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Eddie Izzard - Force Majeure, Transvestite, Mayor?

By The Moscow Times

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Izzard is becoming noticably more political as he mulls a mayoral future.

Ambitious stand-up comedian Eddie Izzard will be next in a growing influx of English-language one-man laughter acts to take to a Moscow stage.

Izzard's "Force Majeure" tour spans 25 countries worldwide with the Moscow show at Crocus City Hall on June 14 sandwiched between events in St. Petersburg and Johannesburg, South Africa. He is also traveling as far as Kathmandu.

"I'm claiming this is the most extensive comedy tour that there's ever been," he told The Moscow Times via telephone. It has already entered its fourth month.

The self-professed "straight transvestite" has laid off the intensity of his makeup and feminine attire in recent years, and is now more frequently seen in a suit, but he retains the odd slick of eyeliner or a pair of low-heeled boots.

His red painted nails, with a single union jack on his ring finger, are the only colorful aspect of the otherwise monochrome promotional video for his Russian shows.

Although his claim really is extraordinary, he genuinely thinks it is a fair one to make, feeling very optimistic about the prospect of carting his surreal brand of comedy beyond the western side of the continent. He believes that all its residents share a certain affinity.

"Let's be positive about Europe," he said. "I just feel that there are more similarities than differences," he continued, commenting on the broad-scale job losses have taken place across the continent.

His conversation is noticeably politically charged — unsurprising for someone intending to run as a London mayoral candidate within the next seven years.

Izzard sets the bar very high for himself and hopes to learn at least four more languages before he steps down from stand up. He has already performed shows in French, a language in which he is fluent, and wants to perform again in Russia one day.

"I'm going to come back and do it in Russian," he said, listing the order of languages he is yet to learn thoroughly. "German, then Spanish, then Russian," he laughed.

Izzard viewed his Russian performances as a kind of testing-of-the-water for now. "Let's just go there now and say hello," he said, announcing plans to return after he has mastered the language — or at least a few words of it.

On the 14th, he will stick with a familiar routine, instead of making it too Russia-specific. "I wanted it to be the same — it's impossible to write a whole new show for every city," he commented.

Visiting Moscow is particularly exciting for him. "It's a legendary city," he enthused. "I spent many years trying to get there, and this is my first time."

Having grown up in an era when the Berlin wall was still firmly in place, Russia and Russian people retained a certain level of exoticism in his consciousness. He admitted that occasionally in his youth "I grew up thinking that I'd never meet a Russian person."

Despite bridging the cultural gap, he still has a specific audience in mind for each of his destinations. "I'm saluting every city, and assuming the intelligence of the audience," he stated. Shows are aimed at "people with a certain amount of education."

He covers subjects as miscellaneous as smoking of pipes, and doesn't shy away from controversy, for example, taking a stand about religion.

He included "God in a squeaky voice, gods of various cultures, and antiquity" among his subjects, while previous shows have made references to cultural icons such as James Mason.

One of his hopes is to gather global minds who have "seen a lot of comedy" mentioning series enjoyed worldwide, such as South Park and Monty Python — it is these fans that he wants to collect on his travels.

Izzard lacks some of the wariness that his fellow performers, such as Dylan Moran and David McSavage, had when performing stand-up in the country.

"I'm apprehensive about nothing: Any time you go to a new place you could think something might happen," he said, adding that this can severely hinder perception, enjoyment and opportunity in any country. "Go in with an open mind," was his ethos.

Izzard was born and raised in Yemen, something which he believes has helped him in formulating this inquisitive and unconstrained attitude.

"Even though stand up hasn't been done much, they'll still understand English" he said, having fewer qualms about the language barrier than his native English-speaking predecessors.

"Young generations have been learning English" he added, "since something like the 1990s." He pointed out that there will be ways of circumventing any translation problems.

The fact that Moran and McSavage all came here (among others) has eased the pressure slightly for Izzard, with him commenting that life's easier if "we're all going around opening doors for other people."

"The melting pot is the way of sanity." The right wing, on the other hand, he said, erring on the political again "killing."

Izzard has confirmed his ideas of running as a Labour candidate in 2020 — 2016 would be a little too soon, according to him.

He acknowledged that he'd have to step down from comedy in order to undertake the election campaign. But he knows plans could be subject to change. "Seven years is a long time in politics," he pondered.

Izzard has been incredibly driven, something he has in the past attributed to the death of his mother at the young age of six. "There's something built in," he said. "I was quite determined while I was a kid."

He added humorously that he wanted to stay "four steps ahead." Given his widely acclaimed running of 43 marathons in 2009, it is very likely that by now, he is several hundred thousand steps ahead.

Eddie Izzard performs June 14 at 8 p.m., Crocus City Hall, located at 66 km MKAD, metro Myakinino. Tel. 499-550-00-55. crocus-hall.ru

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