

Russian Standup Comedian Makes Debut in Edinburgh

By [Thomas Ball](#)

August 10, 2014



Igor Meerson is now performing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Igor Meerson, the first Russian standup comedian to perform at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, greets the audience with the words: "Hello, potential enemies!"

Meerson is currently starring in his one-man show "How i learnt english" at the Pleasance Courtyard, but despite the title, Meerson says that jokes about his poor english make up only 10 percent of the show's content. "It is mostly about false stereotypes, mine and yours, as well as jokes about my personal life. I want to show that we are not so different. I want to find the common ground between our two cultures."

At one point he talks about the British habit of asking "How are you?" when there's no desire to know the answer. In Russia, he says, you don't ask because otherwise "you get the full report: who is sick, who is dead, who is fired. ... So it's better not to ask. Russians are very honest. That is why we are so sad."

Perhaps in an attempt to discover this "common ground," the show includes a section in which Meerson invites audience members up on stage for a vodka-drinking contest, which goes to show that not all stereotypes are totally false.

The "Hello, potential enemies!" quip is a good opening line, a nod to the Ukrainian elephant in the corner, and Meerson admitted in an interview with The Times earlier this month that he had met Russians in London who said they had experienced aggression as a result of Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

"It's the most scary thing because politicians are politicians and people are people. Young boys went to our show with their parents, and they said that after these strange things in Ukraine began it was very difficult for them. British kids were saying: 'You're invaders. We hate you.'"

When we spoke later, however, he downplayed the comment, saying that he himself has experienced no such animosity while in Edinburgh, though the topic of Ukraine is unavoidable.

Meerson started out in comedy with appearances in the popular student comedy team game show "KVN" before graduating to "Comedy Club," Russia's first standup television show, where he became a resident comic. He set up his own standup show and helped bring over Irish comedian Dylan Moran of "Black Books" fame to Russia. Moran in turn helped set him up with the gig in Edinburgh.

When asked what made him come to the Fringe, Meerson replied: "not 'what' but 'who' made me decide: Dylan Moran did."

Reviews have been kind if somewhat mixed but Meerson is happy with how it has gone so far. "The last two nights have been very nice and a great surprise for me considering how silent the town seems. I said to myself, if I get five people to come on these opening nights, I will be happy. But my marketing company has performed a miracle. The room was half-full."

"The audiences here are very warm, far more so than Russian audiences. For Russians, I think, there is the feeling that anything conducted on a stage is an art in a traditional sense and should be treated as such. As Dylan Moran said, 'Russian audiences laugh with their hands.' In Britain, audiences understand how to respond because standup has been popular here for 50 or 60 years."

Meerson says he still prefers to perform in his homeland, though: "I can't use all the tools of language in my comedy here in Britain as I could in Russia. There is also a cultural barrier. I can't reference a song or a novel and expect people to know what I'm talking about."

When given the somewhat banal task of summing up his comedy in one word, he replies: "Funny. The way the show has been going so far, I feel I can say this with confidence."

Meerson performs in Edinburgh, Scotland, at the Pleasance Courtyard until Aug 25. Address: 60 Pleasance. Phone: +44 131-556-6550. www.pleasance.co.uk

Contact the author at artsreporter@imedia.ru

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/08/10/russian-standup-comedian-makes-debut-in-edinburgh-a38167>