



Off Menu – Ep 160: Sir Lenny Henry

Ed Gamble

Welcome to the Off Menu podcast taking the steak of good chat. Sprinkling with the salt of amazing humour. Heating up the pan of the internet until it's smoking, dropping in that great podcast steak and having ourselves a lovely meal.

James Acaster

That was Ed Gamble, my name is James Acaster, we own a dream restaurant and we welcome a guest in every single week-, I was doing so well.

Ed Gamble

You were doing so well, you can do it.

James Acaster

And we have some our favourite ever starter, main course, desert, side dish and drink, not in that order and this week our guest is Sir Lenny Henry.

Ed Gamble

Sir Lenny Henry.

James Acaster

Ed, this is a big one.

Ed Gamble

It's a big one baby. I feel like we're really hitting our stride with the national treasures now.

James Acaster

Yes, we're getting a lot of national treasures under our belt. This is, for me, the original national treasure.

Ed Gamble

Is this the crown jewel of the national treasure?

James Acaster

This is, you know, it's maybe the first person I remember thinking was really funny on TV.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

Huge.

Ed Gamble

Huge.

James Acaster

Huge in my life.

Ed Gamble

This is huge stuff.



James Acaster

This is too much. This is when I'm glad-, this is when I'm really glad it's a podcast and people can't see us during it because I'll just look very in awe of Sir Lenny.

Ed Gamble

Well, I'll be taking photos of you throughout then.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

I can't wait to see your little face all in awe.

James Acaster

I'm going to be all in awe, it's going to be-, this is big deal stuff, big deal territory.

Ed Gamble

Big deal stuff. We are very excited that Sir Lenny Henry is coming in, our first Knight of the Realm in the Dream restaurant, and he's written two books, James.

James Acaster

Two fantastic books.

Ed Gamble

We're going to be chatting about the books I'm sure. He's written Rising to the Surface, which is a memoir and the Book of Legends, which is his hilarious new kids' book.

James Acaster

I mean, pretty good going.

Ed Gamble

Pretty good going.

James Acaster

Two books at once, just write them. Ambidextrous, I guess.

Ed Gamble

Book of Legends publishing on 13th October, 2022 and Rising to the Surface, 1st September 2022.

James Acaster

Exciting. Also, he's going to be in the new Lord of the Rings series.

Ed Gamble

So, you know, he's a busy guy.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

It's going to absolutely break my heart if we have to kick Sir Lenny Henry out of the dream restaurant for saying a secret ingredient but we do have to decide on a secret ingredient.

James Acaster

I'll kick myself out if that happens.



Ed Gamble

Yes. You've just got to go with him.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

But today, there is a secret ingredient and the secret ingredient is, James?

James Acaster

Plain kombucha.

Ed Gamble

Plain kombucha and I'm not saying we've picked something so specific that Sir Lenny Henry will probably not pick it so we don't have to kick him out of the dream restaurant but it feels like that's what's happened and this was James' suggestion. James, I don't think I've had plain kombucha before.

James Acaster

Yes, I've had it. I've had it once before, and it was disgusting. I love kombucha in general, I love the ginger kombuchas, the lemony ones, the turmeric is actually my favourite I'd say, but I once had one that, I think it just said 'original' on it or 'plain', it was just flavourless just as it comes, and that-, people say kombucha tastes like bottled farts, and I disagree with that very strongly but the plain one did taste like a guff.

Ed Gamble

Does that not suggest they all taste like guffs but all the ones you drink, are guffs with stuff added?

James Acaster

Yes, so, I guess if you mix a guff with some lemon and ginger, I think it's delicious.

Ed Gamble

Guff with stuff.

James Acaster

Guff in my face if that's how your guffs smell, but yes, this one was just pure guff and I couldn't have that. So, yes, if Sir Lenny Henry chooses the liquid guff that is original plain kombucha, then we're going to have to kick him out the dream restaurant but, you know-,

Ed Gamble

What if he says he wants someone to guff in his face?

James Acaster

That's allowed.

Ed Gamble

That's allowed.

James Acaster

That's allowed.

Ed Gamble

I made the joke and then it just felt so disrespectful.



James Acaster

Yes, but listen, if we do have to kick Lenny Henry out of the dream restaurant then that's the end of the podcast and I make that promise to the listener now.

Ed Gamble

Fair enough.

James Acaster

We will stop doing the podcast, or at least I will quit. Ed, it's up to you if you want to quit or if you want to replace me or not.

Ed Gamble

No. No, I'd quit.

James Acaster

So, Benito will have to get two hosts, two new hosts.

Ed Gamble

Benito are you going to quit, or are you going to host it? He wouldn't quit.

James Acaster

He said he would host it. As if.

Ed Gamble

And then he'd have to edit his voice out the whole time so it would just be the guest.

James Acaster

Just be the guest and that would be it. Some people might prefer that.

Ed Gamble

Yes, good point actually. Certainly with this one. Hey, I'm on tour.

James Acaster

Are you?

Ed Gamble

Yes. Yes.

James Acaster

Ed Gamble, Electric.

Ed Gamble

Ed Gamble, Electric. I continue to drag it round the country, come and see it, it's very exciting. Do come and see me. Edgamble.co.uk for tickets.

James Acaster

Very exciting. Ed, let's get into this, let's just do it.

Ed Gamble

Let's do it. This is the Off Menu menu of Sir Lenny Henry. Welcome, Sir Lenny to the dream restaurant.

Sir Lenny Henry

It's very nice to be here.



James Acaster

Welcome, Sir Lenny Henry to the dream restaurant. We've been expecting you for some time.

Sir Lenny Henry

I love the dream restaurant. Is that thing going to happen where people walk by with brilliant food and you go, 'I'm having that,' or, 'What are they having? That looks great.' I love that in a restaurant. I want to eat their food.

Ed Gamble

That's fine if you've not ordered yet but if you've already ordered and then you see something coming past that you didn't order, it's a nightmare.

Sir Lenny Henry

And it's spectacularly gorgeous looking, why didn't I order that? I'm a fool.

James Acaster

Do you want that? In your dream restaurant, do you want people going past with food that you think, 'Oh, I quite like that, I quite like that?'

Sir Lenny Henry

I think my dream restaurant would be called, I'll have what they're having.

James Acaster

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

But it would be, there's a parade of food. Like in a Shakespearean, Jacobean style mask thing. Where the food goes by and you go, 'That looks fantastic,' and then you kind of either take their plate from them, so they're sitting there going, 'Hang on,' or you ask them if you can join their table, or you say to the waiter, 'Can I have what they're having, please?' I think that would be a great thing to do.

Ed Gamble

Have you ever joined anyone's table?

Sir Lenny Henry

No, but somebody did join mine once when I was married to Dawn. We were at this very nice restaurant that was run by Marco Pierre-White and he sat down at our table for the whole meal.

James Acaster

For the whole thing.

Sir Lenny Henry

Chatting away, talking, he ordered for us.

Ed Gamble

Wow.

