



One love



Photo courtesy of Rex Features

An expert on Royal weddings and a roving reporter on *The One Show*, Gyles Brandreth is a very busy man. And now he's gearing up for a stand-up tour. **Kirstie Brewer** finds herself engaged in conversation

Few people wear as many hats – or woolly jumpers – as Gyles Brandreth. Not only has he sashayed his way from show business to politics and back again – he has also written for nearly every national newspaper, had a wealth of acclaimed books published and broken a couple of world records to boot. Now he is about to bring his new stand-up tour, *The One to One Show* – a rollercoaster ride of anecdotes about the notable people he has met in the worlds of show business, politics and beyond – to Surrey.

With so many competing interests, I was none too surprised when it took me three attempts to have a proper chat with the man in question. The first attempt was scuppered by the announcement of Prince William's engagement to Kate Middleton.

A frenzied phone call from Gyles confirmed that, as a confidant who has written several biographies on the royals, he had been drafted into *The One Show* to comment, and was speeding towards the studio that very second. “*Such is the nature of the beast,*” he said apologetically with a vaudeville flourish.

Twenty four hours later, when we finally manage a proper conversation, Gyles tells me he is delighted by the news of the imminent union.

“*Kate and William are of the old school like Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip; they do things properly and this could well be a royal marriage which doesn't end in divorce!*” he says.

“*Winston Churchill said Queen Elizabeth's marriage to the Duke of Edinburgh was 'a splash of colour on the*

hard road we have to travel'. I think this befits Kate and William's engagement too."

Never one to miss the opportunity to make a joke, he adds larkishly, "and Kate has waited so long that she knows exactly what's in store – she knows she is marrying a man who will be bald."

Brandreth could be considered the ultimate insider on Royal relationships; his biographies *Charles & Camilla: Portrait of a Love Affair* and *Philip & Elizabeth: Portrait of a Marriage* were the first of their kind and allowed Brandreth unprecedented access. He now visits Buckingham Palace regularly but things weren't always as comfortable.

"I used to think that when royalty leave the room it is rather like getting a seed out of your tooth – it can be a little bit awkward and a relief when it's over. It

writing the fourth in his series of Victorian murder mysteries and overseeing their adaptation for TV. Oh, and did I mention he is the former Monopoly champion of Europe and President of the Association of British Scrabble Players?

In fact, Gyles Brandreth is so firmly imprinted upon the national consciousness that it's hard to feel indifferent towards him. For a man who achieved notoriety from a single term as a Tory MP and an inclination to wear comedy cardigans, he divides opinion like a river of Marmite. But it's difficult to abstain from being at least a little curious about a man with such a colourful career history.

Yet, he rejects the charge that he is a bit of a Gyles of all trades.

"The three most potent words in the English language are 'don't dabble; focus'- I wear different hats on different days but



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isn't easy to make small talk with the Queen. There's an invisible moat around her. I talk more about that in my show."

"Prince Philip is another character who appears in my show; I first met him some 30 or more years ago and have always liked and admired him enormously. I found him to be very different to the caricature people portray. He can be very amusing- he once said to me, 'If ever you see a man opening the car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife'. He isn't always easy but his story is fascinating."

Suffice to say, the inimitable Gyles isn't short on such tales and was only too happy to share them with an entranced public in his one man comedy act 'The One to One Show', at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival last year. Following a huge sell out success, Gyles is now taking his unique blend of wit, wordplay and outrageous name-dropping all over the UK.

Indeed, he has a charming gift of making me feel like I am the sole most important thing on earth. Contrived or otherwise, he certainly knows how to work an audience. Indeed, I appear to be getting a sneak preview of the show; as he showers me with anecdotes about everyone from Michael Jackson to the Queen.

And let's face it, he's got a lot to draw on. He is a former resident of Dictionary Corner on *Countdown*, a regular on Radio 4's *Just A Minute*, a familiar face on *QI* and *Have I Got News for You* and a roving reporter on BBC1's *The One Show*. Never one to rest on his laurels, he is

I always do things properly," he insists.

In fact it is this insistence on doing things properly that's caused him to return to comedy; forty years after he gave his first, dubious stand-up performance. Having gained a little notoriety as a prime-time television presenter, he fancied himself as "god's gift to comedy" and asked his agent to book him a stand up gig. Age 20, he found himself walking into a Mancunian working man's club - to support none other than Bernard Manning. The words 'baptism of fire' spring to mind.

"Bernard took one look at me and thought, this lad is wet behind the ears," he tells me in his unmistakable, fruity voice. But his comedy routine wasn't greeted with the boos or abuse he had anticipated;

"The audience just gazed up at the stage, mesmerised. I was five minutes into my routine when I realised that Bernard had put two topless go-go girls directly behind me and they were gyrating slowly in time to my jokes."

Did he learn anything from possibly the most offensive man in the history of British comedy?

"Bernard Manning told totally unacceptable jokes... but he was very, very funny. I learnt the power of clutching an audience, looking them in the eye and feeling the fear but doing it anyway."

■ The One to One Show is at the Harlequin Theatre, Redhill, 20 Jan, (01737 276 500) and 7 Feb, New Victoria Theatre, Woking 7.30 pm (0844 871 7645)