

## The Spice of Life

A new series of six half-hour comedy programmes *Victoria Wood as seen on TV* starts this month. Michelene Wandour spoke to its originator, writer and performer, Victoria Wood, in rehearsals.

### Can we start at the beginning.

#### Born . . .

Born Prestwich near Manchester, 1953. Grammar school, university. Television. Before I graduated from university I was a barmaid in a pub in Birmingham, and met someone who worked at the BBC who heard me playing the piano, and asked me to audition at Pebble Mill, which I did. I got a few odd little jobs singing songs on their regional programme on Friday nights. The first programme was a folk programme and I sang on that. Then they asked me to write songs specially for some of their other programmes. So by the time I left I already had an Equity card. You can't get them now for just being on the BBC, but you could at that time.

#### You write and perform your own material. Have you done other people's stuff?

At university I was in lots of plays. But I've never wanted to really. It's just the way it's gone. I've always been writing something and then gone on to do it or getting it done. I'm not an actress, so I don't go round scouting for other people's things to do.

I would do something if I thought it was a great script. I'd do a part in a film or something if anybody asked me. I've just been offered a little part. I can't do it because I'm busy with this.

#### When did you get married?

1980. We met in a play at Leicester. In 1976. Geoff was an actor then, he was in the show at the Leicester Phoenix playing Buffalo Bill. I was very out of work and they needed somebody to play the piano for the show for two weeks. A bit after that he decided to stop being an actor. And became a magician instead.

**Have you done shows together?**  
We haven't done since 1982, when we went to Ostend with a show there. We thought it was time I should do a full-length show on my own and he should skip off and do television.

**Do you watch each other's stuff?**

The way it's worked out the last couple of years we haven't always been able to. I can always get to see him in pantomime, because it's 12 weeks at a time.

**Are you going to have any children?**

I don't know, things are so rushed at the moment, there's no way we could. I haven't been at home since July and I won't be home until November.

**Where's home?**

Near Lancaster. Geoff's been on tour at least twice this year, he's just got back from Kenya. And he'll be in pantomime over Christmas. It's all very disjointed, there's not much home life.

**What are the questions you get asked most often in interviews?**  
Why aren't there more female comediennees?

**Do you want me to ask that?**  
No, because I don't know the answer.

**You get comedy formats, don't you, like *Three of a Kind*. There you have three or four blokes and one woman.**

Yes. But they're written by men, so it's a natural progression. I write my show, and we've got three or four women and only one regular man. I bring men in to play businessmen, so I'm just the same. It's just natural that you tend to write for women.

**Based on your own gender and your own interests?**

Yes. And men do that too, there's no reason to criticise them.

**What do you like doing best?**  
I think stand up comedy is what I prefer in theatre. And I love doing this whole show, because I like the feeling that I've written six episodes.

**Do you take a central part in deciding how it is structured?**

**Are you producing in a sense?**  
No, I'm not producing in that way. I think of six running orders and I'll give them to the producer, and he'll probably say: 'We can't put those

two together, or in two separate sketches because they've got the same person in them, and they have to be paid twice'. Something like that. There are things that he knows about that I don't. As long as you say there's a film in each, a song in each, a short sketch then a big sketch, it's fairly easy to do. There's so much stuff and it's quite varied.

**So, you've got a quite unusual degree of control over what you do and how you do it?**

Yes.  
**Writing, performing, being part of the structure, casting. And directing and interpretation in a sense.**

Yes. Intonations and things like that. Most people get it right first off. Geoff Posner is an absolutely great director. I don't interfere with him. I mean, we work together. So, if somebody misses the gist, I'd say, try it the other way. I'm always around.

**Are you there for the editing?**  
No. I think that's a very specialised job, and I wouldn't have anything to contribute.  
**Have you worked very much with the other so-called alternative comics?**  
No. I only work with my own chaps.

**Have you wanted to?**

No. I think they're all very much a group. I don't want to be part of anybody's group really. What I found about them is they all seem to have the same line on things. Whoever's name goes up at the end for the writing, I find it could have been any of them. They've got a joint sense of humour. There's eight people, with one enormous sense of humour between them. I think that's a pity. Everybody's individual.

**But do you think there is a shared climate between the sorts of things you do and the things they've done? Is there something anarchic about both?**

I don't know, really. They're younger than I am, most of them. About four years, I suppose. I don't feel any more connection with them than I do with Monty Python, even though I like them both. I just feel I'm following a theatrical tradition.

**Which is linked to what?**



Victoria Wood: 'I don't want to be part of anybody's group'

To variety. They're the roots that I recognise. It's not from my own childhood, I didn't have a particularly theatrical background. And I'm not sentimental - about the good old days or anything. But you do feel, when you walk on a stage, whether it's a new theatre or an old variety theatre, that you are following the footsteps of anybody who has ever walked out there and tried to entertain people. What's nice is that it's an old tradition, but it happens that minute that you do it.

**I haven't asked you anything about feminism.**

No. that's very good.

**What do you think of feminism?**

I don't know what people mean by it. I'm all for it, as long as it makes people more cheerful. Not miserable, and worrying about hairs on their legs. I don't like anything that tells people what to do.

**What about marxism then?**

I don't know anything about marxism.

**What does it conjure up?**

I think it conjures up miser-

able people shouting at me.  
**So politics is a lot of miserable people, standing shouting at you, telling you what you can't do.**

Yes!

**I wonder where that comes from. Who shouted at you in your childhood?**

No one. It must be from things I've read. I can't bear people discussing things, really. I can't stand it.

**Why?**

I think it serves no purpose. and it never makes me very happy. Thrashing things out.

**Do you prefer just to get on and do something?**

Yes. I like to think inside my own brain, I don't want to know what other people's brains are doing. I like to think about something and do it. And if others don't like it, sod it.

**What if there's something you're curious about?**

Issues, you mean?

No, anything.

I don't have a lot of natural curiosity, just about people.

**About what they do and why they do it?**

What they do. I don't think I ever know why people do things. I just like to know what they do. I love watching other people. It's a story unfolding. I might write down something people said, and never use it. It just sets you off. I think people are very underrated by writers. Ordinary people. People on the whole express themselves very well, and they don't have the limited vocabulary that most writers give them credit for.

**Do you think that political people don't give ordinary people enough credit?**

I don't know. I can't understand anybody wanting to go into politics. Local politics, I can understand a bit, because it's to do with normal things. But I can't understand anybody wanting to go into parliament. I think they must be barmy.

**Do you think it's anything to do with them wanting power?**

Yes. And a certain kind of life as well. I think it's awful that people are making decisions who don't have any home life, never watch television, never go for a walk, and live on black coffee. I think it's all slightly deranged.

**Are there any new characters in your new show?**

Yes. Kelly Marie Tunstall. She wears fish-net tights, and shirts shorter than her jackets. She stands at the bus stop talking. That's my new person. That's me, and I have a side kick called Mary.

**Is this the first time we've seen your legs?**

Yes. Shocked the cameramen. They were taken aback by them.

**What shoes are you wearing?**

High heels, very, as high as I can manage. It's all right because I just stand there, I don't have to walk about. Made me walk like Barbara Windsor, which made me laugh.

**And after the tv shows?**

I'd like to do a film. I've got a few things at the back of my mind. But I'm not really thinking about anything except this series. Then I'll have a bit of a rest. I can't do any big jobs, I'm too tired. I've been working non-stop since January, I need a holiday, a break. •