Sir Lenny Henry

And we were just-, really nice to celebrate our anniversary Marco but you know, it's nice for you to be here, but it's our anniversary and literally you're taking the time from our anniversary. He didn't at all, and members of staff were putting their heads out the door going, 'Marco,' and he was just going, 'Go away.'



Ed Gamble

You're at work Marco.

Sir Lenny Henry

Just giving us his time. No, he joined our table, I would never join anybody else's table. That's rude isn't it?

James Acaster

Well, I don't know, you could.

Ed Gamble

But I reckon, you could.

Sir Lenny Henry

Really?

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

I think that's part of the-,

Sir Lenny Henry

You're making me feel bad now.

James Acaster

I think that's part of the deal with the knight of the realm stuff, isn't it? You're allowed to join any table you want.

Sir Lenny Henry

Out of my way. I'm knight of the realm. Give me that chop.

James Acaster

God.

Ed Gamble

Our first knight of the realm on the podcast.

James Acaster

You are our first knight of the realm.

Sir Lenny Henry

Am I?

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

Is it a thing? Young people don't respect the whole knighthood realm thing at all.

James Acaster

No.

Sir Lenny Henry

I just get called Uncle Len. Nobody calls me Sir Len is my-, Uncle Len, can I have £5? I just have



that all the time. 'You take the rubbish out now Uncle Len, it's your turn.' I have that. Older people seem to tug four locks and bow and scrape and you get nice seats at restaurants sometimes. Not at the Groucho. The girls there just come and look at you and go, 'What's your name again?' But elsewhere, the older people tend to end of go, 'Oh, oh.'

James Acaster

I reckon, even without the sir, you could just join someone's table these days.

Sir Lenny Henry

Really?

James Acaster

Yes. I reckon if someone was like having a meal, and Lenny Henry just sits down with them and goes, 'What we having?' I think they'd be like, 'We don't even care it's our anniversary, this is great.'

Sir Lenny Henry

Oh, that's really nice of you.

James Acaster

I think you'd be fine.

Sir Lenny Henry

I don't think so, but that's very kind of you to say that. I do like dining and I do like going unusual places and I watch a lot of food telly. It's a thing with me. So, I do like it and I have a-, I don't know whether it's-, I've always liked food, couldn't really afford to eat out in a posh way, but I've always liked food. I've always liked different types of food. I remember doing a commercial once, my first ever commercial I think it was for Tizer, and they were quite a lot of French crew. So, they stopped for three hours in the middle of the day and had wine and beautifully cooked chicken, and very fresh fried steaks and new potatoes and this amazing salad that went on for days. I just thought, 'What is this three hour lunch break?' And they all had a nap before we filmed in the afternoon. 'What the hell are they doing?' You know, but I remember thinking people don't just eat to eat in some cultures, they eat because they want to eat and they love the idea of eating, and they'll take time over it. I love that. I love that. What I've noticed recently, the thing people moan about when you go and make a film or you go and do telly and stuff, is the crew moan about food. If something's not good, people are really vexed. You know, and they send out. I've been on a couple of things recently where they maker bloody sends out for food and the food arrives on the deliver bike and they all eat that. Nobody eats what's being-, that's bad, I'd say.

Ed Gamble

Yes, for morale. You've got to look after the crews stomachs.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, you don't want the crew moaning about the food, 'Oh, that shepherds pie was rubbish. Turnover? No.'

James Acaster

Once with good catering, you know, if you get booked to do like a panel show or something and they always have good catering, you tell your mates you're doing that show, they'll say, 'Oh, the food's good there.'

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

That's a thing in writer's rooms in America as well. I remember talking to some friends of mine, they



were saying when you're in a writer's room on a show in America, it is established that if the food is good, the show will be good because there's twelve people in a room and if the food is terrible they're not going to want to work, but if the food is great, they're all going to go, 'Oh, I've had this great idea, can you pass that sandwich?' People want to do their best because this room and this food and this hospitality is so nice. Food is an important thing.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

I grew up in a house where there was no money but my mum cooked great food all the time. One of my favourite meals that I'm offering is a meal that my mum did every Saturday and it was great. So, we'll talk about that later but it was driven into us that, you know, hospitality is a whole thing.

Ed Gamble

Well, you've clearly been eating well Lenny and eating good stuff because-

Sir Lenny Henry

Because I'm fat?

Ed Gamble

No-,

Sir Lenny Henry

You fat bastard.

Ed Gamble

I am looking here at two press releases for two books that, you know, your own writer's room at home has been well-catered, because you've written two books.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, I had a good lockdown. I don't know about you but there was a surge of creativity. You listen to radio, you play your records, you walk around and then, suddenly you have an idea and you think, 'Oh, that's a good idea,' and you write it down. It might be a joke, it might be a TV-thing idea, but I'd already written a book called *The Boy with Wings*, which is a middle-grade kids' book, 9 and 12, and then, I had this other thing and it happened quite quickly, and because I had two years of not doing very much, which if you're in show business means a lot, I wasn't doing that much, but I ended up writing two books and I'm really chuffed with them. The other one's called *Rising to the Surface*, and it's about 1980 to the year 2000 in my career, and it's, you know, I adopted a kid and I was married, and I was doing *Chef* and various things like that, but I just talk around, and it's more work-y than the first book. The first book was about being a teenager and growing up in Dudley and my birth dad not being the same as the dad that raised me, and how that was a kind of weird, sort of, broiling shame in my body for quite a long time, which I never told anybody, never did any-, never said in any press conference when I was between 16 and 22, 'Hey, my birth dad isn't my dad.' You know, I just really kept it quiet, so every time I talked about my family on stage, I'm miming listeners, I'm miming being on stage with a mic in my hand, but every time I was on stage, you know, 'Good evening, great to be here, take my wife please,' I never told the truth about my family because there was a kind of-, and there shouldn't have been any shame about it. Why would you be ashamed of where you come from? When I was doing *Danny and the Human Zoo*, which was the fictional representation of my teens and winning a talent competition, Destiny, the director, asked anybody in the cast if they had an unusual origin. Like, if they had spare parents and spare family, and nearly everybody put their hand up and said, 'Oh, I've got an outside brother.' 'Oh, my dad did this, my mum did that.' 'You know, I've got a sister who's from-', so, we all had this experience of having extra members of family.



The traditional thing from working class or Caribbean families is, you know, the mum or the dad dies and then another husband shows up at the funeral. So, there was that. So, I kind of felt like, 'It's nothing to be ashamed of and I'm going to write about it.' So, the first book is about that and the second book is about work and about, interestingly craft. You know, it's a lot about writing jokes and about what it's like to be in a writer's room and how you've got to punch your weight and have energy. A lot of people don't like being funny in the writer's room for some reason, they sort of like to be grumpy and then produce, 'Here's my work,' you know, they like to do that. Whereas, I prefer people being funny in the room. It's about that stuff and about energy, and about collaborating and stuff as well as all the other stuff. So, rising to the surface is career retrospective my mum speech at my wedding and things like that. The Book of Legends, which is the book that comes out in the Autumn, is about two kids that go on a quest, because you never see black kids on a quest. I don't know why. I imagine Bilbo and Frodo coming to your house and going, 'Yo, Raheem you coming on a quest? No man, I'm playing Fifa, you get me. I'm listening to Stormy and Dave, innit though.' I kind of thought it would be great to have two black kids going on a quest, why not, why wouldn't you? They go to a place where almost everybody's black and there's wizards and elves and murder fairies and stuff and they have this mad adventure, but they're in a place where people look like them. It's because their mum, when she created this book of legends, always told stories about people who look like them.

