

The Izzard of Ha-Ha's

By Katherine Turman (www.newtimesla.com)

Comedy isn't pretty, but Eddie Izzard is. The fact that he rates as a fairly attractive transvestite, however, never overpowers his charmingly ingenuous stand-up comedy act. After scant moments on stage, his appearance takes a back seat. The British comic's high-heeled pumps, liberally applied eyeliner and crimson lipstick serve merely as interesting adjuncts to something much more interesting: his comedic take on culture and cultural history.

"Danger could be my middle name...but it's John," Izzard quipped in the 1997 home video *Glorious*, which swiftly segues from its MTV video-style opening into a stand-up routine that manages to link Lady Diana's death to the *X-Files*, and *The Six Million Dollar Man* to grannies, all the while showcasing the comedian's cheery, sometimes endearingly mumbled array of voices and personas. "If I was Hollywood, I would look at me and go, 'Great, what a buzz, but God knows what to do with him,'" Izzard mused in a recent phone conversation from San Francisco, where the comedian (his name is pronounced more like "is hard" than "blizzard") ends his run this week.

Hollywood already loves Izzard, though he's not yet a household name and has spent a grand total of about six hours in L.A. to date. The stand-up show he brings here this week--aptly titled "Dress to Kill"-- promises to change all of that.

Hollywood, in fact, utilized his dramatic, rather than comedic, talents in *The Avengers* and the forthcoming film *Velvet Goldmine*, and that's just the way Izzard wants to keep it. "If you get established as a dramatic actor, then you can go and do a comedy, and people are overjoyed to hear you've got a sense of humor," he says. "You get established as a comedy person, and you try to do Jim Carrey's flyover to more serious roles, and people get really scared."

While Robin Williams produced his hotly anticipated comedic stand at the Tiffany and he counts David Bowie among his legion of fans, Izzard stands in the eye of the hurricane, not a hair mussed, nail polish unchipped, though vaguely surprised by the American hoopla. "Initially," he begins, "it works against you: 'You're British and transvestite. Oh, that's not going to work.' Then, when it starts working: 'Oh, why didn't we think of it? Can we have something like that?'" Izzard, a fan of *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld*, himself possesses a classic if skewed humor that transcends nationality. He often takes highbrow topics and pokes fun at them. In a riff on God and the creation, he prowls the stage in his roiling gait, proclaiming, "And on the second day, he created fire and water and eggnog and Burma." Izzard's flamboyant but masculine persona and obvious intellectual leanings make his imitation of an "evil" giraffe all the more enchanting. "Before I came out as a transvestite, people said I was camp, but once I did, they said I wasn't. So I have to leave that for other people to work out. My stuff is more surreal, it's sort of Steve Martin stand-up, Richard Pryor stand-up, those are influences," he notes. "Or Monty Python, which isn't camp, it's just bonkers."

"Bonkers" aptly describes his seamless stream of consciousness approach. The move from Noel Coward to the grim reaper to a physical bit on being pummeled by stray gloves from the misnamed

automobile "glove compartment" is more of a one-man play than forced comedy bits. There is, however, one surprising aspect to his wardrobe and lifestyle, as Izzard brightly notes: Chicks dig it. "Women come up to me, and I can just tell in their eyes when they're trying to get the words out: 'I find this really kind of exciting,' " he says, imitating his admirers' hushed, stilted voices. For Izzard, a self-proclaimed "male tomboy" or "male lesbian" who likes women, well, "it's one of the gifts you get given with being 'out!'"