

Interviewer: Mark Wareham

Chris Ramsey has just embarked on his biggest tour to date, *Is That Chris Ramsey?*, culminating in a massive homecoming gig at Newcastle's Metro Arena. The Geordie star of Comedy Central's *The Chris Ramsey Show* tells Mark Wareham about life on the road and how adjusting to first-time fatherhood hasn't stopped him from being arrested in his underpants...

Hi, is that Chris Ramsey?

I see what you did there.

How's the tour going?

Amazing. I've got a big set that I love and it's my first time with a headset mic. It's so free. It's the best show I've done yet.

And it's your biggest tour to date?

Yeah. The scary thing about touring is that the venues are booked before I've written the show, so I've got the title, I've got the poster...

You're a bit last minute then?

It's the only way I can do it man. I was the kid at school where if you got your homework on a Thursday, I would do it on the Sunday night. I'd have it hanging over us all weekend. It's just who I am.

But you must have had a rough idea of the show mapped out in your head?

I've ended up having a theme again. There's a bit of a crisis of confidence theme in my everyday life, on becoming a dad. So I start off talking about the most confident person I've ever met, about my wife, my son, my fears, and then at the end I talk about a situation where I wish I'd been a lot more confident when I was apprehended by the police last year in a hotel in me underpants. I'd like to have handled that better.

What do you think's brought on this crisis of confidence then?

It's just cos offstage you're a proper dulled-down version of who you are on stage. And it's just that sometimes you wish you could be just a bit more like the person you are on stage. And it all comes to a head at the end when the police are handcuffing me in a hotel. You see it in films and think you know how you'd handle it, but when it happens to you, you find out who you really are. And that's why I call the show *Is That Chris Ramsey?* Cos I found out who I really was that night.

That's very interesting, wishing you were more like someone that you actually are anyway!

With comedy, you're not allowed to be the person you are on stage. Cos people would be like, 'Woah, dickhead, tone it down!' Very very rarely do you get a comic who's exactly the same offstage as they are onstage.

It's a bit like having a split personality isn't it, in a way.

Not to the level of Johnny Vegas, but nearly. Obviously his real name's Michael Pennington, but the way he talks about Johnny, it's like a twin or a part of his personality. His book's incredible.

Are there any places you particularly enjoy playing on tour?

I've got a full-on bias towards the North-East. But there's no real rule to what makes a great gig. We did Dartford for the first time the other day. One of those outskirts of London towns and they're normally all right, sometimes they can be a bit hard work. But it was phenomenal. The audience were so up for it. If I've got a gig in Newcastle and a gig in Dartford, I'd put my life savings on the gig in Newcastle being better. But that gig in Dartford I'd wager against any of the others.

And you're finishing the tour in Newcastle at the arena. That's a big gig.

That'll be my biggest one ever. The idea of that many people coming to see you is spectacular. It's crazy. Ten thousand people! The biggest venue I've played so far is the Albert Hall. Five thousand people at the Royal Variety Performance. Though it felt like 2,000, cos hardly any of them were laughing. It was quite a hard gig.

Your last show, All Grown Up, dealt with becoming an adult. But now you're 30, with a kid, so presumably you've not got much choice?

Yes but with the new show I didn't want to make it a dad show. I had a load of stories about my son, but I binned most of them cos they felt like stories that anyone could do about being a dad.

You've got a young following, haven't you?

Not as young as you'd think. I've got a lovely mix. Last night there was an entire family. I once did a gig where there were grandparents as well. Three generations turned up. It's always really nice to see an older face.

As you're such a natural storyteller, do you appreciate a bit of audience banter or does it put you off your stride?

I love it. When I come out, I start chatting to the audience immediately. It's never a problem, unless they're shouting abuse.

Your material's very personal. Do you deal with Trump and Brexit like so many other comics, or just ignore it?

Well Trump does all his own jokes anyway. Anything you could possibly do, he's already done. So it's impossible to satirise him.

Since your last tour, you've got your own show on Comedy Central. It's a lot of fun isn't it, like an extension of your personality.

That's what I wanted. There's so much grim stuff going on and I was never going to do a John Oliver type satire show. That's not my style. I wanted a show that was fun and entertaining and high-energy. All of the guests came away saying, 'That was so much fun to be on.' It was so nice to hear colleagues you admire like Jimmy Carr saying that.

Who do you admire most in comedy?

Billy Connolly. I remember watching him with my dad when I was a kid and I couldn't believe this bloke would stand up there telling these amazing stories to the room and a theatre of people were just hanging on his every word. The first one I saw with him was An Audience With, with Robbie Coltrane, Bob Geldof and Michael Parkinson, and my dad explained that he was a comedian. I never even realised it was a proper job. I used to watch Lee Evans as well.

What are you like when you're on the road?

Well I'm currently sitting in a Mercedes Benz Sprinter van. The tour manager's driving and I'm sitting on a leather recliner with a table, my support act Carl Hutchinson is sitting on my left listening to music on his laptop, and I've got in front of us a PlayStation 4 with a 32-inch telly up on the wall and I've currently got Resident Evil Origins on pause so I can have this interview.

So what do you and Carl do after a show? Do you tear the place up or go back and chill?

Honestly, you can't man. It seems like we're just sitting around doing nothing and it's just a couple of hours each night, but it's actually infuriating how much it takes out of you doing a two-hour show. I got angry when I got ill. Why? It's not like I'm down the mine. I'm just on stage talking. Just sitting in the van can exhaust you. My idea of a good tear-up is going back to the hotel, having a couple of beers out of the minibar and ordering a pizza. We're pathetic. Absolutely pathetic. But after Newcastle Arena, there'll be hell on!

[ends]

Chris Ramsey comes to St David's Hall on Thursday 27 April at 7.30pm.

Tickets are priced £20 (plus a £3.95 Ticket Service Charge per transaction and an optional £1 postage fee).

**To book your seats, please visit www.stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk
or call the Box Office on 029 2087 8444.**