So, the overall meta thing is about inclusivity and about including everybody, but the story is about a quest and I love that because those were my favourite books growing up. The idea of maybe it's because of the way I was raised, but the idea of going to a magical place where cool things happened, really appealed because I lived in working class Dudley, where the telly didn't work and we lived on top of a sewer that used to explode every summer and drown the house and the house had a hairline crack down the middle of it and being bullied at school and shit like that. So, it kind of felt like, wouldn't it be great to go, I'd love to be in Narnia. You know, there's no hassle in Narnia, yes, the snow queen's in charge but I don't care, there's a talking lion and I might get to fly. Here's the thing about stories, great stories, Neil Gaiman says, 'There should always be a great meal in a story.' So, I tried to in the memoir and in the books, the two books that I've written, I try to include food. So, food is a motif guys. So, that's why it's nice to be on this show, to talk about food because it's a thing with me.

Ed Gamble

And, yes, of course Chef, you mentioned Chef, the legendary sitcom.

Sir Lenny Henry

Well, it was kind of a comedy drama because lots of people-, Jeff Perkins kept saying, Jeff Perkins is a legendary TV producer at Tiger on the BBC, used to say, 'Why do you want to play this guy Lenny? He's a dickhead.' I'd go because it's a role, it's not me, and the thing when you're trying to be an actor as you will, you kind of go, 'Well, I just don't want to be me, I want to be somebody else and I want to see if I can do that.' I kept saying, 'Well, he's not me. He's an articulate, smart guy, who has the comeback,' he doesn't think about the comeback in the car like we do, he says the thing straight away and I want to be that guy and he's a bit mean to his staff and then his missus of course, is smarter than him. So, she's often getting him to apologise or go back on something he's decided because it's the cleverer thing to do and I thought that was a good little character thing to have. Plus, he thinks he's the best chef in the world, which meant I had to go and train at L'Ortolan and work with Rowley Lee and John Burton-Race and go to the River Café and talk to people and see what it was like and often there was no shouting in the kitchen, often people were very cool and you know, Rowley Lee's kitchen was very calm, very cool, people doing things because they wanted to and enjoying the process and then of course, Gordon Ramsey and Marco Pierre-White's getting lots of shouting and John Burton, his kitchen was very shouty but only when he was there, when he wasn't there it was kind of cool. They got exposed on the telly, they had secret cameras and they got into trouble but it's a kind of, you know, the world of cooking is quite militaristic. It's a bit like the army. You know, there's a real sense of you've got a brigade of people and you've got to get it done and it's got to hit the pass at the right time.



Ed Gamble

Well, I think a lot of those French kitchens were actually structured in that way deliberately weren't they?

Sir Lenny Henry

Do you want to be in the army if you're cooking a sausage? I don't know. It's a pie. You know, you don't have to beat me up because it's a pie. What's the-, it's some cake. Oh, I don't know, but I do love it. My daughter and I, when she was really little, she used to have a little chair that clamped to the table, and it was very funny for-, I know she has sense memories of this, because she's 30 now, but there was a time when I was working doing shifts where my daughter would be clamped to the table and giving two Michelin star food. I'd feed her at the table this food, because she liked pasta, and this two Michelin star chef would go, 'Oh, I'll make her something.' I know Billie has this thing in her mind of there was a-, wasn't there some fantastic food growing up. Where was that? It was because she was at L'Ortolan all the time when I was doing Chef.

James Acaster

Well, we always start the dream menu with still or sparkling water.

Sir Lenny Henry

Still please, because sparkling thing is like, I don't get sparkling. It's like lemonade but crap. What is that? I like still water, it's council pop, it's what I'm used to, it's what I grew up with, still water and if you could put two big tablespoons of sugar in it like back in the day, then it would be alright. We used to do a thing where we went on adventures, and we'd have sugar and water.

James Acaster

Who's we?

Sir Lenny Henry

Me and my mates and my family. I've got three brothers and three sisters and they became-, who's four years older than me, Sharon and Paul, and sugar and water, sugar sandwiches with butter, and then we'd wrap that in newspaper and put this-, it was all fields round here, but we'd go off and have an adventure. So, yes, still water please.

Ed Gamble

You must have been absolutely buzzing off your head.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, we were off our heads, yes.

Ed Gamble

Sugar water.

Sir Lenny Henry

Do you remember, I don't know about you but do you remember playing? Do you remember when you would go, 'I'm playing?' Do you remember that? What was that? It went on for hours and nothing really happened. 'I'm playing, we're playing,' what were the games? You know, if you look at books and read American rite of passage books, when they go out and play it's always quite structured they were always playing baseball or something. In Britain, we did kick the can and hide and seek and we climbed trees and just ran around, because of all the sugar. You know, we used to run to our mates house, 'Is Tom playing?' Yes, and then you'd just run to somebody house, it wasn't actually playing, unless there was a ball or a cricket bat or something.

Ed Gamble

I love the sugar water thing.



James Acaster

Sugar water, sugar sandwiches.

Sir Lenny Henry

Sugar sandwiches were dope, have you ever had one?

James Acaster

No.

Sir Lenny Henry

It's really nice. The butter and the sugar is the thing.

Ed Gamble

Does it go sort of like a nice paste like a fondant sort of?

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, it's delicious it's, kind of, mmm, okay, it's delicious. Sugar, water, white bread. White bread was the thing, we used to love the white bread. Wonder bread.

Ed Gamble

Which is sugar basically.

Sir Lenny Henry

But we don't really, you know, we eat sourdough now and rye bread. We don't do that anymore but white bread was a thing and we grew up with that. White bread, tap water, lots of sugar in everything. We're all diabetic, nobody cares. I'm diabetic, we have type 2 nobody cares, have a party.

James Acaster

Ed's type one, so he's looking down on you immediately.

Ed Gamble

Yes, yes, I'm the best one.

James Acaster

What adventures would you go on?

Sir Lenny Henry

Well, we'd go on-, when you had a party-, did you do this? We had six bikes with your mates and you'd just go somewhere. You didn't know where you were going. You tried to not be on the main road because you might get killed. But you'd go off the main road and go to a canal or there'd be a hill or something. So, you'd go all around Dudley. The Tipton to Netherton canal was a good place to go because it was just shopping trollies in the water, and puppies trying to swim after they'd been chucked in. So, rescuing nearly dead puppies from the canal, eating sugar sandwiches and talking a lot, and trying not to get pushed in the water by your friends. That was a big thing. Your mates pushing you in the water because that was funny.

James Acaster

Yes, sure.

