

= Malcolm Hardee =

Malcolm Hardee (5 January 1950 ? 31 January 2005) was an English comedian , author , comedy club proprietor , compère , agent , manager and " amateur sensationalist " .

His high reputation among his peers rests on his outrageous publicity stunts and on the help and advice he gave to successful British alternative comedians early in their careers , acting as " godfather to a generation of comic talent in the 1980s " . Fellow comic Rob Newman called him " a hilarious , anarchic , living legend ; a millennial Falstaff " , while Stewart Lee wrote that " Malcolm Hardee is a natural clown who in any decent country would be a national institution " and Arthur Smith described him as " a South London Rabelais " and claimed that " everything about Malcolm , apart from his stand @-@ up act , was original " .

Though an accomplished comic , Hardee was arguably more highly regarded as a " character " , a compère and talent @-@ spotting booker at his own clubs , particularly The Tunnel Club in Greenwich , South East London , which gave vital and early exposure to up @-@ and @-@ coming comedians during the early years of British alternative comedy . In its obituary , The Times opined that " throughout his life he maintained a fearlessness and an indifference to consequences " and one journalist claimed : " To say that he has no shame is to drastically exaggerate the amount of shame that he has " . In a publicity quote printed in Hardee 's autobiography I Stole Freddie Mercury 's Birthday Cake , Arthur Smith wrote that Hardee had " led his life as though for the perfect autobiography and now he has paid himself the compliment of writing it . "

= = Early life = =

Hardee was born in Lewisham , South East London , near the River Thames , and came from a long line of lightermen who earned their living on tugs pulling barges on the river . He was the eldest son of Frank and Joan Hardee , spent his first two years in an orphanage while his mother was in hospital with tuberculosis and was educated at three South East London schools ? St Stephen 's Church of England primary , Colfe 's School , and Sedgehill comprehensive .

Expelled from all three , he drifted into petty crime ? stealing Coca @-@ Cola from a local bottling plant , burgling a pawnbrokers and setting fire to a Sunday school piano because he wanted to see " holy smoke " . He served prison sentences for cheque fraud , burglary and escaping custody ; in 1967 , he escaped from Gaynes Hall Borstal dressed as a monk . He also had convictions for arson and once infamously stole a Rolls Royce which he believed belonged to British cabinet minister Peter Walker . (Walker later wrote to Hardee after reading about this widely reported story and denied it had been his car .)

Hardee decided to turn to showbusiness as a way of staying out of trouble , saying : " There are only two things you can do when you come out of prison and you want immediate employment . You can either be a minicab driver or you can go into showbusiness " and " Prison is like mime or juggling ? a tragic waste of time " .

= = Acts and stunts = =

After coming out of prison in 1977 or 1978 (sources vary) , Hardee joined Martin Soan 's The Greatest Show on Legs ? at the time , a one @-@ man adult Punch and Judy act . Revamped as a surreal sketch group , The Greatest Show on Legs became a regular at the Tramshed venue in Woolwich , alongside the likes of Rik Mayall and Ade Edmondson . Soon afterwards , in 1979 , The Comedy Store opened in Soho and The Greatest Show on Legs became regulars there , too . Their breakthrough came in 1982 , when they performed their naked balloon dance on Chris Tarrant 's anarchic late @-@ night TV show O.T.T ..

In 1987 , as one of his many publicity stunts , Hardee stood for Parliament in the famous Greenwich by @-@ election , 1987 , as the " Rainbow Dream Ticket , Beer , Fags & Skittles Party " candidate , polling 174 votes . He then stood again in the 1992 election in order to publicise his comedy club because the election rules allowed him a free mail shot to all registered voters in the constituency .

Hardee regularly appeared in his own shows at the Edinburgh Fringe and arguably his most infamous confirmed stunt there was in 1983 when , performing at The Circuit venue ? a series of three adjoining tents in a construction site with a different show in each tent ? he became annoyed by what he regarded as excessive noise emanating nightly from Eric Bogosian 's neighbouring performance tent . Hardee obtained a nearby tractor and , entirely naked , drove it across Bogosian 's stage during his performance . Rivalling this stunt in Fringe infamy , in 1989 , Hardee and Arthur Smith wrote a rave 5 @-@ star review of Hardee 's own Fringe show and successfully managed to get it printed in The Scotsman under the byline of the influential newspaper 's comedy critic . At the Fringe in 1996 , The Independent reported that he attempted to sabotage American ventriloquist David Strassman 's Edinburgh show by abducting the act 's hi @-@ tech dummy , holding it to ransom and sending it back to Strassman piece by piece in return for hard cash . The plan failed .

Perhaps the most @-@ quoted anecdote concerning Hardee was that , on 9 October 1986 his house was searched by the police ? who were looking for crumbs ? two days after he and others stole Freddie Mercury 's £ 4 @,@ 000 40th birthday cake . No crumbs were found at the house as he had already by then donated the cake to a local nursing home . He used this incident as the title of his 1996 autobiography I Stole Freddie Mercury 's Birthday Cake which he wrote with John Fleming . In another encounter with the police , Hardee was once questioned by Special Branch officers after being found on the balcony outside government minister Michael Heseltine 's hotel room , wearing nothing but a pair of socks and a leather coat containing £ 5 @,@ 200 in cash and a pack of pornographic playing cards . He had mistaken the room for that of a friend .

