

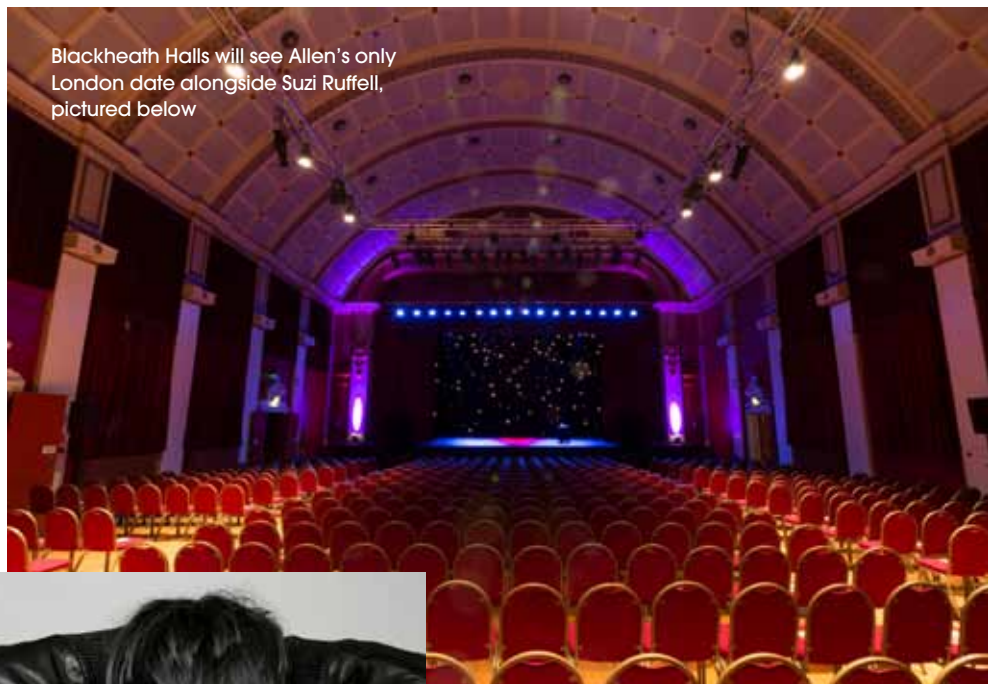


# HIT *the* ROAD

*Bromley boy Tom  
Allen and comedy  
queen Suzi Ruffell  
head to Blackheath  
Halls with their new  
stand-up show*

Words MADELEINE HOWELL

Blackheath Halls will see Allen's only London date alongside Suzi Ruffell, pictured below



**T**om Allen and Suzi Ruffell, darlings of the Edinburgh Festival, will present their hotly anticipated new show, *Hit the Road*, on Saturday 13 May at Blackheath Halls. Such has been the sell-out success so far that at the time of writing more tickets have been released as they embark on their double header UK tour. The pair are also the hosts of hit podcast *Like Minded Friends*, and Allen, who first trained as an actor with the National Youth Theatre, is particularly excited to be touring to a venue so close to where he grew up.

In fact, he tells me, Bromley was the starting point for much of his viciously funny material. 'I talk about how I've been living at home with my parents in Bromley and how it's been a return to my childhood stage – I've had to regress slightly,' he self-deprecates. 'It's based around a party that I went to with my parents, where all of their friends wanted to talk to me, mainly about being gay, and how I managed to get stuck in the downstairs toilet. A disaster!'

During our brief chat, it becomes clear to me that Allen would brighten up even the dullest dinner party with his signature brand of theatrical wit and keen insight. Much of his skill is in his dextrous delivery and sense of timing. Although clearly not too happy to have returned to his parental home, he is incredibly fond of other artists that have emerged from the leafy borough that is BR1. 'I think Bromley is famously – what's the word – surburban,' he says. 'So it comes as a surprise that it has given birth to people like David Bowie, Hanif Kureishi and Siouxsie Sioux. I suppose they're all people who have done interesting things to challenge the boredom of every day life.'

As someone who has always been

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drawn to laughter, stand-up was the natural course for Allen to take. 'It was a way to communicate with people when I was growing up and to break down social barriers – if that's not too grand a thing to say. And apparently it's very good for you. I thought I wanted to be an actor growing up, but then I realised I was just a show-off really.' Allen also admires the likes of Victoria Wood and Alan Bennett: 'I like the way that they see the foibles in people's ways,' he

says. 'I've also always enjoyed Kenneth Williams and Frankie Howard.'

The Blackheath date is one that Allen eagerly awaits. 'Blackheath was always the aspirational place up the road where all the posh people lived, in their gated enclosures,' he laughs. 'It's very exciting. The nearest place I've performed before is

at Up the Creek in Greenwich, which was also quite an experience.'

So, other than at awkward social gatherings, from where else does he draw inspiration? 'Well, I like to talk about myself,' he says deadpan. 'Isn't that nice? But really, it's about the human experience. All of us have insecurities and things we're worried about – what we think about other people, or what we worry about them thinking about us. It's that sort of thing that interests me,' he reflects. 'I also get quite angry and quite snobby about the way people behave sometimes. I think everybody has had an experience of feeling frustrated at their fellow human. I think comedy is at its best when people laugh because they think "oh, I think that" or, "I feel that too", and they connect with it, and don't feel so alone.'

Next on the agenda, Allen is busy writing his latest show to premiere at Edinburgh. 'My only hope is to be busy,' he tells me. 'I find if I sit around too much that I get very introspective.' Fierce, feisty and fabulous – his is a show you'd be mad to miss.

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