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## All aboard for fatherhood



Chris Dingli in a past edition of Comedy Knights.

*The giggles, the cuddles and the serene family unit – that’s fatherhood right? Well, not according to comedian **Chris Dingli**. As he tells **Jo Caruana**, he’s been a bit of a Bad Dad.*

Becoming a dad is a moment most men cherish. Yes, it kick-starts a huge change and concludes the concept of the lie-in for approximately 18 years, but it’s obviously totally worth it. Right?

Well, not exactly, according to comedian, actor and writer Chris Dingli, who has written a whole show about the shock of become a dad for the first time – to his beautiful daughter Imogen, who recently turned one. Of course, he’s quick to say that it’s not all bad, but it certainly hasn’t been a walk in the park.

First up, though, is Chris really the ‘bad dad’ he’s professing to be, or – more likely – is he an amazing dad to his little girl?

“Well, I’m currently in the process of trying to answer that question by observing my own behaviour while writing a show about it,” he tells me with a grin. “But, to be honest, maybe the fact that I am willing to use my infant daughter to sell doesn’t bode too well...”

That said, he stresses that he’s not simply making light of the topic of parenting in this play; the humour is very much about honesty, and he stresses that he’s not seeing to belittle or parody fatherhood in any way. “I simply want to present a light-hearted look at certain aspects of it,” he says.

Chris explains he’s always been drawn to the idea of doing a solo show, but hadn’t found the right subject matter to write about. “Then, one fine night, my wife told me that she was pregnant,” he quips. “I must admit that, over the next few months, I experienced what some might call a nervous breakdown. Even though her pregnancy wasn’t a surprise, the thought of becoming a father was a source of huge trepidation for me.”

The actor had always assumed that, as you get older, your attitude automatically shifts and you gradually start becoming more paternal in your outlook. He believed raising children was simply a natural expression of that new, grown-up view of life. “Well, I’ve since learned that, while that may be true for some people, it doesn’t apply to all. It certainly wasn’t the case with me. Quite the opposite in fact. I found that the older I got, the less inclined I felt towards wanting to start a family.”



In fact, as the father of a one-year-old child, Dingli admits that he finds himself in a position where his newfound role is still rather alien to him. “Parenting has not come naturally to me, far from it. I don’t seem to feel the things other parents say they feel, or think the way other parents say they think. It seemed to me that, for the sake of my daughter, I should step up and be a dad, albeit a man-child of a dad. I therefore began to search for a shift in thinking that could help me prepare for my

new circumstances,”

Thus, he admits this show was borne out of that effort to reconcile that lack of parental aptitude with being a dad and somehow, try to make things work. As a result, Bad Dad has become a semi-autobiographical journey for Chris, and he will be spending his time on stage talking about his experiences of fatherhood so far.

His story is one of self-analysis and observation. It will be told through anecdotes, examples and set-pieces that most people – especially mums and dads – will recognise and enjoy. Chris will be playing all sorts of zany characters in the show and he explains that it is going to be quite demanding, both physically and mentally.

“The story is also rather personal at times, and I am very truthful about certain aspects of fatherhood. One of the things that I initially set out to do was to present my case, warts and all. No holds barred. I think that remains true and that’s one of the things that makes the show funny. It’s truthful and personal. I invite everyone to come and laugh at my pain.”

As always with Chris (who is well-known for penning popular sketches and performing with The Comedy Knights, as well as for his shows with co-comedian Malcolm Galea) the main thing audiences should expect is laughter. He assures me this show will be no different; it will be packed full of jokes, laughs and some very funny physical bits.

“It sounds clichéd to say that writing it is therapeutic and that it’s a journey of self-discovery, but that is exactly what it is. The challenge has been to take my observations and present them in a way that is interesting and fun for an audience without being self-indulgent. That means exposing myself emotionally to that audience. Vulnerability is daunting, more so when it’s a personal story such as this.

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“What I’m trying to say, is that it’s not easy, but not for the reasons that one might think. I guess I’m approaching this show in a similar way as I do when writing The Comedy Knights. I take a serious issue, turn it on its head and see how it becomes very funny. Well, that’s the plan anyway.”

So, with comedy at the centre of his life, it looks like there are lots of laughs in this actor’s future. While Chris and his young family recently returned to Malta from London, he has plenty of hilarity lined up before he takes his next major overseas move: he is working on the next instalment of The Comedy Knights this Christmas and getting involved in stand-up comedy, while also hosting the Big Drive Home on XFM. He is then planning to take Bad Dad overseas to the UK and the US.

“I think Maltese comedy is undergoing something of a renaissance at the moment and we’re seeing an increasing number of original works being produced. As a person who makes a living writing and performing comedy, I think that this is a wonderful thing.”

Although audiences flock to comedies, he believes the art form is still seriously underrated.

“I do think that cultural authorities and private entities should give more weight to the value of original comedy. However, this attitude towards comedy is not restricted to the Maltese islands. Comedy is pretty much universally viewed as drama’s poor cousin, even though it is way more popular amongst audiences.”

That said, speaking of audience attendance, Dingli explains that independent producers know that comedies are safe bets.

“I trained as a dramatic actor and would love to see more dramas being produced,” he says. “But dramas are much less well-attended when compared to comedies, making them bigger financial risks. I find the brave producers who do produce hard-hitting dramas very admirable, and vital to the future of Maltese theatre. I urge audiences to watch as much drama as they would comedy.

“Although, I do suggest that they start with coming over to have a laugh at Bad Dad!” he adds with a cheeky smile.

*Bad Dad runs on Friday, Saturday and next Sunday at Blue Box Theatre, Msida. Tickets are available online.*

[www.baddadshow.com](http://www.baddadshow.com)

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