

Shazia's week



My audience in Liverpool bawled about Boris. Give me Bollywood bowling instead – any day

I have performed in many inconceivable places, from an underground toilet in Forest Gate to a bunker in Kosovo that had no electricity.

This week, I was asked to host a comedy night for Redbridge Borough Council as part of its book and media festival. The event was a comedy and curry night at a Bollywood bowling alley in Ilford. The audience sat on handcrafted leather settees enjoying chicken madras while, down below, people were bowling, Bollywood-style. Each wave of laughter coincided with “Oi! Oi!”, bang, “Yeh, done it again”, and some electronic dancing from cardboard cut-outs of Bollywood stars.

On election day I arrived in Boris's favourite city – Liverpool – to perform at Anfield, the home of Liverpool Football Club. This was a corporate event for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. I walked into the banquet hall to people wailing and screaming: “No, no, he can't win!” One man stood in the middle of the room, his face maroon with rage, shouting: “Who the fuck is voting for him?” It seems Boris is not popular in Liverpool. I informed them he was not popular in a couple of London boroughs either. The maroon-coloured man carried on with his tirade: “Boris Johnson is the Robbie Williams of politics.”

The first time I appeared on *Have I Got News for You* was alongside

Boris. I had never met him before. I had been a comedian only a year or so, and I was pushed into doing the show before I actually had any jokes. That's what agents do these days, pimp their clients for as much money as possible while they can, just in case the client decides to give it all up and work at Butlins.

Boris the MP was funnier, more entertaining, better-dressed, and had more fans in the audience than I. Everything he said was met by squeals of enchanted delight from

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the women in the studio, whereas everything I said was met by: “Stop interrupting Boris.”

It is no surprise to me that he has won an election that was rather like the Eurovision Song Contest: more about hairstyles than performance, and when it's all over you can't find anyone who'll admit to having voted for the winner.

Despite the outrage from the man at Anfield, the people were very nice and came from all over the world – Norway, Denmark, Germany, Malaysia, Ireland, Austria (though any jokes regarding this country were totally out of bounds) – and also from the British Council, the official government department

for patronising foreign nations.

It's a challenge to perform to such a vast and diverse array of people, so as always I was pleased to see the bar staff and security men on the outskirts of the gig. They provide me with the warmth, comfort and laughter that can be missing on these occasions.

I had the luxury of being provided with a hire car to drive from Liverpool to London. It is always exciting driving a hire car. It's brand new and smells of a recent valet, and you just know that if you had the money you wouldn't buy it – but while you have it, it's nice to drive it up a couple of pavements and reverse-park it into a motorbike.

Unfortunately, the car didn't have sat nav. These days, driving without sat nav is like swimming the English Channel in a balaclava.

I had to do it the old-school way and stop at a series of petrol stations to ask for directions. My requests were met with: “Don't you have a sat nav?” “What's happened to your A to Z, luv?” “Don't you have a map?” Nobody thinks it necessary to know where anything is any more. “The city centre? It's in the centre, innit?” replied Fred at Texaco.

I got lost and crossed boundaries into parts of town that looked life-threatening. It took me 45 minutes to get out of Liverpool; but at least I didn't have to pay a congestion charge. ●

Shazia Mirza

PAYNE'S GREY BY CHRIS PRIESTLEY

