit like someone modeling in clay, continually sculpting and re-sculpting what they're doing. I have certain bits that I come back to, but each time I do them it's going to be a different. It's a conversational style. Every time I go into it, I'm not sure where I'm going to land, what I'm going to say.

**DDD:** *Some audience members take your conversational style a little too literally, and feel comfortable heckling you—how do you handle an audience member who's gone rogue?*

**EI:** That's fine; you just talk back to them. You can get thrown on stage, but if you've done as many gigs as I've done, you don't. Sometimes you can mishear: at the bowl, someone said 'Fuck Yeah!' and I thought they said 'Fuck You,' so I sort of laid into him when I should have just said 'Sorry, I didn't hear you.' I tweeted an apology. But generally, once you've gotten to the point in your career where you're playing arenas or Hollywood Bowls, people tend to be pretty positive towards you.

**DDD:** *One of the themes of Stripped is your "spiritual atheism."*

**EI:** I believe in human beings, not mystical powers. I see no organized plan coming from any organized god, so that's what I decided to talk about. And in Europe that kind of material makes no real noise at all, everyone's sort of there, too, but in America it causes a bit of consternation. I think half of your country is there, and half of your country isn't. The middle of America is still very religious, and the more progressive America—which tends to be at the outer edges, maybe because they have more contact with other people coming in from other shores—is more open-minded. But I am spiritual: I enjoy the connection between people. I just don't see a connection between anyone living up in clouds.

**DDD:** *In your work, there's an interesting mix of cynicism and idealism, which a lot of artists exhibit. Would you describe yourself as a cynic or an idealist?*

**EI:** I'm idealist. I'm cynical about things when I think they've lost their way. If you look at all organized religions, the wise people who come along—and they're usually wise men, I think women didn't get a lock-in because of the sexist nature of early civilizations—tend to be modernizers. I think Jesus was a wise man. I think Mohammed was a

wise man. Abraham, a wise man. Noah, a wise man. These were wise people who probably did things—extraordinary things, positive things—but once they died, people started reinterpreting what they said, and then they...insisted it can never, ever change.

**DDD:** *Everyone needs something to believe in. What's your lodestar?*

**EI:** Well, I believe in us. I believe in human beings. I believe in the innate goodwill of the vast majority. If you look at WWII, it was the goodwill of people, with a few lucky breaks, or a few strange accidents that happened, that caused us to win in the end. I believe that the god and the devil are fighting in each person, and that we have to perhaps try to work towards "the better angels in our nature," as I think a president of yours once said.

**DDD:** *Speaking of duality, you're always Eddie Izzard in your comedy, but you seem to slip very easily into other roles for your film and television work. How does that compare to doing a live, improvisational stage performance?*

**EI:** If I'm doing theatre, like David Mamet's *Race* last year off-Broadway, that has a similarity to the every night, live nature of stand-up. And I try to drive the drama down a logical corridor so I can actually move it night-to-night, and I can change how I might emotionally play a scene. It's something—I haven't heard about before, but I've developed it, 'cause I've done two Mamet plays now, and he's very particular about how he wants the dialogue delivered, but then you can choose your own emotional angle. So live performance, dramatic acting on stage, has quite a few similarities with stand-up. When you're doing film, it gets quite different. But the essential thing about all of them is being in the moment. That is the key thing: being very much there, as opposed to reciting something, where there's a distance between you and what you're saying. Live what you're saying—be it a dramatic truth, or a comedic twist.

**DDD:** *Do you feel there's a vast difference between trying to make people laugh and playing something serious and dramatic, or do you think they're pretty close together on the continuum?*

**EI:** I think there's a similarity between dramatic storytelling and comedy, which I've only just realized recently. In comedy, we put ideas together, and then we hit a punchline, and an audience should be wrong-footed, so that they think 'Oh, I didn't know you were going there', and then they'll release a laugh, because you turned in a way that they find funny. In a dramatic story, you'll be going along with the story and then turn, emotionally, in a way that the audience isn't expecting. But the bottom line of drama is always to be truthful. If you're being truthful to a character, he should only do what's within that character's emotional lines. In comedy, sometimes you can blend or break that—simply, to get a laugh by doing something that the

character just would not do.

**DDD:** *Is there an essence in a character that you find you respond well to? Or do you just like the challenge of something new?*

**EI:** I do more and more like a challenge. But the essence of all the characters I play—they've got to be relentless bastards. 'Cause that's what I am. They do things that people don't expect to turn out right. Having done gigs in French, having run forty-three marathons in fifty-one days, having played the Hollywood Bowl—I kind of like the fact that I can come up with things and say I'm going to do them and then people look at me oddly like, Well, that's not going to happen, and then I go and do them anyway. It feels like a good use of my life.

**DDD:** *Have you always been the kind of person who continues to raise the bar for yourself?*

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**EI:** I don't think I could make a bar initially. I was always determined as a kid, but I couldn't get anything going for so long. Now that I have things going, I've realized that raising the bar seems to be the only way forward.

