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Talking Tories, Brexit, and magic money trees with Geoff Norcott

[Gursimran Hans](#)

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"Growing up, I was like a political Billy Elliot."





These are the words of Geoff Norcott, a comedian in the middle of a stint at the Edinburgh Fringe. His show is a little different to most at the festival: he's an open Conservative and voted Leave in the EU referendum.

His show builds on this. Norcott says *Right Leaning with Well Meaning* is opposed to "the kind of confrontational politics of the last year", before adding he wants to "ask myself whether I am guilty of the things the left typically say the right are guilty of," by shining a light on his own ignorance and prejudices.

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He adds: "It's one of those shows that might divide the critics a bit because it's not the typical kind of political slant of material you might get in Edinburgh."

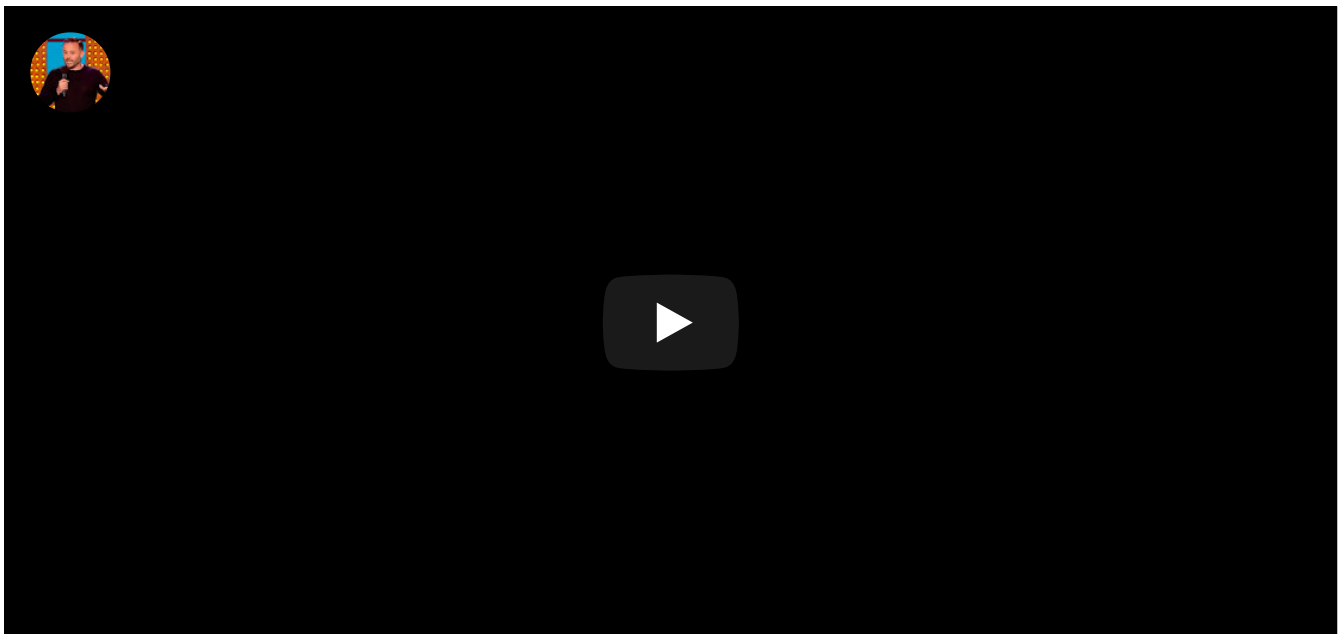
As for the audience? "You get people that agree with you, you get people who just want to get outside their echo chamber, and they're all welcome."

Norcott, 40, grew up on a council estate. His father was a trade unionist and his mother stood to be a Lib Dem Councillor.

So why, exactly, did he come to be pro-Tory and pro-Leave?

"I'm in favour of a small state, a lean benefits system, and people taking responsibility for themselves", Norcott explains. "The democratic deficit of the EU was a big problem for me, but then I also understand that in the age we live in things being done or being controlled in your life that you can't see so clearly is quite common. You know, it happens on the internet as well: we all sign lots of online terms and conditions without reading them. So our lives are either run by the EU or iTunes."





With a lot of talk being about whether or not a cross party approach to Brexit is needed, Norcott posits: "I think that the idea something so big for the country should be completely led by one party maybe isn't entirely constructive but, equally, I do worry about Brexit being designed by a committee. It could end up looking like a camel. I don't know, but I can see a strong moral argument for a cross party Brexit committee."

We've probably all heard claims referring to leave voters as racists, which is something entirely dismissed by Norcott, who states most Leave voters voted for sovereignty and that "having concerns about immigration is not the same as being racist. Now there were obviously some racists who voted to Leave, that's true, but I think that I'm an optimist in the British electorate. I'd like to think that's a minority".