Collaborator John Fleming said of him that " At home , he occasionally put a live goldfish in his mouth to get attention ? I saw him do it twice . It was often said of Malcolm , with a lot of justification , that he never had a stage act ? his life was his act . "

In his autobiography , Hardee claimed he was the first to attempt the ' banger @-@ up @-@ the @-@ bum ' routine , later perfected and performed by Greatest Show on Legs co @-@ star Chris Lynam , in which a firework (occasionally a three @-@ stage Roman Candle) was clenched between the buttocks and lit to a recording of Ethel Merman singing " There 's No Business Like Show Business " .

The claim for which Hardee was arguably best known throughout his performing life was that he was said to have " the biggest bollocks in show business " and he became renowned for a rarely performed but vividly unforgettable act in which he would use his own spectacles atop his genitals to create a unique visual impression of French President Charles de Gaulle with his testicles representing the politician 's cheeks ; this act pre @-@ dated the Australian show Puppetry of the Penis by several years .

Hardee rarely appeared on television , though he did play minor roles in six Comic Strip TV films and one episode in the first series of Blackadder .

= = Clubs = =

Hardee was also renowned as a talent spotter and owner of clubs which gave vital early exposure to up @-@ and @-@ coming comedians including Charlie Chuck , Alan Davies , Harry Enfield , Harry Hill , Paul Merton , Vic Reeves , Frank Skinner , Johnny Vegas and Jo Brand , with whom he had a two @-@ year affair and whom he persuaded to become a comedian . He hosted the first @-@ ever outing of the new circus group Ra @-@ Ra Zoo , who performed comedy mime to a , for once , silenced audience . He also worked for a time as the manager of Jerry Sadowitz and was an occasional promoter and tour manager for his friend and neighbour Jools Holland .

His most infamous venue was The Tunnel Club , which he opened in 1984 next to the southern exit from the Blackwall Tunnel in Greenwich , South East London . He would sometimes introduce inexperienced stand @-@ ups to audiences with the nerve @-@ jangling line : " This next act 's probably a bit shit " but , once their performance was finished , he would often comfort those he thought showed promise with backstage words of encouragement and urge them to try again . His advice to comics who were concerned that a joke might be offensive to an audience was : " If you think it ? s funny , then fuck ? em . "

At his weekly Sunday Night at the Tunnel Palladium shows , sometimes even experienced and accomplished comedians failed to complete a whole set against the unforgiving crowd and razor @-@ sharp heckling . It was at the Tunnel Club that comedian Jim Tavaré once began his act with the unwise opener , " Hello , I 'm a schizophrenic " ? to be met with the lightning rejoinder from a heckler in that night 's audience , " Well , you can both fuck off then ! "

The Tunnel closed in 1988 and , in 1991 , Hardee opened the Up The Creek comedy club in Creek Road , Greenwich . In an upstairs bar at the club was a mural commissioned by Hardee as a parody of Leonardo da Vinci 's The Last Supper . It showed Hardee as Christ with Jo Brand , Julian Clary and other famous British comedians as the Disciples including Ben Elton as Judas Iscariot .

In 2001 , after he sold his percentage in Up The Creek , Hardee took over a floating pub , The Wibbly Wobbly , on a converted Rhine pleasure cruiser in Greenland Dock , Rotherhithe , by the River Thames .

= = Death and legacy = =

On 2 February 2005 , Hardee 's body was recovered from Greenland Dock , after he was reported missing from The Wibbly Wobbly on 31 January ; he had been last seen late @-@ night on 30 January . A post @-@ mortem soon confirmed he had drowned . In an inquest at Southwark Coroner 's Court on 20 July , Coroner John Sampson recorded a verdict of accidental death . It had been assumed in several reports of his death that , while trying to make his way home by dinghy from The Wibbly Wobbly to his houseboat The Sea Sovereign just fifteen yards away across Greenland Dock , Hardee had lost his balance and drowned while drunk . But the Coroner found that , whilst attempting to access The Sea Sovereign from the quayside , Hardee had fallen into the dock while drunk .

Police constable Martin Spirito told the court that , on 2 February : " The search commenced at 10.00am. At 10.24am one of the officers came up and said he had found a lifeless body . I followed the officer 's line down . Six metres down I saw a white male . The male had a bottle of beer clenched in his right hand . " Police sergeant Roy Dawson , in charge of overseeing the dive , told the court : " The bottle was held in his right hand . It fell from his hand on the ascent . "

Hardee 's date of death is usually said to be 31 January , although Coroner John Sampson said , " He was last seen on the quayside outside the Wibbly Wobbly public house at about 6am on Sunday January 30 " .

