

**'There's nothing better than making people laugh. I love it. It's the best job in the world'**

# Comedy gives me confidence

**Sarah Millican** talks to Victoria Young about her addiction to box sets, the joy of living alone – and faking confidence (until you make it)

**Comedian Sarah Millican, 37, lives in Manchester and is in a relationship with comedian Gary Delaney.**

**Growing up, I had two different personas.** At school I was quiet and shy, then I blossomed at home. The tiny little rubbish

ballerina in me would be thrilled that I'm a stand-up comedian, but also shocked.

**I never wanted to be in the limelight.** I was in school plays but as "third child" or "narrator". I wrote short plays and films, and studied film and production.

It didn't cross my mind to be in front of the camera.

**I got divorced when I was 29.** Before that I'd always been in the middle, just coasting. After that, there were days when I thought I could do nothing and days when I thought I could do

anything. And on an anything day I signed up for a workshop for people that had written before but never performed.

**So I went along and we did a little performance that night.** I read a monologue I'd written about my divorce. I was shaking,

and some of it was crushingly sad. But some of it was hilarious and the audience responded accordingly. Afterwards, I went into the ladies' loos and rang my dad, and I jumped up and down in the toilets, just because I'd done it.

**After the divorce I moved back with my mam and dad.** I spent a few months just trying to get a handle on it. But then I started thinking about what I wanted to do. I thought, "Well that was fun, let's do that again." So I rang the girl who had run the course and said, "I think I want to try stand-up comedy," and

she said "I know", like she'd known the whole time and had waited for this call.

**She booked me a five-minute spot at a really rough pub in Newcastle.** Everyone sat with their arms crossed, then they laughed and then I came off stage and thought, "Wow, that feels nice." I'll always be grateful that she saw something in me.

**Some people get drunk all the time after a break-up.** Some people throw themselves into work. And that's what I did – but I threw myself into a new work rather than my day job in

the civil service, dealing with benefit claims at the council.

**Making people laugh was definitely therapy for the first few months.** I'd lost confidence in the relationship side of things. I thought: "I'm going to have to go out with a bloke again. I'm going to have to go 'dating' again. Then I'm going to have to have sex again with someone new!"

**But comedy gave me confidence in a different area of my life.** I talked quite honestly about the divorce. I was funny but harsh – I didn't sugar-coat it. If I could be honest about something he'd said at home that was hurtful, and if I could see it from a funny angle and tell an audience and they'd go "Ha ha ha" – sort of like "We're on your side" – then I'd feel better. >>

**It was all quite raw and I felt exposed.** But I wanted to lift the lid: I shouldn't be ashamed that somebody doesn't love me any more, right? I almost stripped myself bare in front of the public and said, "This is what I'm like now and I quite like it." Thank god they did too.

**Going on stage in front of an audience is nerve-racking.** I have a really good "I'm having a lovely time" face. It's fake. You can fake confidence until you get it. As soon as I have a couple of big laughs under my belt then that confidence is real but until then – FAKE!

**There's nothing better than making people laugh.** I love it. It's the best job in the world. I get nurses and firemen saying, "You're doing the hardest job in the world," and I say, "This is a doddle compared with being a nurse!"

**I'm quite positive and I don't take defeat easily.** My ex-husband and I saw a counsellor who said, "Perhaps we should just put it down as a failed marriage." I said, "I don't really do failure – can we not just say it was short?"

**I saw a counsellor alone quite a lot afterwards.** I knew I needed to get myself sorted out and it helped, massively. My theory is, we're all a little bit messed up, and those of us who are less messed up – it's because we see a counsellor.

**I learned a lot about myself. I know how I function now and I know the flaws.** I learned that I can have – although I don't any more – a tendency to get sucked into a relationship so that I'm part of a couple. But I make sure now that I remain whole. I hate that phrase "my other half" because it implies that without that other person you're nothing.

## Comedy heroes

**Growing up, my comedy hero was Victoria Wood. And I had a video of Eddie Izzard that squeaked, as I had played it so much. My heroes now are the guys and girls playing the comedy clubs – in particular the rowdy weekend crowds. It's just such a skill, which develops from experience: how you can watch what looks like a car crash waiting to happen and just turn it around and everybody all of a sudden**

**is just watching this woman or man on the stage and they've got them wrapped round their finger. They are my heroes.**

## What makes me laugh

**So many things. I'm a really good audience. And I'm very lucky because I'm constantly surrounded by people who make me laugh. My family make me laugh all the time. Farting makes me laugh, and pictures of animals in clothes make me very happy.**

## My family Christmas

**This Christmas I'm going to be at home, at my house. Normally it's just me and my fella because we don't want to travel because we travel constantly. But this time my family is coming to me. My boyfriend will be cooking and I'm in charge of the serviettes. My mam and dad and sister are coming so it'll be just the five of us and I'm going to have a real tree.**

**I'd never lived on my own before.** I had no idea how awesome it is and I don't know if I ever want to go back! It's just the freedom. There's no compromise necessary. If I want to watch all the *Friends* weddings one day then I can. It's a sort of healthy selfishness and it also means that I'm not selfish when we're together.