He also believes there are racial overtones to the argument EU workers are needed for "low-paid menial work", saying "it sounds like a neo-imperialist argument."

Additionally, Norcott spent time as an English teacher. However, he describes accusations that the Tories are trying to destroy education as "emotive hyperbole."

"I don't think it's a case of wishing to destroy anything. I mean it just sounds bizarre, doesn't it? People waking up and thinking that they're evil, you've got to ask if they want to destroy the education, want to destroy the NHS, well what do they gain?"

He admits there is a debate to be had about "adequate funding" but argues: "what a lot of the public don't realise is that the teaching profession also has a pay scale, which some people move through at the end of each year, which also involves a pay rise."

Norcott is rare in that he is an open Tory and Brexiteer, but are there more leaning comedians then care to admit?



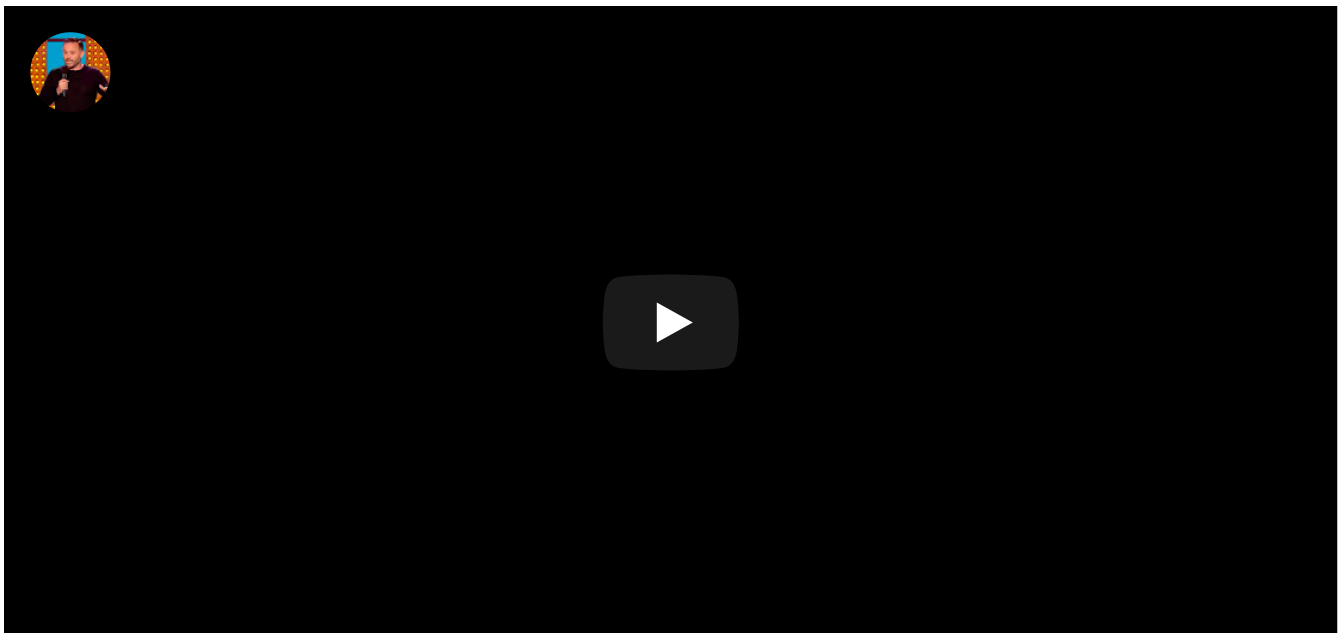
"In short, there are probably more natural Conservative voters than Leave voters, perhaps," he explains.

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"I don't think it's a case of them concealing how they feel. I think a lot of comedians aren't political, you know. Same like you've got people in life who don't want to discuss politics" noting one-line merchants might find it hard to "get in Jeremy Corbyn gags into a kind of pull back, reveal, set up, punch situation."

Though he admits that "sometimes I do get the odd secret message of support. Some big names which I will conceal."

Last year, at one of his shows, an audience member who voted Remain walked out of Norcott's show in protest, which he at the time admitted proved his point: "Well, we've got quite a long running battle. I put it on [YouTube](#), but I kind of shortened it down a bit. One of the things she said was 'if something's broken, you stay and change it.' So the moment she walked out, I thought that was a moment of supreme irony. I think there are these contradictions with the liberal left at the moment, you know. The most classic one is that tension between free speech and no platforming. So, the right has its issues, but I think the liberal left has its own demons, as well. So I'm thinking if I'm turning the table on myself, people might be happy enough if I turn it back on them briefly, which does happen during the show."



