

LIFE ARGUS



Jill runs her course from Brighton Komedia



Find out what Jimmy Carr, Seann Walsh and Romesh Ranganathan have in common

BIG name comedians such as Romesh Ranganathan, Seann Walsh and many others grace our stages and screens on a regular basis.

But what you may not know is a host of our most popular stand-up comics learned all they know at a school in Brighton.

Run by Jill Edwards, who has more than 20 years in comedy under her belt, the Jill Edwards Comedy Course has given comedians the country over the tools they need to make people laugh. Jill talks to JAMIE WALKER about teaching people comedy and how it feels when they go on to bigger things.

WHEN you turn on your TV you are almost bound to see a comedian or two.

Stand-up comics, if they are good enough, are often given the chance to host or appear on programmes on the small screen.

Whether it's 8 Out Of 10 Cats Does Countdown, A League Of Their Own or The Mash Report, those looking for a laugh need not go far.

And there is one Brighton woman who – unknown to many – has been the driving force behind more than just a few of the comedians we see on our TVs today.

In 2005 Jill Edwards launched the Jill Edwards Comedy Course with one simple idea, to teach the art of stand-up to people across the country.

The course is held at Brighton Komedia, the most well-known comedy venue in the city,

and has seen hundreds pass through its doors.

Jill used to be a comedian herself but now she takes pride in teaching others the art form.

She said: "I've always been in comedy, the whole of my life, right from the very beginning that's what I wanted to do.

"I was making a living as half of a double act, and we were playing all the clubs and my double act partner decided they didn't want to carry on, which was devastating.

"I was looking for things to do and started writing, and people said I should teach stand-up comedy because I knew the scene really well. People said you can't teach stand up comedy, I said 'I bet you can'.

"If you go to drama or art school but you're not destined to be an actor or artist then you aren't going to be, I didn't understand why comedy couldn't be the same thing.

"You're helping people access the talent they have."

If you turn on your TV and see the likes of Jimmy Carr, Seann Walsh, Romesh Ranganathan, Angela Barnes, Hal Cruttenden and Shappi Khorsandi you may not think they have a lot in common apart from their career.

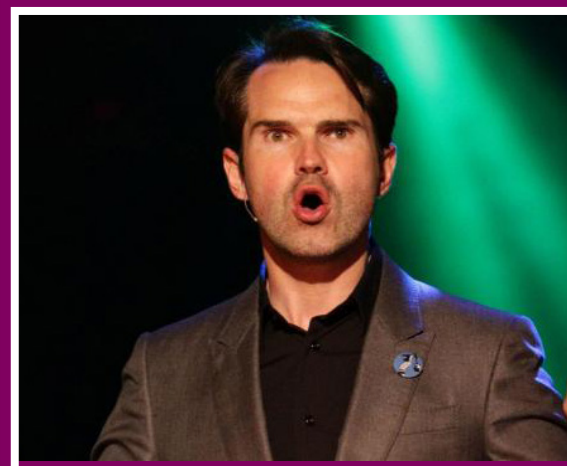
But you would be wrong – they have all, along with many others, attended the Jill Edwards Comedy Course at some point.

All of the names above have made numerous TV appearances and completed stand-up tours and while Jill may miss performing herself, she relishes seeing her graduates succeed.

She said: "There is nothing that compares to the excitement of seeing people you've trained on stage or on TV.

"I've had some lovely moments where I'm watching someone on TV for the first time and they're texting me at the same time.

"I've also seen graduates who had done my course early, working with those who have done it more recently.



Jill Edwards, pictured here standing, runs her comedy course in Brighton. Her successes include, right from top, Romesh Ranganathan, Jimmy Carr and Seann Walsh

"There was one show that had four of them on it and they were all from different eras of the course. Seeing them achieve stuff and be happy makes me very emotional."

You only have to look at Jill's website to find out what her graduates make of her work.

Jimmy Carr, the host of Channel 4 shows such as 8 Out Of 10 Cats Does Countdown and The Big Fat Quiz, said: "People say comedy can't be taught. They could learn a lot from Jill Edwards."

Romesh Ranganathan, from Crawley, who gave up his career as a teacher to pursue comedy after taking the course, said: "I felt like I had hit a plateau. After my first lesson with Jill, things just moved on immediately."

"People were telling me I'd improved hugely and I was being offered better and better gigs."

"Jill's advice enabled me to establish myself and move on to the next level. I wouldn't be a professional comic if it wasn't for Jill Edwards."

Shappi Khorsandi said: "The experience was immense fun and I would recommend it to anyone interested in comedy."

And Angela Barnes, who lives in Brighton, said: "I cannot recommend Jill Edwards' stand-up course highly enough."

"It's incredibly valuable in getting you started."

"This comedy course can change your life, and I sincerely mean that."

Jill runs a two-hour course for those who want to "dip a toe in" to comedy, or a longer one that runs over 12 Saturdays at Komedia, where budding comics will learn the ropes and practise on stage.

Much like acting, Jill said there was a moment you can tell someone has got "it", adding that the course teaches more than just comedy.

She said: "I think there's a big difference between someone who is going to become a stand-up comic and some who might just do a

few open mic nights."

"There's a moment where you know they've got it. All the people I've taught who have done well have been very hard working, very good at listening and very savvy about the business of it."

"But there are no guarantees that everyone is going to end up being a comedian."

"If it's not your destiny then it's not your destiny, but you may have a really nice time and get some confidence."

As well as creating some of the biggest names in British comedy, Jill also has her own comedy night at Komedia to help bring through up and coming talent.

The Comic Boom night runs once a month and features some of the best new talent on the comedy circuit.

"The idea for the show came from seeing all these great new act nights in Brighton," Jill said.

"If you're just starting out there's loads of

places to play."

"But there's the new act nights, then the big act nights and there's a massive gap in between."

"So Comic Boom is to fill that gap, so that people who have been performing for a couple of years, who have been impressing, can come here first, play a big room, learn about it when the stakes aren't as high, and then move forward."

"It's so difficult to go from playing 30 people in a pub to then the likes of the Glee Club in Birmingham (420 capacity), that's so different."

"It's something in the middle, where I can give them advice like not to play the front row but the back, or get the mic technique right."

"Whoever I put on for Comic Boom will be someone I'm interested in, because the idea is to grow and facilitate new talent."

To learn more about Jill's courses or Comic Boom visit www.jill-edwards.co.uk.