



*By the end of it, I'd like  
people to feel that  
they're not alone*



# LONG TIME

*Celebrated stand-up comedian Josie Long prepares to bring her new solo tour *Something Better* to Richmond's Orange Tree Theatre this month*

Words MADELEINE HOWELL

South London comedian Josie Long has been entertaining audiences with her signature brand of politically charged (but wonderfully silly) humour since she was 14 years old. Following the international sell-out success of her last tour, *Cara Josephine*, a personal show about love and family, she will soon be gracing the boards of the Orange Tree with her 8th solo show – *Something Better*.

Her comedy is friendly, she tells me when we catch up, but also impassioned. ‘I try to write about things that I really care about,’ she emphasises. It’s this that has stood her in good stead as the star of BBC Radio 4’s *Romance and Adventure*, and as the presenter of *Short Cuts*.

Now 34, she also meditates on her age and where she’s at in her life in the script – balancing the personal with the political. There’s also, of course, a dose of the requisite comedic navel-gazing and self-deprecation. She’s no healthy living guru, she confesses: ‘I’ve got a bit about how I ate four dinners from Pret-a-Manger, and I’m not ashamed.’ More seriously, Long has spoken often about how activism is close to her heart, and it’s something she initially sought to tackle in the new show – but the aftermath of the Leave

campaign’s triumph and her navigation of the tumultuous political landscape of 2016 took over. ‘I wanted to write about how much I admire the audacity of activists, and to talk about all the cool, inspiring and funny things people have done, but then Brexit kind of got in the way,’ she admits. ‘It became a lot more about grief and my reaction to that, and about trying to get myself back to a place where I could write about optimistic things again.’ Organisations she admires – ‘run by people who are so bold’ – include Sisters Uncut, which campaigns to protect domestic violence services, and Movement for Justice, which has campaigned against immigration removal centres including the notorious Yarl’s Wood.

So, what was her reaction to Brexit, and why did it strike such a chord? ‘I voted Remain and initially, I felt galvanised. I felt desperate to work harder, and to be a better citizen and person in spite of it. After a few days, it really hit me – and I was like, f\*\*\*.’ Long herself is firmly on the left of the political



*I truly believe that  
Nigel Farage is  
somebody to be feared.  
To me, that’s not a joke*



PHOTO: JADE JACKMAN

Long takes political issues seriously and admires the work of activists

spectrum. ‘These last six months have been really hard for those not on the right,’ she reflects. ‘It feels like we’ve gone through the looking glass. The country has gone off a sort of right wing cliff. It feels very

daunting.’ That said, she has found that the vote did create interesting alliances. ‘People who normally disagreed on everything suddenly had something in common,’ she says.

Her comedy doesn’t necessarily appeal to everybody, but that’s something that she’s working on. ‘It’s very difficult because there are things that I don’t want to pander to, like the fact I truly believe that Nigel Farage is somebody to be feared. To me, that’s not a joke. I want to do shows where I play specifically to people who disagree with me and we have a good conversation – but I’d say that’s something I’m building up to.’

Although our chat has taken a heavy turn, in *Something Better*, these issues are counter-balanced with Long’s lighter jibes and jokes. There is hopefulness and optimism, and faith in solidarity. ‘By the end of it, I’d like people to feel that they’re not alone. I’d also like people to leave feeling hopeful and a bit buoyed up, to know that there is a point to being political even if only in a small way. That’s the dream – just to help everybody to deal with what’s happened in a positive way.’

Sunday 5 February; 0209 940 3633; [orangetreetheatre.co.uk](http://orangetreetheatre.co.uk)