As for his current stint in Edinburgh, Norcott is enjoying it, though he does tend to miss home: "I really like being at home, Edinburgh's a great city. If I could come up here and do a 10-day run, I think it would be ideal. But there's nothing better when you've finished the show and you exit and go through the crowd of people coming out of the show, that vibe is amazing. While the festival is on,



actually, I live down in Leith. Leith is always Leith, they don't give a shit that the festival is on. It's a working class area - it's funny because you get a lot of middle-class socialists, but they live well away and then there's me, keeping it real, living among real people."

Norcott's working class roots have played a big part in his identity. He tells me about his respect for John Major, a fellow working class lad who went to the same school as him. "He's the kind of aspirational upwardly mobile Conservative voter I would identify with".

He gets comic inspiration from Bill Burr: "He's also a working class bloke and he's opinionated, but he admits he's not always fully informed and I think that I'll be probably coming at it from a similar angle as well. I just admire that he's willing to strike a provocative tone, you know, and work from that position. I think that's admirable."

As someone with a keen interest in politics, what did Norcott make of this June's General Election?

"Well, in a weird sort of way, I think the public ended up delivering the right result. I think the Tories had drifted too far to the right with talks of grammar schools and fox hunting. I think the offer from Labour was too hard left, I suppose for this country. So, if you think of the British electorate as a single organic being, they kind of looked at it went you know what, none of you get to have full power."

As for the deal with the DUP: "Well, a lot of people took the piss because they were talking about a magic money tree and they found a magic money tree for the DUP but, you know, I think the thing is all parties have a magic money tree - it's just some parties are bigger than others. The Conservative magic money tree is a Bonsai tree and the Labour one is a giant Redwood."

However, the deal was foolish he argues: "the dumbest thing about that is the DUP would support them anyway. It's like paying your mum a million quid to put your drawing on the fridge."

Whilst Norcutt believes Jeremy Corbyn "is a good politician, his heart is in the right place," ultimately the view that Labour are "one more push away" is false as "the Labour Party still have a massive split" over Brexit.

He notes Corbyn has a strong supporter base but "it's always slightly concerning when you see a politician getting their name chanted. Ask anyone who's ever done GCSE History, that doesn't always end well."

Norcutt's career has also seen him [appear on Question Time](#), which he described as "terrifying".

"I did have sort of imposter syndrome. I don't have a massive profile as a comedian, so I was wondering how the hell I'd managed to get in, but it was



interesting experience." He notes how the politicians "change" when they go on stage from what they are like in private.

This is why he would not be too keen on entering politics himself: "I'm just too gobby. The one thing about politics is you don't truly get to say what you think."

He admits he sometimes talks "utter bollocks" but, as a member of the public, he's allowed. "I've been on Question Time. People have fear in their eyes as they realise they have to tip toe around a difficult subject. I'd rather say the first thing that comes into my head and then deal with the aftershock."

As for what happens if he suddenly thinks he might have been wrong all along? "I am fully conflicted - in many ways that's what this show's about. I'd say I have 70% certainty, I think that means there's a lot of the time I think oh have I got this wrong." He notes a lot of people have political spats with Twitter with such certainty: "What have we become? All these political experts, I think it's really natural to question everything, you know? So, to answer your question, probably at same point today, probably at some point during my show tonight, I'll think 'oh fuck me, I'm talking shit again.' I expect that my ideas are flawed, so I have to juggle what my thoughts are. I'm a comedian, not a politician."

For more information on Geoff Norcott's stint at the Fringe, visit: <https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/geoff-norcott-right-leaning-but-well-meaning>

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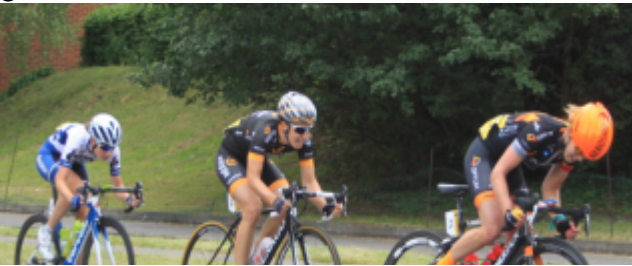


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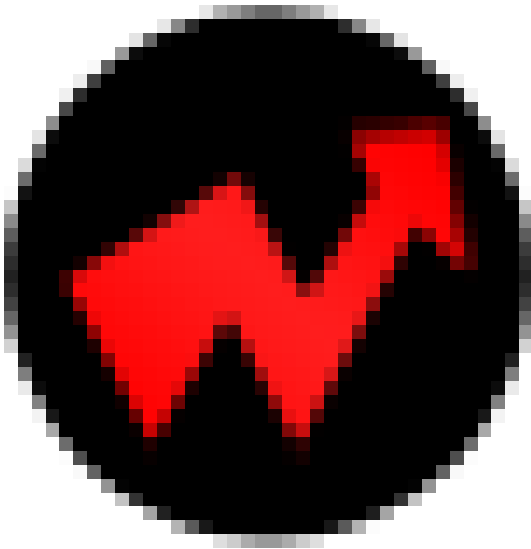


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