Sir Lenny Henry

So, there was a lot of that going on and then as you got older, the adventures were one of you could drive. So, they'd borrow dad's car and you'd go for miles and just maybe go to a pub and drink underage and just go for lots of driving and there was that exploratory-, because I never had a car. I



never had any money, but my mum told me to integrate, 'You must integrate with the Dudley people them. Go out there, try not to box anybody down, eat their food and get on with people otherwise you won't fit in.' So, the whole fitting in thing meant having white friends because it wasn't really a thing in my house of friendship because we had the family. There was like seven of us, so we didn't really need friends but going out and integrating meant meeting white people, going out with them and going to their houses. So, when I met Greg and Mac and Tom, who were my best friends in the world, who were brilliant, a bit older than me, went to grammar schools, suddenly I had a different perspective on life. I listened to different types of music, you know, Mac introduced me to John Peel and Tyrannosaurus rex, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and Greg listened to Dylan and the Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel and stuff and Tom liked Genesis and things like that. So, I was listening to different music, I was eating different things, ham, egg and chips, pie and chips, scotch and chips, everything with chips, and then I'd go home and have my dinner because I was never-, I was always hungry. So, I had this weird life of trying to integrate, trying to assimilate into British culture and it was an adventure. So, our adventures were different to earlier adventures. Our adventures were going to discos and driving everywhere and going to these pubs where people said, 'We don't get many darkies in here.' I went, 'Well, you've got one now. I'll have a shandy please.'

Greg tells a story about us going on this big adventure to this pub, scotch egg, crisps, pickled onions, scratchings, scratchings, and Gregg said we went in and I went to the duke box and quite a lot of people walked out of the pub, because I was the only black guy in the pub. When I turned around from the duke box and I'd probably put Slade on or the Rubettes or something, the pub was empty. So, we had it to ourselves and he said that happened a lot. So, I had to deal with that. Once I was on the telly it was different. Everyone wanted to be near the kid who was on the telly but when I was just this black kid with ill fitting flares and a tank top, there was a real thing in the midlands of, you know, 'What's he doing here?' Kind of thing but we overcame that and because these guys were, honestly, they were brilliant. They drove me everywhere, they lent me money, they were kind, I suddenly had this bigger idea of who I was and what I was going to do. I don't know if you had mates that-, they definitely said I was funny, they definitely, 'You're funny you are, you should do something with that,' and made me thing, 'Oh, okay. I could be on stage, I could do that.' They made me go on stage. Did you have friends like that?

James Acaster

No, I was too much of a like show off in my friendship group that they were like, 'Well, he's going to do that anyway, let's not encourage him.'

Ed Gamble

Yes, I think they'd try to get me to play it down if anything.

Sir Lenny Henry

Really? 'Could you calm down? Just keep it-,'

James Acaster

Were you doing impressions amongst them and stuff like that where they were like-,

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, they were crap impression too. I'm not saying I was any good, but I did impressions of anything I saw on the telly, anything I heard on the radio. So, it was a lot of, somebody called Adrian Just used to play the Goons a lot, so I was always doing, 'Oh, hello,' I was doing that voice a lot. I was doing, anything Dave Allen did I loved. The idea of just sitting telling stories was quite focussed and I quite liked that and Dave Allen was kind of cool. He had that kind of black suit, white shirt, black tie thing, cigarette, glass of whisky, telling stories and being kind of, 'I don't care if you laugh or not,' kind of thing and I thought, 'Oh, that's interesting.' Then Benny Hill. Everybody loved Benny Hill at my schools. Pythons, Pythons were weird because in my family we laughed at the cartoons. We liked Terry Gilliam stuff and we kind of like global hide and seek and the Spanish Inquisition and I



remember my mum, it was quite rude, but my mum laughing at the Terry Gilliam cartoons. So, I kind of had a really good sense at what visual humour was.

James Acaster

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

So, I noticed when Terry Gilliam did the credits for the Marty Feldman show, I thought, 'Oh, that's Terry Gilliam.' I knew who Terry Gilliam was and I kind of starting to recognise writing, who had written things. So, this was stuff I hadn't been taught or anything. I hadn't been to college to learn this, I just knew that might be a John Junkin quote or a Barry Cryer joke or something, which is why you watched Kenny Everett and I started to be interested in who'd written it. Not just Kenny, because I thought, 'Oh, Kenny is just mad and funny anyway,' but, 'Oh, yes, Barry Cryer and Ray, who's that, who are these people.' So, you know, I definitely wasn't thinking what my mates were thinking, plus I was writing jokes down.

Ed Gamble

Oh okay, interesting.

Sir Lenny Henry

I don't know if you do that but I was writing things down.

Ed Gamble

Like, your own stuff or from things that you were seeing?

Sir Lenny Henry

I was writing down things I was seeing, I was writing comments about them, I was writing how that might work if I did it. It was a weird early attempt at craft I think. Thinking about why some jokes work and some jokes-, so, I kind of had a thing where I was thinking all the time about types of humour, and I didn't write. Never wrote. You know, when I was in a writing room, eating sandwiches and people were saying, 'You should do this, Len,' I had lots of energy but I didn't actually write things down, I would, kind of, have energy in the room.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

Which is writing, by the way, but it wasn't seen as writing. I started to get a credit near the end of Three of a Kind and for Lenny Henry show, I started to get writing credit then because people realised that I was writing but it was tricky. So, writing the books has been a release, a huge release, with just me in my pants, and jammy dodgers and a full sugar coke. Just writing on my own and listening to very loud music. Run the Jewels and very, like, cake and a computer is everything, great.

James Acaster

That's where I got Covid from, Run the Jewels gig.

Ed Gamble

Did you?

Sir Lenny Henry

Really?



James Acaster

Yes, yes, I definitely got Covid at that Run the Jewels gig. Well, I tested positive enough days after that, that's the incubation period. I'm pretty sure.

Sir Lenny Henry

Was it a big gig? Was there a lot of people?

James Acaster

Brixton, in Brixton Academy.

Sir Lenny Henry

They're kind of mad, Run the Jewels, I don't quite understand it but they are very good. I think their, kind of, sense of percussion in terms of the words and what they're talking about, particularly on the last album, which was all about gun crime and stuff, brilliant and Killer Mic's-, when Killer Mic got up to make that speech after George Floyd died, I was in-, it reduced me to tears. Mainly because I thought, A) I wouldn't like it if Killer Mic stood on my foot, have you seen how big he is? But also, because people in his family are connected to law enforcement and he just talked about the idea that not all law enforcement is evil, that we've got to find some way to work together, this should not have happened, you know, it was so moving and I just thought, 'God, you're great, and you write funny and witty, and very potent lyrics, too.'

Ed Gamble

They are so fun, like, I was at that gig as well.

Sir Lenny Henry

Did you get Covid?

Ed Gamble

No, I was in the seating area.

Sir Lenny Henry

'No, I was a VIP.' We'd all had a lateral flow.

Ed Gamble

Normally, I stand at gigs but that was the first time I'd sat down and thought, 'Actually, this is way better.'

Sir Lenny Henry

How can you dance though? If you're stuck in that seating.

