

COMEDY



BBC Northern Ireland



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The Blame Game, Tim McGarry, Jake O'Kane Neil Delamere and Colin Murphy

Comedy 2006

Introduction by Peter Johnston, Head of Broadcasting, BBC Northern Ireland	3
Foreword by Jackie Hamilton, Executive Producer, Comedy Unit	5
The Blame Game	7
Dry Your Eyes	13
Folks On The Hill	14

Taking the not-very-serious very seriously

Comedy needs to be taken seriously. On the face of it, of all the different kinds of programmes the BBC makes, comedy seems like the one with least obvious pure public purpose, but the evidence suggests that it is one of the most powerful of all the genres.

At its best, it provides a different but very rich insight into contemporary society and its attitudes – the characters and situations of *Little Britain* and *The Office* are all too familiar and perhaps make us think about subjects in a new light.

Great comedy still brings together large numbers of people to enjoy and talk about the same communal experience. It provides a platform for talents who often go on to have other creative impacts – would we have Michael Palin and *Himalaya* without Monty Python? Sometimes, at its simplest, it provides welcome light relief from the other more weighty subjects we cover.

BBC NI's relationship with comedy goes back a long way. It was always an obvious priority here – some of the worst of our society can only be viewed safely through satire. We also seem to have developed more than our fair share of comedians and our most successful shows have truly united very large numbers of people. The *Give My Head Peace* Christmas special, even after 70 episodes, attracted an audience of 233,000.

The tricky bit with comedy is developing genuine hits – recent audience research helpfully concluded that the secret to developing successful comedy programmes was to “make them funny”. It is, of course, often a very subjective business, but we have had more than



**Peter Johnston, Head of Broadcasting,
BBC Northern Ireland**

our fair share of hits from James Young to *PK Tonight* to *Give My Head Peace*.

In order to extend this run, we set up the Comedy Unit under Jackie Hamilton over two years ago now. The aims were to put specific development funding into comedy, to have a team who could reach out to new and established talents and to develop a number



The Give My Head Peace Christmas Special attracted an audience of 233,000

of projects across TV and radio to create a portfolio of programmes covering different tastes and genres.

We also hope that the critical mass and relationships established will stimulate other ideas and uncover new talents. Humour has always spontaneously run through the veins of BBC Radio Ulster and we have now established a fixed comedy slot on Saturday mornings as a regular showcase with recent series including *The Blame Game* and *Folks on the Hill*.

These programmes do act as an important counterbalance to our often heavy news agenda. Working with and finding the talent is

vital and we have developed some people through radio on to limited TV exposure, to more ambitious projects and on to network in some cases.

Many of the stars who emerge can also add significant social value back to our society – they are much sought after to front local charity events or educational initiatives.

In 2006 and beyond, we hope that viewers of BBC Northern Ireland television and listeners of BBC Radio Ulster can sit back, relax and, moreover, have a laugh, safe in the knowledge that BBC NI will continue to take comedy and all its qualities very seriously indeed.

There's no business like the funny business



Jackie Hamilton,
Executive Producer, Comedy Unit,
BBC Northern Ireland

“‘The funny business’ - a throw away line often used to describe the silliness of the world in which my team and I work. However, to succeed in providing audiences with relevant shows which stand the test of time, we must get both the ‘funny’ and the ‘business’ right.

Much of the past two years since the birth of the Comedy Unit has been about ensuring that we are the first port of call for emerging and established comedy talent when it comes to talking about their new ideas.

We like to think of ourselves as a hub which offers support, guidance and direction to talent, based on an understanding of the different kinds of comedy which we believe our audience likes.

Just like audiences, comedy talent comes in all forms; the lone writer, the stand up comedian, the ensemble, the complete unknown and the household name. While bearing in mind the varied tastes of our audiences when making our decisions, we recognise that each of these talents requires a different type of opportunity to help them grow and flourish.

The Comedy Unit recently seized the opportunity to showcase Irish comedy talent by staging and filming three shows called One Night Stand at the Belfast Festival at Queen's. These shows featured 23 comedians from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Many relative new comers to television, such as Maeve Higgins, John Colleary, John Lynn, Rachael McCabe and Neil Dougan shared the limelight with more established comedians such as Kevin McAleer, Owen O'Neill and Michael Smiley. These programmes, hosted by Jake O'Kane will broadcast in March.

With our extended family of writers and performers, my team and I within the Comedy Unit have been busy developing and piloting new formats and ideas for radio, television and new media.



