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Edinburgh Fringe 2015: An interview with Sarah Callaghan

While preparing for her Fringe stand-up show, Elephant, Sarah Callaghan tells [Joel Down](#) why running away from the problem can sometimes solve it and why comedy is her only option

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Image: Steve Ullathorne

While she may not be a character act, Sarah Callaghan certainly has plenty of character. She declares, 'I've had quite a colourful life shall we say, so it's really not hard for me to think of stories and shit'. I get her to tell me one such story, and it soon becomes apparent that where confidence is requisite, she ticks all the right boxes, 'I left school, and went to college, and it was just shit, and I couldn't imagine me being in a job' and so '[After completing a TEFL course] I thought right well I'll go to Madrid. I was so eager to go: I'd just turned 18 and I was just pissed off with my surroundings so I ticked the yes box which meant that I could speak fluent spanish. I couldn't speak a word.'

Coming back nearly a year later, she says 'I was a bit fucked up, but I look back on that experience and you know I think I love that because it brought me here.' Having won Up the Creek's 'One to watch' as well as making it to the final of the Funny woman competition and now back for her first full hour at Fringe, this year, 'here' isn't too bad for someone who couldn't ever picture herself in a solid career. Today, she's brimming with the optimism that everyone else can do better; saying that her official Fringe debut is 'about how our worlds are all quite small, how we get comfortable and are scared to change, because change is quite hard to achieve sometimes. If you *don't* stay in the small world that you live in you can achieve so much more', hoping that people leave her show 'thinking bigger'. Underpinning all of this is the knowledge that, 'if no-one ever acts on their talent then they are just going to be a product of their upbringing,' a point even the most arts-averse politician would struggle to disagree with.

Politics isn't really her game though: she says 'I don't know much about it but I know enough to make it relevant to me', understanding that references to current issues are unavoidable in telling her story, especially given that she's always felt trapped in the narrow confines of her council estate. For this reason, there's talk of the housing crisis in her show, as well as the struggle to make it as a comedian so not only does equity come into it, but also equanimity: 'last year my show was more along the lines of comedy politics, like not selling out, not selling your soul to the devil and not doing shit adverts and staying true to yourself to the end, becoming one of the greats and not just an average comedian who's going to be forgotten about in 2 years time'. She'll be the first to say that there's far more to her than meets the eye, 'I want people to see more of me, because you know, I get judged quite a lot from the way I grew up, or the way I speak... but there's layers to people': it's these layers, which can be missed in the race for an easy-laugh, that she wants to explore. It's little wonder, therefore, that she's been marked out as both authentic, and honest.

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However, total honesty can be a little bit dry and she admits that when you go onstage, 'you have to have that energy. I couldn't just go on like... just me, because that would be boring I think, so I do exaggerate just to give a bit more life to it'. Sarah is confident that with a finely chiseled stage presence and a wealth of material she won't be cutting too many people out, especially as she 'talk[s] about a lot of stuff that can relate to different ages'. I still question her as to who might *not* take to her style and after a little pause, she pins them down: 'if you're quite uptight you won't like my stuff', the reason being that she's not afraid to use language loosely. In one instance she said a particular word beginning with c (and ending in -unt), no less than three times during a show her Granddad was watching ('he loved it'). She's not all that eager to maintain this: 'back when I started I used to swear loads, but I've toned it down now' she says, joking that 'I talk quite fast though, so you gotta keep up, if you're partially deaf then you probably won't enjoy my show!'

With all the fast-talking profanity, Sarah Callaghan does have a knack of coming out with neat aphorisms, such as 'all writing comes from emotion'. For her, the most creative emotion, just happens to be a strong one, 'when you're angry you go on rants and write loads and it might all be bollocks but you can come back to it. There's a lot of humour in anger and frustration'. This rings true of her first venture into the realm of writing comedy: that year in Madrid involved plenty of frustration, and turned into an entire book of jokes. 'It was the longest time I'd been away from home and I fell into this deep depression.' with few

people to talk to, and even fewer to get on with, 'I felt myself changing, because I've always been quite a sociable person but I wasn't like that anymore'. Comedy offered the answer: 'I don't know why, but it was like a release almost', and from pen to paper, from one gig to another, the journey has been pretty smooth since.

'Comedy is my only option at the moment', she says happily, of wanting to spread her wings. Edinburgh Fringe is the perfect climate in which to do this, being 'a really good platform to be experimental,' even if it can be a little hard to 'sift through the people who are just doing it for a laugh and the people who are doing it to make a living'. It gives the comedian a great chance to relish the whole experience, whereas for the rest of the year, she's running between her gigs and her home. There's little doubt as to where she'd rather be, 'comedy is my escapism, mentally, emotionally and hopefully physically if I become successful enough'.

Sarah Callaghan will be at the Pleasance Courtyard, with her show Elephant at 5.30 pm from the 5th to the 30th of August.



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