Ed Gamble

You just wiggle around, wiggle around in your-,

Sir Lenny Henry

In your seat?

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

You're a seat wiggler. Me too, I like seat wiggling. I can't be-, I saw Chris Rock and I sat quite near the front and I was a bit-, people snogging and eating sandwiches around you. I would've much rather been in VIP, standing there looking over people's heads and going, 'Oh, this is rather funny. He's talking about Tottenham, how does he know about Tottenham?'



James Acaster

Poppadoms or bread? Poppadoms or bread Lenny Henry? Poppadoms or bread?

Sir Lenny Henry

Poppadoms. Poppadoms are great. I used to over order, all the time because we had a curry every Friday and I'd always over order, always have six of everything, just in case but I love poppadoms. I like onion bhajis but they tend to be oily. I like parathas, but they tend to be a bit dry. Poppadoms are-, it's like a big crisp. It's a big-, imagine if they had a bag of poppadoms, like, crisps?

Ed Gamble

Like a huge-,

Sir Lenny Henry

Like a hessian sac of poppadoms. That would be great, wouldn't it? Because we love poppadoms but you carry it under your arm like a big bag and every so often you pull out a foot, poppadom a foot across and munch on it at the pictures or at the park or something.

Ed Gamble

How many do you think you could get through?

Sir Lenny Henry

I don't know, twelve.

James Acaster

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

I could eat twelve, fifteen poppadoms. I might not eat very much afterwards but I could eat twelve or fifteen poppadoms in a sitting because poppadoms rock and they really crunch, when they're done well they really crunch. I love them.

Ed Gamble

Good curry houses in the midlands as well, right?

Sir Lenny Henry

Well, we've got the Balti triangle in Birmingham.

Ed Gamble

Yes, of course.

Sir Lenny Henry

The Lights of Asia was in Dudley and we used to go there, but in Birmingham it's the Balti Triangle and Sparkbrook and places like that and I used to love to go to the Baltic Houses in Bradford, and then afterwards, Phil Macintyre used to take me to this place that was like a café, a curry café. Not a restaurant, so not posh, but oh, the food was great. Bowls of chicken curry and a poppadoms and a naan and no knife and fork and you just ate it like that and it was so, unctuous and succulent and delicious and then it was £2.50. It wasn't very expensive at all. Beautiful, beautifully cooked. So, I highly recommend going to Bradford and finding a curry café, rather than a posh restaurant.

Ed Gamble

You did a face there where you're imagining eating the curry, where it's the perfect food face where you sort of screw your face up. It's like you like it so much you almost hate yourself for it.

Sir Lenny Henry

Ooh, no I don't hate myself but I'm trying not to eat-, my thing is I eat fast.



Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

So, I have to slow down when it's good because you've got to-, you can't eat good-, you've got to savour it and my girlfriends always going, 'Just slow, what's a matter with you,' you've always finished and everybody's still kind of eating. Just, 'Slow down Len.' 'But I'm hungry.' Phil Macintyre was a big rock and roll promoter in the late '70s early '80s, the reason I know him and wanted to work with him was, Tiswas went on tour, and Chris was the promoter with Paul Roberts, and it was the first time I'd experienced kind of rock and roll comedy. I come from, you know, it took a lot of getting over but I come from variety, lined entertainment. So, I did the clubs, I did Jolly's in Stoke and Blazers in Windsor and The Starlight Rooms in Husk and it'd be like 6 or 700 people, dinner and drinks, you know and then you'd come on at 10 o'clock and do an hour and then that'd be it and that's where I came from.

Ed Gamble

That filled me with dread just the description of the gig absolutely filled me with dread there.

Sir Lenny Henry

It is kind of frightening, and then when I was doing Tiswas, Tarrent said, 'Oh, we're doing Bishops, Stockford, do you want to come?' And I said, 'Yes, sure,' and I arrived and there was a queue that went from the door all the way down the street. People with Tiswas t-shirts on dressed as the phantom flan flinger, with their own custard pies ready, throwing buckets of water over each other in the queue, and then we got in and you couldn't actually get in the pub. You couldn't actually get in the gig. It was worse than Run the Jewels. People were hanging through the windows, they were standing on the tables that they'd set up for us to be on collapsed, because they didn't have a stage they just had trestle tables, and it was one of the best nights of my life and we all nearly got killed. I thought, 'I want to do that, I want to tour like that. I don't want to do the starlight rooms in workington,' which is thank you very much for paying me by the way, but it was not my-, you know, people eating and then watching you do your jokes. I want to do gigs like this where they want to be entertained and their rabid and they're loving it and they're laughing really loud and cheering and I thought, 'This is it, this is the kind of gig you want to do.' So, when they went on the big tour, I did Stockport and Phil was in charge and Stockport was legendary it was like a Beatles gig. I mean, it was so-, it was like compost corner and the whole, 'Compost Corner,' 'Here comes David Bellamy,' people going nuts like that. I just thought if Phil Macintyre's in charge of this, I need to be with him. So, I had to convince my agent, who was very, 'Hello, what,' bowler hat, pinstripe suit, Mr Love is name was, had an umbrella even in the summer time, wore a bowler hat.

I had to convince him that having these two rock and roll merchants from up north, doing the tours might be a good thing. Phil came along, 'Oh, you know, Mr Love, it'll be great, you know, Lenny, Tiswas very popular, you know, you'll get a different audience, young people,' and Mr Love said okay. So, I did my first tour and the poster for the first time was me in a leather jacket and t-shirt with a big smile on my face and it was almost like I'd been set free from doing those other kind of gigs. Then I kind of never looked back really and I started doing these big gigs, and I loved it and preferred it so much more. Had holdback, comedians had fullback, go and see Ben Elton and two big ass speakers on front of the stage, pumping your voice back at you really loud. So, it kind of made you feel a bit more roar in stage, you know, I loved it.

James Acaster

It's always mad for me hearing about Tiswas, because like I think that was before my time. So, I grew up, you were like a very big part of my life growing up and watching you on telly.

Sir Lenny Henry

When were you born?



James Acaster

85'. Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

So, you have no idea what Tiswas-

James Acaster

So, Tiswas I didn't know what that was but I knew who you were, watched you a lot. Then Who Wants to be a Millionaire whatever age was that was massive with Tarrant, and then I learnt that ages ago there was Tiswas, and I couldn't even comprehend you and Chris Tarrant in a show together because it didn't make sense because you occupy two completely different spaces for me. So, every time someone says Tiswas, I'm like, did that-, what?

