

'Forget comedy – I'd rather read a book!

He's one of the world's living comedy legends. A founding member of the Monty Python gang – whose TV series spawned a phenomenon of stage shows, films, books and a smash-hit West End musical – and the star and co-writer of one of the most iconic BBC sitcoms of all time, *Fawlty Towers*.

John Cleese and his comic creations have inspired generations, but his talents aren't only confined to the comedic realm. The all-rounder has an impressive back catalogue of successful movie credits under his belt too. From *The Life of Brian* and *A Fish Called Wanda* to the James Bond, *Harry Potter* and *Shrek* franchises, he's made a name as an outstanding actor.

Now, at 76, he's clearly even more unfiltered than ever and is on the road with fellow Python, Eric Idle. Ahead of his arrival in Australia this month the comic opens up to *Yours* about his passion for therapy, touring and making people laugh.

Yours: You've said "no two shows will be quite the same" on this tour. Will you add a few Aussie-specific touches for us?

John: We've got some already. There's our famous Bruces sketch (from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*) and – without giving too much away – I'm sure we'll introduce a few other local touches! When I was growing up, Australia was actually very top of my mind and over the years I've been here regularly.



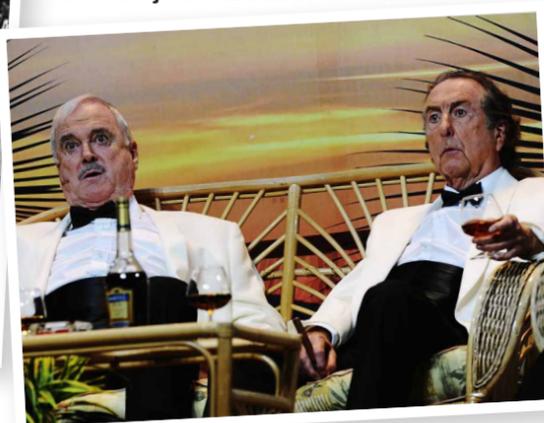
Funnyman **JOHN CLEESE, 76**, tells *Paul Ewart* about marriage, movies and why it's far better to share a stage than go solo



PRIDE AND GROOM John seems so happy with his wife Jennifer



IDLE WORSHIP John (far left) works with other members of Python from time to time and is touring with Eric Idle (left and below right) on his latest comedic jaunt around Australia



Yours: How does performing solo compare to doing it as a double act?

John: I've done a lot of one-man shows, but it's a lot more fun doing it with somebody else. Also, you play bigger halls – with Eric, we'll perform to crowds of 3000. Neither of us find it too daunting, which we both know that it would be if we were on our own. Having someone else there relaxes you and you get a few breaks when the other one is telling a story. It can get a bit tiring otherwise.

Yours: You've talked about your very happy times with the Pythons. Does touring with Eric make you nostalgic?

John: I don't think so. There are some Python shows I haven't seen for years, and I mean years, 20 or 30 years. These days, often the audience know the lines and the sketches better than we do! There are people out there who have the sketches memorised, while we don't remember them three months afterwards. It's often strange to meet audience members who know your material better than you do!

Yours: So many comedians cite you as inspiration for their own humour. What do you think of today's comedy scene?

John: I'm afraid I don't know much about it. I've discovered that as I get older and finish my day's work, it hardly ever occurs to me now – at my

grand old age of 76 – to do anything other than read a book. I find reading books so exciting. There's so much information out there now, particularly in my area of interest, psychology. I'm reading a couple of absolutely fabulous books at the moment. I get so much more out of it than watching a sitcom. Not that I wouldn't enjoy it, but I'd rather read a book. I'm from an older generation, so I want to read an actual book – not a Kindle. I want a physical book in my hand.

'These days, often the audience know the lines better than we do!'

Yours: Speaking of psychology, you've been a big advocate for therapy over the years.

John: I'm an advocate for good therapy. If you're lucky enough to find a good therapist, then it can be very helpful. It can be a great way to educate yourself and your feelings. I think that any kind of practice where you try and look at yourself objectively – whether it's religious through some kind of meditation or yoga or something like that, or whether it's just in therapy – is good for us, because it allows us to become slightly happier and better people. The human mind is in some ways rather wonderful, but in others it's not a very honest machine.

Yours: You've got a great list of movie credits to your name, but claim you don't like making films. Why is that?

John: I particularly don't like making films because it completely takes over your life. It's rather like being back at school. When you get into your forties, you like to be able to make decisions about your own life, but you can't do that if you're an actor. Long days with lots of waiting around and sitting in trailers. You can do a jigsaw or write cards but you can't tackle a difficult book; the moment you start to absorb it you're told to get on set! Boring.

Yours: You married your fourth wife Jennifer Wade in 2012. How is married life this time around?

John: She's a real one-off, this one! She has an extraordinary, mischievous sense of humour. What is so attractive about her is that... well, we've consisted of three "parts." Part of us is the wise person, part of us is the adult and part of us is the child. Most of the time people are walking around trying to pretend they're very important, that they have lots of money and deserve respect; they lose that childlike quality, they don't have any fun and they don't have much humour. With Jenny it's the opposite – she's just full of fun and humour. ●

Cleese & Eric Idle: Together Again at Last... For the Very First Time tours nationally from February 25. Visit abpresents.com.au for tickets