



Language of Comedy

Cross Cultural Humour

Henning Wehn:

There is always a lot of talk how different the British humour is from the German humour, and, and, and I'm not even sure it actually is. Like, the pub jokes are the same – the probably, then, the, the Irish are replaced by the East Frisians, er, or the Bavarians, but the structure of the joke is still the same. And, er, what, the, the, the main difference, actually, I think, is the social importance of humour; whilst in Britain everything is measured in humour, like, er, there is every job application, everyone is keen to point out they've got good sense of humour, even in the, in the, in the, in the, in the job description, like, 'required: good sense of humour', and everything is measured in the UK by good sense of humour. Like, Gordon Brown got loads of criticism of, "Yeah, he's always grumpy; doesn't have a sense of humour." Well, that, I don't even understand where that comes and how that comes into judging a, a politicians work.

Like, er, Frau Merkel, she probably can't tell a joke to save her life, but it just is nothing you would hold against her, whilst in Britain the social importance of humour, er, is so big.

And, and I always say, er, we, I always say the, the Germans they, they like a laugh just like the Brits, the only difference is the Germans laugh once the work is done whilst the Brits laugh instead of doing any work. So, and that, probably, er, i-is in a nutshell, the, the, the, the cultural significance of humour. If you wanna have success as a standup here in the UK, all you have to do loads of swearing, and in Germany we don't do any swearing at all; reason being, things work. Now, er [laughs]. And what's my favourite words in the English language? I absolutely love 'Herbert', er, is, and then 'gappings' is a lovely word; er, 'haberdashery', that's a good word, er, 'cause you, really gives you the idea you're dealing with something incredibly substantial, er, and then you go there and all it is is it's, well, it's not even it's not even knick knacks, it's just gappings [laughs].

Humour can only work if the reference points are shared. Like, I remember I came over in 2002 and, er, and the first time someone said to me, "Oh, you're from Germany, so you must love David Hasselhoff," I thought they had something wrong with them. So, and that was, er, so, and then, then you hear people, all the time you hear people say that time and again, then you were like, "Oh, yeah, there is that stereotype that Germans are really into David Hasselhoff." So, and, and then, then you have to understand, okay, that is where reference point has changed. And, now, if you were to go to Germany, say, and you were to do a routine how everyone in Germany loves David Hasselhoff, the audience would shout, "You've lost the plot, what are you talking about?" It just couldn't work. So, for humour to work the reference points have to be shared.

I think, when I do social commentary in the style of classical political cabaret, er, er, most of my jokes are blunt statements which I subvert with a twinkle of my eye. So, that's how I describe what I do; everybody else here in the UK describes me, "Oh, you're him; that German bloke." So [laughs], so, there is, you can all the ambitions you want, I mean, it's just a question how, of how you're seen, and I think you just have to accept it; it's just 'that German bloke'.