About 700 people attended his funeral at St Alfege 's Church in Greenwich ? and it was one of the few funerals ever to get rave reviews the following day in both The Daily Telegraph and The Sun newspapers . Jo Brand , Arthur Smith , Stewart Lee and his son Frank Hardee all delivered eulogies , and the musician Jools Holland played the piano . He was cremated at Hither Green in South East London .

In June 2005 , there were two tribute shows at the Glastonbury Festival ; in July , a BBC Radio 4 documentary tribute ; and , in August , two tribute shows at the Edinburgh Fringe . There were five @-@ hour tribute shows at the Hackney Empire theatre in London on 5 February 2006 and 28 January 2007 to commemorate the anniversary of his death .

= = The Annual Malcolm Hardee Awards = =

The Malcolm Hardee Award for Comic Originality is given annually at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival " for comic originality of thought or performance " . It is said that it will be presented until 2017 . Winners so far have been :

2005 ? Reggie Watts

2006 ? no award presented

2007 ? Doktor CocacolaMcDonalds

2008 ? Edward Aczel (nominees : Edward Aczel , Aindreas de Staic , The Fringe Box Office , Peter Buckley Hill , Otto Kuhnle)

2009 ? Otto Kuhnle (nominees : Three Gaga Heads , Tim Key , Otto Kuhnle , Joey Page , George

Ryegold)

2010 ? Robert White (nominees : Dr Brown , Bo Burnham , Lewis Schaffer , Bob Slayer , Robert White)

2011 ? Johnny Sorrow (nominees : Dr Brown , James Hamilton , Bob Slayer , Johnny Sorrow)

2012 ? The Rubberbandits (nominees James Hamilton , The Rubberbandits , Simon Munnery)

2013 ? Adrienne Truscott (nominees Ursula Burns , Red Bastard , Adrienne Truscott)

2014 - Candy Gigi (nominees The Birdmann , Michael Brunström , Candy Gigi)

2015 - Michael Brunström (nominees Michael Brunström , Richard Gadd , The Story Beast , Mr Twonkey)

The Malcolm Hardee Cuning Stunt Award is given for the best Fringe publicity stunt of the year .
Winners so far have been :

2008 ? Gill Smith , awarded retrospectively in 2009 , for nominating herself for a Malcolm Hardee award and putting " Malcolm Hardee Award Nominee " on her posters

2009 ? Lewis Schaffer , after convincing several publications he was sponsoring the Edinburgh Comedy Awards (or " Lewies ") for the modest sum of £ 99 (nominees : Lewis Schaffer , Shed Simove , Oliver Moore , Jennifer Warren and Charlotte Jo Hanbury)

2010 ? Stewart Lee , for successfully encouraging people to vote for little @-@ known Japanese act Frank Chickens in a poll for best fringe performer (nominees : Stewart Lee , Manos The Greek , Arthur Smith)

2011 ? Kunt and the Gang and Bob Slayer , for getting fans to put stickers depicting penises on the posters of rival acts (nominees : Tim FitzHigham , Kunt and the Gang , Sanderson Jones)

2012 ? Stuart Goldsmith , for YouTube videos about the censorship of his show Prick (nominees Nathan Cassidy , Chris Dangerfield , Stuart Goldsmith)

2013 ? Barry Ferns (nominees Barry Ferns , Richard Herring , Lewis Schaffer , Gareth Morinan)

2014 ? Christian Talbot and daughter Kate (nominees Luke McQueen , Mark Dean Quinn , Christian Talbot)

2015 - Matt Roper (nominees Miss Behave , Matt Roper , Abigoliah Schamaun)

The Malcolm Hardee ' Act Most Likely to Make a Million Quid ' Award was started in 2010

2010 ? Bo Burnham (nominees : Bo Burnham , Greg Davies)

2011 ? Benet Brandreth (nominees : Benet Brandreth , Josh Widdicombe)

2012 ? Trevor Noah (nominees Tim FitzHigham , Trevor Noah , The Rubberbandits)

2013 ? No award presented

2014 ? Luisa Omielan (nominees Luisa Omielan , Peter Buckley Hill (would have won ' The Malcolm Hardee ' Act Least Likely to Win a Million Quid ' Award ?))

2015 - Laurence Owen (nominees Sarah Callaghan , Phil Ellis , Laurence Owen , Al Porter)

The Malcolm Hardee ? Pound of Flesh ' Award was given in 2013 to an act which created " the kind of publicity money cannot ? and perhaps should not ? buy "

2013 ? Gareth Ellis (and Richard Rose)

= = Writing = =

I Stole Freddie Mercury 's Birthday Cake (autobiography ; co @-@ writer John Fleming) Fourth Estate , 1996 . ISBN 1 @-@ 85702 @-@ 385 @-@ 4 .

Sit @-@ Down Comedy (anthology , ed Malcolm Hardee & John Fleming) Ebury Press / Random House , 2003 . ISBN 0 @-@ 09 @-@ 188924 @-@ 3 .

Hardee also wrote a number of columns in comedy magazines in which he gave tips and told anecdotes about life as a comic .

= = = Obituaries and reports of his death = = =