Sir Lenny Henry

I have nightmares where I think-, have that happen to me. Was I really in Tiswas? It was really great. Tarrant was the producer, he was the executive producer and he wrote most of it. Usually on a Wednesday when he was fishing at 4 o'clock in the morning, he'd go fishing and he would just dream up the whole shape of the show, what it was because it was kind of like assembling a radio show or a podcast I think. He had blocks of things that he was going to do and we had to contribute the jokes. We had to say, so, there'd be me and John Gorman and Bob Carolgees and maybe Frank Carson sometimes, Frank would go, 'It would be good if I was pretending to be a medium and reading your fortune and then, after a while you just unmask me and then you slag me off and then I'll be the joke,' and then I would go, I used to do a Rastafarian character called Algernon who said, 'Okay,' and I said it would be good if Algernon was into high arts this week and talked about going to the Tate gallery and blah blah. So, we would do that and then he would assemble it on the Friday and we'd go through it and everything, that's crap think of something else, and then on Saturday we'd just do it, live and sometimes it would work and sometimes it wouldn't. You'd get a major bollocking when things didn't work, literally on air. 'That was rubbish, don't do that again.' So, we really wanted to please him, he was one of those people, a bit like John Lloyd or Jeffrey Perkins, one of these producers where you really want to do your best work for them because they've given you this chance and you don't want to cock it up. So, every Saturday was like that for three years of working to Chris Tarrant and trying to please him.

James Acaster

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

And we did another show called OTT after Tiswas, which was a grown up version, kind of a bit like trying to be like Saturday Night Live, and that didn't work and it was because we thought that the Tiswas audience would naturally migrate to OTT and they didn't. Of course, it was an adult audience who were expecting and organised well thought out thing and it was just chaos. Imagine, snooker and pop videos and the Human League showing up for some reason and it was just that and it was not well thought out at all and as a result it was a bit ramshackled but it was a lot of fun to be had. TV now is kind of odd. I keep saying why don't people have their own shows anymore and I think it's too expensive and I think, you know, if you talk to my girlfriend she just goes, 'Oh, well, sketches aren't even a thing anymore,' which I don't believe. I think in maybe in five years time, somebody will come up with a new sketch type thing.

Ed Gamble

There's amazing sketch acts out there. I think it must be a budgetary thing.

Sir Lenny Henry

The thing is these sketches are expensive. If you suddenly want to do renaissance England, it's like, you know, it's expensive. Costumes hire and all that, it doesn't matter how good the idea is, they just



don't want to do it. They'd rather have you on a panel and I think there's the tyranny of panel/gameshows is tough for comics because I watch them a lot but I don't want to be on them. I loved Shooting Stars, but when they asked me to be on it, I was slightly mute because I was wishing I was at home watching it but I know you guys are more-, I don't know how it works but you guys seem to be more able to deal with it because it's the culture now, right?

Ed Gamble

Yes, exactly yes.

James Acaster

Because we grew up watching it, it's like I grew up watching panel shows and you know, enjoying it and you learn the language by watching it. So, then when you're on it, it doesn't maybe feel as-

Sir Lenny Henry

There's craft to it though, isn't there? There's a preparation-, I went on the Have I Got News equivalent in Australia and I was shocked that it was prepared. I had no idea that it was prepared. So, I went on and did all the preparation with the people that were on it and then I went on it and it was a great show. I was surprised at it everybody thinking it through, 'This won't be in the show,' but I was just shocked at the preparation that goes into it that's all, because the skill is making it look like you're making it up of course.

Ed Gamble

Yes. I think so, there is a level of preparation to those things that is always surprising. When it comes through on the email the first time you do them, you're like, 'Oh, right.'

Sir Lenny Henry

'Oh, it's this. It's this kind of thing.'

James Acaster

So, let's start with your dream starter then.

Sir Lenny Henry

Hand dived scallops, of the Ritz. So, I'm watching Great British Menu, and there's this kid on, and he's great and he works at the Ritz and I love him, I've fallen in love with him. He does this, you know, he does this Jane-Austen thing where he presents this meal and somehow he's got a production-design budget, and the whole table is flowers, and this beautiful roast-quail thing, and he gets top marks for it. I'm watching this kid and I'm going, and I do this a lot when I'm watching Great British Menu, 'I want to eat wherever this guy cooks.' So, there's another guy called Nathan, bald guy, always uses fire, and I love him and I want to eat at his restaurant but this kid, I think his name's Spencer, I go, 'I want to eat at his-', he's like twelve, and I go, 'I want to eat at his restaurant,' he cooks at the Ritz, really expensive, and I go, so, on the pretext of taking my 94-year-old mother-in-law out for her birthday, it wasn't her birthday, we go to the Ritz. 'Happy Birthday-', 'It's not my birthday,' 'Shhh, to you.' We take her into the restaurant and go through this menu and he's on, he's cooking that day. 'Oh, great.' I see scallops, I love scallops. I don't like seafood, I got poorly once from seafood at school, roe. I got really sick, I was off school for ten weeks, but I can't resist scallops, this meaty fish that's kind of delicious and I, kind of, don't mind the orange earlobe thing, but I really like it when you get a big arse piece of meaty, thick fish that's not too overcooked, that just melts in the mouth with some kind of garlicky sauce on it. Anyway, hand-dived scallops at the Ritz, it arrives and for the five minutes I was eating it, I just thought, 'This is one of the best things I've ever had,' and great thing about Spencer, came out and said, 'Hello.'

Ed Gamble

Yes, he's a lovely boy.



Sir Lenny Henry

Oh, what a nice boy and he stayed slightly too long, but I thought, 'Hang on a minute, Marco Pierre-White, pal you can't sit down,' but he does come and join you and stand there and talk about the programme and what you're all like, and what it was like, and the pressure of it and everything. He was lovely. So, there's a lot of sense memory involved with the hand-dived scallops, it was delicious and it's always a go-to thing for me, scallops. Scallops or ribs. I like ribs, but scallops at the Ritz, perfect.

Ed Gamble

Yes, I took my mum there for her birthday just because I wanted to go and eat his food again. He is a pretty special chef I think.

James Acaster

That's one of your series?

Ed Gamble

Yes, that's the last series of Great British Menu. You will have eaten Spencer's food. So, he did the Partridge and he did the fish dish, the Sherlock.

James Acaster

In the finale? The banquet.

Sir Lenny Henry

Anytime you want me to come on there and eat food, I'll happily come on.

James Acaster

Oh, well, they will hold you to that.

Sir Lenny Henry

Watching the kind of competition and see people fall by the wayside, it's always a shock to me and when the geezer with the long hair comes on I always kind of have dread, because there's a guy who's like the Dark Destroyer. He's got blonde hair down to-, he comes on and he's just very like, you know, it's like if Bono suddenly became a food critic. He's incredibly scathing about the food and it's kind of like, I just get very scared for them all but Spencer was brilliant and the hand-dived scallops, literally rocked my world. So, it's that, that first.

James Acaster

They sound amazing.

Ed Gamble

Very very strong start.

Sir Lenny Henry

Delicious. I'm always surprised by how little you have to cook things sometimes, because I like cooking but I often leave things in for far too long and then my mum used to burn things. When my mum made a cake, she was very good at making cakes, but her methodology was to put it in the oven, see smoke coming from the oven, take the burnt thing out and then debruid the burnt tissue away from the cake revealing the beautiful cake in the middle somewhere. So, there'd be this tiny cake in the middle of burnt tissue and that's how she made her cakes. I'm trying to be a better chef, and the idea of not cooking things for too long whether it's meat or fish, is a good thing.

