

WEB'S DARK SIDE INSPIRED COMIC DAVID

TACKLING TOXIC TROLLS



CLASSIC: David and Frank Skinner co-wrote Three Lions anthem

MISSION: Comedy is David's main weapon when dealing with trolls on the internet



Picture: TESS HALLMANN

THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW

DAVID BADDIEL
WRITER & COMEDIAN



TRAWLING through his Twitter feed most days, David Baddiel is greeted by a lot of what he calls "mad s**t".

Barmy ranting, toxic twaddle, vile abuse, etc.

"What's weird about social media," he tells me, "is that you can be talking about something else entirely and then suddenly you're in a very dark place you didn't ask to be in, because someone's decided to send you messages saying the Holocaust never happened, or whatever."

But aren't these idiots best ignored? "It's dangerous to do that, Mike, and to assume they'll go away. They won't."

David, it seems, has a smarter tactic. "Comedy is my primary weapon," he reminds me.

"So I've always thought the best way to deal with these people is make fun of them."

"Apart from anything, they take themselves so seriously."

To David it's like ridiculing a heckler at a stand-up gig, only here his put-downs entertain an online following of more than half a million. They also serve a more serious purpose.

"Making trolls look stupid is good," he says.

"People enjoy it. And it interacts with the negative in a way that forces it above ground."

Social media's dark side is something of a preoccupation for David Baddiel right now.

This interaction with online cranks is the subject of a new stand-up show he's working on, *Trolls: Not The Dolls*.

And the way the medium can be exploited by unscrupulous attention-seekers is the theme of a new film he pops up in, *To Trend On Twitter*, launched this weekend.

A darkly satirical comedy short, raising funds for kids' cancer charity CLIC Sargent, *To Trend On Twitter* finds David narrating the tale of single mum Susie (Keeley-Jo Jupp), who gains online fame and fortune by shamelessly exploiting her baby's terminal illness.

David says writer/director Andy Wooding, who also secured contributions from *Inside No.9* creators Steve Pemberton, Reece Shearsmith, and actors Helen Lederer, Josh Whitehouse and Jason Flemyng, was "ahead of the game" when creating this storyline.

"Getting yourself noticed by creating a storm on social media has definitely become a thing now," he says.

But he's keen to stress that his own online life has plenty of plus points.

He recently published his fifth hugely successful book for children, the teacher/pupil body swap adventure *Head Kid*, and loves the upbeat feedback from his readers and parents.

Proud

That book, I notice, contains a cheeky reference to Three Lions, the classic England football anthem David co-wrote and sang with comedy pal Frank Skinner and Lightning Seeds' Ian Broudie.

"Yes, it had that huge resurgence this summer, and I noticed lots of kids singing it, so I thought, 'Why not have it in the story?'"

But for David himself, isn't Three Lions ancient history?

"No, no, it's very much part of me.

I'm clear about one thing, that when I die I'll get a 'best known for...' – and they'll play the Three Lions video!

"I can't get away from that. I'm not sure I want to."

"I've done plenty I'm proud of but Three Lions is probably the most extraordinary thing I've ever been involved with."

"When I was at England-Scotland in 1996 and the DJ put on that song, the whole crowd sang their hearts out."

"That's an incredible thing to happen with something you've put out there, to get a moment when you're surprised spontaneously by everyone taking it to their hearts."

"And it continues, of course. Mind

you, its popularity depends on something very fragile, which is the England team doing well. "No one's going to sing it when we're losing to Iceland."

So does David envisage ever working with Frank again? It's been a while.

Brilliant

"It's not impossible, Mike," he tells me. "The show we're always asked to do is Fantasy Football, but we both feel that would be a mistake."

"It had its time and it was brilliant. But I'd be keen to do Baddiel and Skinner Unplanned again."

And meeting Frank for talks wouldn't be hard, it seems.

"Frank actually lives down my

road. I don't know if you know this but he's always followed me around London. We lived together in a flat round the corner from where I live now, then I moved out and lived with my girlfriend at the time, and Frank got a house two doors down.

"And now he's got a house ten doors away. It's like a very expensive form of stalking."

● *To Trend On Twitter* premieres tomorrow at the Curzon Soho, Shaftsbury Avenue, London. Download it from Monday at Vimeo.com, priced £2.99.

● To donate to CLIC Sargent child cancer charity visit <https://donations.clicsargent.org.uk>