

The king of 'LOL'

YouTube comedy sensation Bo Burnham posts his thoughts on Edinburgh, Hollywood and revolutionising comedy

When 20-year-old comedic wunderkind Bo Burnham hit the Edinburgh festival last year, he was the youngest person ever to be nominated for the main award. He walked away with a more beneficial accolade: Act Most Likely To Make A Million Quid. The only problem was, he probably already has.

At just 15, Burnham began recording his comedic songs in his bedroom in Hamilton, Massachusetts and posted them on YouTube for his friends. The first, "My Whole Family (Thanks I'm Gay)", racked up a million hits in the first month and is now up to more than 70 million. In short, you would hate him were he not so insanely, brilliantly funny. His verses on everything from society ("If I had a dime for every time a homeless guy asked me for change... I'd still say no") and politics ("My show is a little bit silly and a little bit pretentious. Like Shakespeare's willy. Or Noam Chomsky wearing a strap-on") to misogyny ("Swallow, bitch, there's people starving in Africa") can be as profound as they are profane.

One thing is clear: Burnham's rise has been borderline absurd. In 2008, within 18 months of posting his first clip, Comedy Central released his debut EP. Then, not wishing to rest on his laurels, Burnham hit the comedy circuit. He was invited to perform at the prestigious Just For Laughs festival in Montreal, where Hollywood director Judd Apatow saw him, casting him in 2009's *Funny People*. The two were soon working on a film together, which Burnham describes as the *Anti-High School Musical*.

Yet, rather than continue his ascent into Hollywood, Burnham plans to stay in stand-up.

"It was an incredible experience," he says of working with Apatow. "I literally learned how to write a movie from Judd. I'd like to write movies in the future, but the life of being an actor is not for me. I don't want to leave stand-up just

because there's this movie on the table. With movies, you just sit around all day and say what other people wrote. I don't really get it."

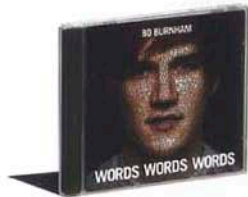
And why bother when his new CD, *Words Words Words* is the most successful musical comedy album for the past two decades? As well as being catchier than any pop song, each track brutally deconstructs all that's wrong with the American comedy circuit – quite ballsy for a comic just out of his teens.

"Before they could insult me for being a kid who uses music as a crutch, I would attack them," he says. "I came to Edinburgh because I don't think it's the case in the UK. In America, 99 per cent of comedians sound the same. That said, a lot of modern comedy can feel a little too postmodern and pretentious, so I tried to synthesise that with actual jokes, rather than making it too much like an ivory-tower commentary."

People expect Burnham to be arrogant – and he has every right to be – but he comes across as wise and learned. Confident, sure, but not cocky. Even when he is telling you what he can do to change the face of comedy.

"I have this vision of what I can do with comedy," he says, "which is actually to treat it like a serious art form, have moments of serious clarity, and really expand it into some sort of theatrical production, with every single element of theatre, lighting effects all working towards making these jokes as funny as possible." A long pause, then a sly chuckle. "And even if I fall on my face, it doesn't matter as long as I go out in a big ball of fire."

James Mullinger



● **Words Words Words (Comedy Central Records) is out now**

● **O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire, 18 June. seatwave.com**

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