James Acaster

Yes, that thing when you see a cooking show or an interview with a chef or something, and they're talking these top end chefs, talking about making a steak or scallops or whatever it is, and it's hardly cooked at all, and you think, 'What are we all overthinking it for?'



Sir Lenny Henry

Yes.

James Acaster

It seems like they just go bam, there you go.

Sir Lenny Henry

Do you ever panic when you're watching these shows and they make a steak and you go, 'Well, that's not cooked.'

James Acaster

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

Can't do that now, no, you need to render the fat.

Ed Gamble

With pork as well, when you're like, Pork can be pink, you're like what?

Sir Lenny Henry

No, no, chicken can be pink, no. No good with chicken, these guys are crazy. 'Oh, we just show it to the grill.' No, you need to cook it.

James Acaster

Your dream main course. Now, we have a feeling this is going to be a home cooked thing, right?

Sir Lenny Henry

This is mum. My mum was a great cook, she cooked the same thing every day for 30 years. She had different days of the week. So, Saturday was Saturday Soup, which is what I'm going to choose. Sunday, was a Jamaican roast, which is chicken and rice and peas and hard food, which is yam and cho cho and sweet potato and stuff, dumplings. Monday, as we started to move out of the weekend and run out of money, it might be meat and potatoes and stuff. Tuesday, chicken. Wednesday, no money, pilchards and white rice. Thursday, really no money, sardines, tinned sardines, and potato. Friday, fish and chips, or a fish thing. Saturday, Saturday, so. She'd do the same thing every day. And we really looked forward to Saturday, because we've only just had pilchards. So, we've got PTSD from pilchards, pilchards and white rice. 'We don't want to eat tinned fish and rice anymore, please can we have something nice.' So, we'd get to Saturday, 'Oh, thank God.' And she would get up in the morning, and she'd put the mutton on. The mutton has to simmer for quite a long time, because it's quite a tough meat. So, she'd simmer the mutton for a couple of hours, until it was falling off the bone. Mutton, thyme, garlic, onions, simmer, leave it. Then, when it was cooked, all the vegetables go in. This is the yam, yam is quite a fibrous carb, carb-y white vegetable. Cut that up into blocks. It was peasant food, so you don't have to, kind of, be nice about it. Carrots, the dumplings can go in now, and whatever other, you know, scotch bonnet pepper, maybe, can go in. That goes in for half an hour. The last 20 minutes, the potatoes go in. So, you've got this quite big, I mean, we're talking literally a vat of food here, with liquid in it. And so, we'd all get our own tureen, that's what I remember, we'd all get our enormous tureen of food, and it would be the liquid, and then potatoes, dumplings, yam, mutton, sometimes on the bone, sometimes if you're lucky, chunks of melty meat, and carrots with the thyme, and garlic, and everything. Oh, my God, every Saturday. So, you'd eat this every Saturday, and it, kind of, took on legendary proportions. And when I left home to be a professional comedian, I used to dream of it, because I was eating Chinese, and curry, and stuff, and going out to Greek restaurants, and exploring other cuisines. But I did think, 'Oh, my Mum's food is up there with this. My Mum's food is good.' She had this thing where she would put beef in foil, and put loads of vegetables, aromatics around it, garlic,



and stuff, and pinch it, and put it on a very low heat for hours. This food, this meat, fell apart, and it was delicious, and tasty, and succulent. So, she was a clever cook.

And I'd get home, I'd be in, like, Huddersfield, and I'd drive home overnight, and I'd get there Saturday morning, and the soup would be on, and I'd be like, 'Oh, thank God.' And I would just eat this soup, and it would have that, kind of, sense feeling of home, and safety, and stability. And you'd eat it, and you'd immediately fall asleep. And you'd wake up when the wrestling was on. So, you knew the soup had been good if Mick McManus was punching somebody in the face when you woke up. So, it was always that. And it's delicious, and tasty, and garlicky, and the meat was always succulent, and you did suck the bone, and I know that sounds horrible, but there was stuff inside the bone, like the marrow, that was always really tasty. And, I think, it was legendary that dish. And I've tried to cook it. Me, and my brother, we try and do Mums cake as a thing in our family, and nobody quite gets it right.

Ed Gamble

No one burns it enough.

Sir Lenny Henry

Err, we always think the burning is wrong. But actually, we'd do the soup, and we can get close. (Inaudible) has got a good Saturday soup recipe. But, the Saturday soup in the thing I would choose.

Ed Gamble

It sounds phenomenal.

Sir Lenny Henry

Oh, um, I went to Mr Jerk, in Soho, it's not open anymore, and they made the Saturday soup. Mutton soup with red peas, kidney beans, and hard food. And it was on a work day, I was going to a writers meeting in the afternoon in Soho, at PBJ's, PBJ is my manager, and um, I just thought, 'I'll have some soup.' And I went in, and I had it, and I started to cry, because my Mum had passed away, and it reminded me of my Mum. And food can do that, you know, remembering some past things food can trigger memories, and you don't know why it's doing it, but it suddenly evokes something. And I had this soup in the middle of Soho, with the bin men going around, and the bottles clanging away, and smashing, and people in the street, and smoking fags, and stuff, and I just thought, 'God, my Mum was great.'

Ed Gamble

Your dream side dish?

Sir Lenny Henry

Um, I like ribs, I love spare ribs on the side.

Ed Gamble

Well, you mentioned, possibly ribs for a starter. So, this might be a good place to put the ribs.

James Acaster

Yes, perfect.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, I think this is a good place to put the ribs, because salt, and pepper ribs are delicious. However, the ribs that fall off the bone, are the bomb. So, whenever I have those, I always think that's very similar to how my Mum would cook them. So, when I go to a Chinese restaurant, and the ribs have a sauce, and they fall off the bone. There's a restaurant in China Town, where they serve this 1 where it's obviously been cooking for a long time, and the ribs are to die for. So, yes, that would be a side for me. I'd have 2, maybe I'd have 2 as a side.



Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

Delicious.

Ed Gamble

Yes, 2 little racks?

Sir Lenny Henry

No, you have the 2 ribs, and they're quite big, and there is quite a lot of meat on them. But, you don't want to spoil your main, so you might share that with somebody. I'm doing a lot of sharing of sides, at the moment. I don't know if you do that? I kind of go, 'Shall we share one?'

Ed Gamble

I'd never mean it though.

Sir Lenny Henry

Ed, you seem to have eaten all the, sorry.

Ed Gamble

My wife knows, she's like, 'Yes, we'll share that.' She knows she's not having any of it.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, yes.

James Acaster

I'm very disappointed when ribs don't fall off the bone.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, the chewy rib is not really my thing. I like the fall off the bone ones, where the meat just goes, 'I give up.' Nd just falls off the bone like that.

Ed Gamble

I agree, but in competition American barbecue, it's actually marked down if it falls of the bone.

James Acaster

That's ridiculous.