John Lynn



Kevin McAleer

Narrative comedy – written comedy that doesn't just fall into the sit-com or sketch show categories - has been a priority as we look to find comedy formats of the future.

'10 X 10 Funnies' is a writing initiative in which we invited more than 40 emerging and established local writers to submit outlines for new sitcoms.

Ten of these submissions will be developed into 10 minute comedies which will be broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster. Who knows, maybe in the future one of those short comedies will have the same impact as Give My Head Peace?

An early success for the Comedy Unit has been The Blame Game on BBC Radio Ulster. This comedy panel show, which features both established and rising comedy talent as they lampoon the week's news and current affairs, will soon be seen on BBC ONE NI in January.

Looking after established talent and brands is also a key task of the Comedy Unit. Indeed, Folks On The Hill and Give My Head Peace are hugely popular with families in Northern Ireland and continue to attract large audiences.

This year will see the launch of Dry Your Eyes, a new six-part, 30-minute BBC ONE NI comedy sketch series with The Hole In The Wall Gang - the team behind Give My Head Peace. This series shows

a 'Norn Iron' with all the unique characters that make this place special and features new writing and performing talent.

As well as launching some of our new shows in 2006, we will continue to develop new talent and experiment with new ideas and formats.

Evidence of this will be heard around April Fools, which provides us with an appropriate opportunity to experiment when we let our comedians take the helm at BBC Radio Ulster.

Colin Murphy and a host of other talent will have the station all to themselves in I Can't Believe It's Not Radio Ulster.

Irreverence and humour will be the buzz words of the day as we adjust the tone and personality of the station with some shows that will hopefully prove to be a success for the audience, the comedians and writers and BBC Northern Ireland.

Finally, presenting Irish talent on the national stage is a natural progression for the BBC Northern Ireland Comedy Unit and we currently have three scripts in development with our network colleagues at BBC ONE and BBC THREE.

It's a funny old business, the funny business, but with our audience at the heart of everything we do and our ambition to help develop talent, we are determined to get big memorable laughs."

Jackie Hamilton
Executive Producer, Comedy Unit



Maeve Higgins

Pointing the finger and poking some fun

BBC Radio Ulster hit *The Blame Game* comes to BBC ONE NI
The Blame Game, on Friday January 27 at 10.35pm on BBC ONE NI



*The usual suspects . . . Jake O'Kane, Neil Delamere, Tim McGarry and Colin Murphy star in *The Blame Game**

A new season of comedy set to tickle the ribs of BBC Northern Ireland viewers kicks off in January with the no-holds-barred series *The Blame Game*.

Already a hit on its home of BBC Radio Ulster, *The Blame Game* will make its television debut on BBC ONE NI on Friday, January 27 at 10.35pm.

The Blame Game has been amusing BBC Radio Ulster listeners since its beginnings in October 2005 as host Tim McGarry and his team of outspoken panellists name, shame and, more importantly, blame just about everyone and everything for all the latest news and current affairs headlines.

The *Blame Game* panel is a mix of established and up-and-coming talent with one thing in common – they are not afraid to speak



The Blame Game

their minds. One of Northern Ireland's top contemporary comics, Colin Murphy, joins Belfast funny man Jake O'Kane and Dublin newcomer Neil Delamere as regular members of The Blame Game panel. Each week, they will be joined by a special guest comedian.

Having already struck up plenty of rapport over the months on BBC Radio Ulster, Colin, Jake and Neil can ensure plenty of quick-firing banter, insults and, of course, finger-pointing as they battle it out to see who's the best at apportioning blame – and Colin and Neil set about their own private battle of north versus south.

Like the BBC Radio Ulster version of the programme, The Blame Game on BBC ONE NI will feature a series of rounds in which no subject is too taboo and no one is exempt from condemnation as the panellists pinpoint the perpetrators behind the week's biggest stories.

Recorded in front of a studio audience, rounds include an impromptu look at the papers, questions from the audience and a vox pops section from the public.

The Blame Game host Tim McGarry says: "The Blame Game does for politics what Johnny Adair does for house prices in Troon."

We all love a good whinge and when you can't complain then it's always good to blame. And if you don't think the programme is funny; don't blame me, blame the panel!"

The Blame Game producer Raymond Lau says: "The Blame Game is quite simply a different way of doing topical stand up. In an age of sound bite politics and political correctness, the only people left who can actually tell it like it is are comics. Informing, entertaining and very possibly annoying, The Blame Game will hopefully raise as many eyebrows as it does belly laughs.

