



# How the mighty have risen

Comedian Noel Fielding talks to ANNE GIACOMANTONIO about student life and mashed potatoes

**I** arranged to interview large-haired comedian and renowned party boy Noel Fielding – one half of BBC comedy duo *The Mighty Boosh* – at 10am this particular Wednesday morning. Now, this is early for me, let alone one of these celebrity types. I am dubious I will receive the call. Sure enough, 10am ticks by and no call from Noel. Then comes 10.10am. 10.15am...

Just as I am about to write him off, the phone rings. Instead of a strop or a hissy fit, I'm greeted by a friendly and strangely familiar voice on the end of the line attempting to get to grips with my surname. Five minutes later, we move on to more pressing things.

"I just finished filming series three [of *The Mighty Boosh*] on Saturday," he explains, "and I haven't recovered from the wrap party, let alone the filming." So, all previous timing issues are forgiven too; we're on a roll.

For those of you not savvy with the ways of *The Mighty Boosh*, the comedy programme on BBC2 has rocketed in popularity over the last two years with its clever mix of surreal characters – principal among them Vince Noir and Howard Moon – and adventures. The television show graduated from a series of stage shows and then a Radio 4 programme, co-written by Fielding and his comedic partner Julian Barratt (pictured bottom right).

"We were quite ambitious this series," Fielding goes on. "We set it in a shop, Naboo's Magic, a sort of second-hand shop. Vince sells clothes, Howard sells jazz records and Naboo sells under the counter."

Fielding has been busy creating from the tender age of 13. "I used to write sketches – none of them were funny but by the time I was 16 I had a big suitcase full." After high school he went on to study fine art at Croydon Art College and "a bit at Camberwell", before continuing his studies in graphics and illustration at the University of Buckingham. Being an art student seemed to suit his personality. "The teachers pretty

much leave you to do what you like. We made some films, lots of paintings, lots of ridiculous stuff. I made some clothes for trees at some point – you can do whatever you want really.

"What happens with art is that you are all lumped in together. So, you are in with the fashion students, the textile students, the illustrators, the jewellery makers, and pretty much everyone's the same. Also, no one gets in before 2pm and those people usually go out late. It was quite good fun."

Apparently this happy arty bunch weren't universally popular though. "The engineering students hated us. It was a bit like being dinosaurs – we were the herbivores and they were the carnivores, and only when we made it to the art block were we safe." Sounds like a perilous existence.

"I didn't have much money but that's kind of part of the fun, isn't it? Buying second-hand clothes and eating hardly any food at all." Mashed potato on toast is Fielding's recommendation for cheap student food. "That was our thing, though I'm sure there are no vitamins or anything good in it at all."

During university he also managed to find time for some stand-up. "I used to dress up as Jesus and do Mick Jagger impressions – it was a bit strange – and I used to spray holy water out of a water pistol. I'm not sure how funny it was, but that was the thing that led me to do stand-up!"

"I did my first gig when I was at university. I went down with all my mates to Cambridge, and had to do 15 minutes because some of the other comedians didn't turn up. Phil Jupitus was there and he was really nice actually, because I thought I couldn't do it and he just said, 'You'll be fine, they're only people,' and gave me a hug! I guess I have always been good at just getting around and making people laugh a bit. I didn't really think you could do that as a job."

After graduating he went back for more, touring around universities on the comedy circuit. "A lot of them were really good, though some of them were just awful!" Fielding honed his comedic skill at unorganised gigs in student bars up and down the country. "Everybody was drunk, they hadn't been away from home for that long. Just the worst crowd I have ever, ever, ever experienced. They were the most horrific gigs, but I did them for five years and got quite good at them. By the end I was really enjoying it."

And of all the universities, which was the most appreciative? "Manchester, probably – my stuff always worked really well there." And with that he was off, though whether to make a pair of trousers for a tree or go back to bed, we can't be sure.

Series three of *'The Mighty Boosh'* starts on BBC Three in November



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