**My boyfriend Gary and I live 90 miles apart.** It gives us both breathing space. But he's a comedian too and because we both travel for work, we see each other a lot more than we would if we lived together because we plan ahead. He's still the most important person to me. But I think I am also important.

**I think you've just got to make sure that you don't slip into complacency.** So I never iron or Hoover when he's there. I do all that when he's not there so that when we're together we go for lunch or nice walks or we sit and watch the telly. The other thing is, there's no routine, so you can't get bored of no routine, can you?

**My mam and dad were thrilled when I said I was going to do stand-up.** They

were happy that I'd found something that I wanted to do. They just want me to be happy. My relationship with them is much the same as it's always been – very supportive, and we always laugh.

**I love it when people say my show is quite risqué because I don't think it is at all.** Comics swear constantly, so I'm used to being around people who talk like I do. You'll never shock a comic – you just can't – so you can all be exactly who you are and say exactly what you think, however rude or dark that is, and that's quite liberating. Then I see an audience reacting when I say something really provocative and I remember, "Oh, that's the general public and they're not like us."

**You'd think that I'd tailor my content when my mam and dad are watching.** But they know that what I'm like on stage is very much what I'm like off stage. My mam said to me once she thought I was coarse on stage – she clearly has no idea that it comes from her! She has a really dark sense of humour, I think because she's disabled (she had polio), and it's par for the course when people have

had a tricky time to use humour to deal with things. My dad is the storyteller so that's where I get that side but she hasn't twigged yet that she's where I get my filth from.

**Going home is a real tonic.** They're proud of me but they're not impressed by celebrity, and they're just as proud of my sister, who's the manager of a job centre – and rightly so. They're not impressed by the flashy side of life and I'm not impressed by that stuff either, although I was a little bit taken aback when I met Terry Wogan. He said, "Shall we have a photo together?" after I'd done his Sunday morning show. He gave me a hug and I was like just thinking, "It's Terry Wogan!"

**Most of my friends are comics, but I have a few non-comic friends too.** My best friend is back home. In London there's a bunch of female comics and we get together every couple of months and go out for posh dinners and get all dressed up. Then there are my Manchester friends – about five or six, all

quite new, up-and-coming female comics. They're the friends I see the least because when I'm at home I just want to put my pyjamas on and watch telly.

**My relationship with my sister is really good.** She's very funny. I think a lot of people are funny – they just don't feel the need to tell everyone, whereas I clearly do! I see her as much as I can. She came down recently to meet my cat. She'd seen loads of pictures and wanted to be properly introduced.

**My cat is called Chief Brody, after the character in *Jaws*.** He'll never judge me, he never thinks that I'm hilarious but he never thinks that I'm rubbish. He always just thinks that I'm the person who provides the food and a nice warm lap. If I'm happy he makes me a little bit happier, and if I'm grumpy he nudges me in the face and it's just adorable and I just think, "Oh, everybody should have pets, why would you not have a pet?"

**My boyfriend likes it when I make jokes about him in my show.** Sometimes he says something a bit daft like we

all do and he always comes across as really funny, so it's quite a compliment and it's always affectionate. He doesn't talk about me in his routines because he just does one-liners. So if anything funny happens between us I get to use it. I make notes all the time.

**The thing that keeps me awake at night is box sets.** I stay up too late watching telly. My body clock will rarely let me fall asleep before one or two, especially if I've been performing. I'll say to myself, "Oh I'll just do one more episode," and then I rue it the next day because I need a disco nap in the afternoon. I could really do

with my cat learning to tell me to go to bed.

**I like clothes shopping but can't go in everywhere because I'm not a size ten.** I like Phase 8, Monsoon, Next, Dorothy Perkins, Marks & Spencer – high streety places that allow boobs and bellies and bums.

**I'm sort of on the fringes of exercise and fitness.** I've never been in a gym but I want to start going running again. I like the feeling afterwards; not so much the adrenaline but the smugness. I want to be able to brag about running again.

**I've just bought a house. I can't wait because I've never owned anywhere before.** It'll be lovely

to put a picture up or paint a wall without having to ask anyone. I'm also looking forward to growing vegetables.

**I don't feel guilty about anything, particularly about music that I like.** I like 80s stuff that reminds me of when I was a teenager, like Go West, and Take That. Classical music will calm me down. They piped it through train stations at one point to calm teenagers and stop them getting all stabby. I've never been stabby but sometimes I get quite stressed when I'm in the car driving and that really calms me down. *The DVD of Sarah's second sell-out headlining tour, Thoroughly Modern Millican, is out now.* **w&h**

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