"Very typically Northern Irish, The Blame Game picks up on that quintessential trait we seem to have, where we don't just like to complain about things, but apportion blame as to why things are not working, usually in an attempt to clear ourselves of any responsibility. We perhaps should have called it It's Not My Fault, the irony being, if you don't like the show you can blame me."

Tim McGarry



Tim McGarry has the difficult job of keeping the comedians in line as host of The Blame Game

The Hole in the Wall Gang's Tim McGarry, who is a familiar face on BBC Northern Ireland through programmes such as Give My Head Peace and Hearts & Minds, is the host of The Blame Game. Like a cheap pair of binoculars, Tim has the rather unenviable task of keeping the other comedians focused the questions asked.

Why do you think Northern Ireland people like to apportion blame?

"Because it's more fun than admitting you're wrong."

How have you enjoyed hosting The Blame Game on BBC Radio Ulster?

"It's been great. Everyone on the show has enjoyed themselves and that comes across on the radio."

Are you looking forward to hosting The Blame Game on television?

"Absolutely, although I'm worried that people will be disappointed by how ugly the rest of the panel is."

What can BBC ONE NI viewers expect?

"A good laugh, devastating satire and lots of jokes about Derry."

What aspect of The Blame Game can we blame on you?

"I bring order to the anarchy. I keep things under control and keep it funny when the panel dries up."



Colin Murphy



Cool kid Colin Murphy is quick off the mark when it comes to apportioning blame

One of Northern Ireland's top comedians, cool man Colin Murphy is no stranger to BBC Northern Ireland, having recently fronted the programmes, TV Fads and Ad Fads. A popular draw on the stand-up circuit – including the Edinburgh Festival – Colin has also appeared in BBC NI comedy programmes such as Return of the Empire, People Like Us, Something for the Weekend, Elvis Has Left the Building, Comedy Nation, Comic Asides and The Empire Laughs Back, I Fought The Law and the dramas Holy Cross and Eureka Street. Colin is also a regular compere at the Empire Comedy Club.

Why do you think Northern Ireland people like to apportion blame?

“Otherwise things would be all our own fault.”

How have you enjoyed being a panellist on The Blame Game on BBC Radio Ulster?

“Getting paid to slag people off? What’s not to like?”

Are you looking forward to The Blame Game coming to BBC ONE NI?

“It’s about time.”

What can BBC ONE NI viewers expect?

“Slanging matches, slagging and talking crap. Just your average BBC Northern Ireland show.”

What aspect of The Blame Game can we blame on you?

“A healthy disregard for my own safety.”



Jake O’Kane



Jake O’Kane can always find someone to grouch about

Jake O’Kane is a well-known face on the Northern Ireland comedy circuit, being compere at the Empire Comedy Club for more than 10 years now. As well as gathering a loyal following doing stand-up with his observation of ‘Norn Iron’, Jake has also appeared in the BBC NI programmes The Stand Up Show and Two Ceasefires and a Wedding.

Why do you think Northern Ireland people like to apportion blame?

“Because it’s always somebody’s fault.”

How have you enjoyed being a panellist on The Blame Game on BBC Radio Ulster?

“To be associated even tangentially with gods like George Jones and Uncle Hugo has been a thrill.”

Are you looking forward to The Blame Game coming to BBC ONE NI?

“Yeah. And the money’s not bad either.”

What can BBC ONE NI viewers expect?

“Hopefully a lot of people getting annoyed over nothing much.”

What aspect of The Blame Game can we blame on you?

“I bring age, experience; an amazing memory for facts, age, experience, an amazing memory for facts, age, experience, an amazing memory for facts, age; experience, an amazing memory for facts. Can I have my tea now?”



Neil Delamere



DUBLINER Neil Delamere shows his competitive side in *The Blame Game*, mainly against Belfast man Colin Murphy

Neil Delamere is the resident Dubliner of *The Blame Game* team. One of the most hotly-tipped headlining acts on the Irish comedy scene, Neil has taken his comedy talent around the world performing at festivals in places as far-flung as Montreal, Adelaide and the Edinburgh Festival, where he debuted in 2004 to good reviews. Neil comperes various comedy gigs around Dublin.

Why do you think Northern Ireland people like to apportion blame?

“Because it keeps their minds off other stuff – the weather, global warming.”

How have you enjoyed being a panellist on *The Blame Game* on BBC Radio Ulster?