**DDD:** *On your Twitter account, you describe yourself as thinking like an American.*

**EI:** It means thinking like an economic migrant, really. A big part of the historical engine of America has been people coming from other lands to look for something new and to work hard trying to create something different, better. And that's what I like to do. I just like 'Let's go do it, let's go build it'. Which I think can end up in a lot of good, positive things, like America going to the moon. But then sometimes America goes too far, which is your Watergates, your Grenadas, the unnecessary wars. There is this beautiful side of America—let's go build it, let's go help—but then there's another



**DIEDERIK COMTE** white quilted cotton short coat.  
**JERELL SCOTT** silk jeweled tuxedo shirt with woren chain.  
**VERSACE** waxed leather jeans.  
**EVAN CHAMBERS** nickel plated space pistol.  
**MOE** grenade stool.  
**LIANA REID** orange silk & leather chair.  
**MANDULA** black leather bolster.  
**EDWIN BETHEA** black & white "poseidon lord of the sea" painting.



**DIEDERIK COMTE**  
*francis linen black tuxedo jacket.*  
**VERSACE** *white shirt.*  
**VERSACE** *black waxed leather trousers.*  
**MILES MCNEEL** *dog tags in semi*  
*precious stones set in labradorite.*  
**RARE MULTI-COLOR PEACOCK** *c.1940*





**DIEDERIK COMTE** white quilted cotton short coat.  
**JERELL SCOTT** silk jeweled tuxedo shirt with worn chain.  
**VERSACE** waxed leather jeans.  
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side which I don't identify with.

**DDD:** *I know you're very politically active in the UK.*

**EI:** I want to stand for election in nine years, and so that's what I plan to do. In America, I'm active with the Democrats...I can raise money, I can donate money, as I have a green card, and so I'm very happy to help progressive people around the world. Because progressive people have changed the world and made it the better place that it is. It's the conservatives that conserve, and hold back progress—they're the ones that voted against the emancipation for all men, they voted against women, they voted against gay people—they try hold onto what came before, all the wrong rules.

**DDD:** *You have a real fascination with history—does that impact your political position and activism today?*

**EI:** It informs it, yes. Churchill was a big student of history—maybe he did a number of things wrong, but he also wanted to do right things like standing up against Hitler in nineteen-forty when the rest of cabinet would have probably just have made a deal. So I think if you study history, you can see where human beings and different civilizations and different countries through the centuries have made good decisions and bad decisions, and you can learn from it. We learn from our mistakes. You can't go back and run countries in the past, but you can see what other people did: where they fucked up and where they got it right.

**DDD:** *I hear that idealism at work, and the world is in a difficult spot right now. Do you think it will get better?*

**EI:** Oh yes it will, we've always been in a difficult spot. You take a snapshot of any time. So there was an economic crisis caused by greedy capitalists, who tend to be right-wing thinkers. Who don't care about others, and wanted to sell all those subprime loans. There seem to be people who are sociopaths, who go around all their lives only caring about themselves. We have to legislate against it; you just can't trust some people. They could be the minority, but that minority has thrown the whole world into this mess.

**DDD:** *Do you think your stand-up experience will help you as you move further into politics?*

**EI:** Well you have to study Al Franken, because what I was planning to do, he went and did. I know Senator Franken quite well, and people thought he would be a comedic senator when he came in, but he's actually very serious, and Democrats that I've talked to are liking what he's doing, and hopefully the Republicans have been hating what he's doing, because that means that he's doing good stuff. But comedy helps you talk, it helps you articulate;

it helps if you can put some comedy into politics because it can get very dry.

**DDD:** *What inspires you?*

**EI:** It would be between Wikipedia and DVDs. I just want to inhale all the knowledge that I can. Like in *The Matrix*, when they put that thing in his neck, and he goes 'My god, I know Kung Fu'... it would be great for me to have that, but instead I have to work. To watch. I like to know quite some detail about all the major religions, the details of where they come from historically, and all the philosophies—so that then I can compare them.

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I'm looking for answers as to how we got here, how our thinking processes developed, and why extremists should be blocked out because they're all about killing if you don't obey whatever they say. I want my stand-up to be as accurate as possible, and not to be making up facts. There's a lot of stuff out there that I've yet to inhale or take on.

**DDD:** *All of this talk of good and evil reminds me: have you seen the last Harry Potter movie?*

**EI:** I haven't, but I'd like to.

**DDD:** *If you were a wizard, what would your specialty be?*

**EI:** Dunno, maybe I would fly, but then they can all fly, can't they?

**DDD:** *Something to do with words, I think.*

**EI:** Maybe. But I think I've already got that.



**VERSACE** jacket.  
**JERELL SCOTT** army green with pallet  
 & stone button, wool & chain detail shirt.

*Creative Director:* **LYNN FURGE.**  
*Location & Wardrobe Director:* **MARKUS KETTY.**  
*Men's Grooming:* **RACHAEL DOWNING**  
 using **FACE STOCKHOLM.**  
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