“Yes, it’s been great. Jake O’Kane keeps touching me in inappropriate ways throughout the show though. It’s to put me off. He’s very much a diva in that way.”

Are you looking forward to *The Blame Game* coming to BBC ONE NI?

“Yeah, it should be fun and obviously we can do different things on TV than on radio. McGarry will have to stop wearing a bustier for a start.”

What can BBC ONE NI viewers expect?

“Us abusing various people, institutions, inanimate objects and fish.”

What aspect of *The Blame Game* can we blame on you?

“I am to blame for my limited local knowledge of Northern Ireland and in the mistakes I make trying to understand stuff that the lads keep trying to explain to me. What exactly is brown lemonade?”

The *Blame Game* starts on BBC ONE NI on Friday, January 27 at 10.35pm. The series returns to BBC Radio Ulster in February.



Life's a sketch

Brand new comedy sketch show from the writers of Give My Head Peace
Coming soon to BBC ONE NI



The cast of BBC Northern Ireland's new sketch show Dry Your Eyes

A side-splitting, rollercoaster ride of laughs is promised from a brand new comedy sketch show coming soon to BBC ONE Northern Ireland.

Dry Your Eyes is the latest comedy offering from the writers of BBC Northern Ireland's hit sitcom Give My Head Peace.

Damon Quinn, Tim McGarry and Michael McDowell have once again joined forces to produce a hilarious new series.

Dry Your Eyes features performances from the three writers as well as the talents of Marty Reid (Uncle Andy from Give My Head Peace) and introducing Sharon Norwood, Martin McCann and Emma Little.

The comedy team play a whole range of characters from the drole, motorcycling mad McDowell Brothers to Arthur Heckler; Cos I'm Irish the leprechaun and the Trendy Priest.

Damon Quinn explains: "We are excited about this new project and it's been a great opportunity to try out new comedy ideas and introduce new comedy talent.

"We have spent the past few months writing and filming and are pleased with the results.

"It's a temporary move away from Give My Head Peace for us and is made up of a series of short sketches featuring new characters.

"We are delighted to be able to welcome on board actors Sharon Norwood, Martin McCann and Emma Little, which is a credit to BBC Northern Ireland in its commitment to bringing on local talent and promoting local comedy.

"We hope viewers will enjoy the series as much as we have while making it."

Note to editors:

Further press information, images and cast interviews will be available closer to transmission.

That's not all folks . . .

Folks on The Hill still making a good impression on BBC Radio Ulster and BBC ONE NI



The Folks On The Hill has enjoyed great success on the airwaves and on BBC ONE NI since its beginnings on BBC Radio Ulster

Although enjoying seven series on BBC Radio Ulster and five series on BBC ONE NI, the satirical sketch show The Folks On The Hill is most certainly not over the hill.

Since its beginnings on BBC Radio Ulster more than four years ago, The Folks On The Hill has continued to amuse audiences with its wry and deeply comical look at the world of Northern Irish politics and beyond.

No one is safe from satire as local writer and impressionist Sean Crummey pokes fun at the worlds of politics, showbusiness and sport at home and further afield.

The Folks On The Hill has been a popular listen on BBC Radio Ulster on Saturday mornings since 2001 and the popularity of the programme increased further two years ago when it made its television debut on BBC ONE NI.



The Folks On The Hill

With Sean Crummey continuing to provide the uncanny impressions, the televised version added a new dimension to the programme as animator Liam O'Neill provided hilarious computer-generated images of all the politicians and celebrities.

These 'virtual' politicians are created by computer using the same software technology that brought movies Toy Story and The Incredibles to life. It takes approximately eight - 10 days to create each 'virtual' politician. Four-five days to model and another four days to 'wire' the model for movement and expressions.

The results are hilarious. Where else would you see Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley playing chess?

Owen McFadden, who produces The Folks On The Hill for BBC Radio Ulster and BBC ONE NI says:

"The Folks On The Hill has grown from strength to strength since it started on BBC Radio Ulster. The comedy is first class and the impersonations are spot on.

"We've had lots of feedback from viewers and the politicians featured in the series have also commented on what it was like to see their virtual 'clones'.



Folks On The Hill writer and impressionist Sean Crummey

"With The Folks On The Hill, we hope to be as topical as possible so we're right up to date with what's happening on the political scene here and able to give viewers a satirical picture of the day or week's events."

The Folks On The Hill can currently be heard on BBC Radio Ulster at I am on Saturday Mornings. A new series on BBC ONE NI will be broadcast later this year.

BBC RADIO ULSTER