Ed Gamble

There needs to be a pull, you need to pull it off.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes. I agree with that, but the meat does need to be tender on the ribs, otherwise it's not great. And I like a sauce, I like it when it's been marinated in a delicious sauce. Sometimes, ribs can be a bit, you know, they just chuck it on, and they taste of the smoke, and the meat, really. And, I think, if you've taken the trouble to make a good marinade, that can elevate the rib to something quite extraordinary. And we want extraordinary, don't we? Steve Martin says, you know, somebody asked him, 'What do you care about?' And he said, 'Do you know, every single meal.' Imagine that. I ate with him once, and it's true, he took a really long time to choose his food. He wanted it to be perfect. He doesn't want any meal time to be disappointing. Imagine that. How many crap meals have you had, and gone, 'Oh, it's alright. Just let me eat that. Come on, I've got to get on.' You know, Steve Martin wants every single meal to be perfect.



Ed Gamble

I think I agree with Steve Martin.

Sir Lenny Henry

Really?

James Acaster

Ed is definitely Steve Martin.

Sir Lenny Henry

But that's a problem man. That's a problem, if all he can do is get street food on the way to somewhere. 'Wait a second, how are you cooking these onions for the hot dogs.' And it's, kind of, like, 'Steve, it's just a hot dog.' 'No, no, no, I need to know what kind of soy sauce they're using on these ribs.'

James Acaster

I'd love to know the context of you, and Steve Martin. Were you working on something together?

Sir Lenny Henry

No, it was, we got this phone call from Pete, and he said, 'We're going out with Steve Martin for lunch. Do you want to come?' And I was almost there before he'd finished the phone call. And I was just sitting there, and Steve Martin was there, and it was brilliant. It was, kind of, like, all of us seen him perform at the table. He didn't do any jokes, so it was, kind of, like being with this slightly grumpy, middle aged bloke. But we didn't care, because we were all, kind of, in awe of him, watching him eating, being really fussy. Because even when he was fussing over his food, it was, kind of, funny, so we were biting our lips trying not to laugh. And he did 1 thing where he went, 'I am going to the bathroom.' And we were, '(laughing).' And it wasn't even funny, he just, kind of, said it in that, kind of, wild, and crazy way. And we were, '(laughing) it's Steve Martin. We're having our lunch with Steve Martin, it's great.' But he was a bit grumpy. Oh, I did an impression of him, I made a film called live and unleashed in 1989, and, um, I did an impression of Steve with prosthetics at the beginning of the film where, I walk into that empire, and he rang me, he rang my house, and left a very long answer phone message about copywriting, about plagiarism. It was funny. You know, 'Maybe my lawyers will be on the phone to you at some point, because you've literally stolen my soul.' It was great. It was really nice. Good guy.

James Acaster

That's very good to hear.

Ed Gamble

Yes, yes.

James Acaster

For a second there, because you were saying it very serious, where you said he left a message to you about copyright, I was like, 'What, Steve Martin was going to sue?'

Sir Lenny Henry

No, it was joking. It was a joke.

James Acaster

It was not like that at all.

Sir Lenny Henry

'Saw your film. Okay, spoken to my lawyers.'



James Acaster

Do you feel like you, and Steve Martin have a natural bond as well, because your surnames are also Christian names? So, when Steve Martin and Lenny are hanging out (talking over each other).

Sir Lenny Henry

No, it was just, we're both comics, and quite miserable in real life. It was cool to meet him. They say you should meet your heroes, but I go, 'What's that all about, you should meet them.' Doesn't matter. I was a bit tongue tied when I met Joan Armatrading, but apart from that. I also met Aretha Franklin, and was tongue tied, I don't know what's the matter with me. I'm not shy, I met Aretha Franklin in an airport, and I was like, 'blah blah.'

Ed Gamble

I think anyone would be shy in front of her, come on.

Sir Lenny Henry

She signed a book for me, and she had a huge bodyguard with her, he was like an asteroid, he was so big this guy, and she went, 'Let him through.'

James Acaster

Our friend, Rob David, is a comedian, you might have met Rob, does a live, um, comedy, music show, like a quiz. And I was paired up with someone, and they had to describe musicians, and I had to guess who they were without saying the musicians name, like articulate, and they had Joan Armatrading, and at that point I hadn't heard of Joan Armatrading before, and the guesses that I came up with to try, and get who this person was. Because they were trying to, like, you know, 'So, say you had a job, and it was to swap like a breast place.' And I was like, 'Err so like an arms dealer.' 'No, you're nearly there, you're nearly there.' I had no idea.

Sir Lenny Henry

You didn't know who Joan Armatrading was?

James Acaster

I didn't at the time, didn't at the time.

Sir Lenny Henry

She was in the Beano.

James Acaster

We were in the Beano.

Sir Lenny Henry

Were you?

Ed Gamble

We were in the Beano.

James Acaster

Yes, because of this podcast.

Ed Gamble

We're in 1 frame of a mini the minx cutting.

James Acaster

It was set in a restaurant, and in the foreground, there's me and Ed having a little meal. It was the best day of our lives.



Sir Lenny Henry

I was in the Beano. We did a Comic Relief comic, and um, some of the artists put us in the comic. I was so chuffed you know, because Beano is a thing.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

And food again, the Beano and Dandy, at the end of every episode in the last panel, they were always having sausage and mash, and saying, 'We'll feast on this. 50p, we'll feast on this.' And they always had huge sausage and mash, and the sausage always stuck down.

Ed Gamble

Yes, they stuck it in (talking over each other).

Sir Lenny Henry

I love that. I've never had sausage and mash like that.

Ed Gamble

No, no.

Sir Lenny Henry

But if I was serving sausage and mash, I would, sort of, want a pile of mash bigger than my head, and the sausages poked like antlers out of it. That's the way to eat sausage and mash, pal.

James Acaster

Yes. I went to the Beano exhibit at Somerset house, you went there as well, didn't you?

Ed Gamble

Yes.

James Acaster

And, I didn't know that, like, at the first bit of the exhibit, it basically just explains that Beano is all about food. And, I was like, 'I didn't even think about that.' But, like, yes, they have a big sculpture of the mash, and the sausages.

Sir Lenny Henry

Desperate Dan, cow pie.

James Acaster

Yes, pie, yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

But is it because of post war, because of rationing, and stuff? Because food was so scarce, all the comics were about stealing cakes, and eating sausage and mash.

Ed Gamble

By abundance, yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

Yes, it was all about, just loving food. Lord Snooty, and the backstreet kids all eating pies, and stuff. It was that post war thing of scarcity. And I get that. We didn't have much money, but we always ate.



My Mum was always very clear about, 'You clear your plate. This food was hard won this week.' And so I really got the Beano and the Dandy's obsession with food.

Dream drinks. When I saw the Beatles on something, drinking Scotch and Coke, I drank Scotch and Coke for a long time. And, um, the Edge bought me a bottle of Tequila once.

Ed Gamble

I love it. No build up to that. Just straight in. That's how I want (talking over each other).

Sir Lenny Henry

And Lemmy gave me a bottle of Vodka once at a gig. But these are not my dream drinks. My dream drink is a rum punch, because it's quite strong but it doesn't mess up the meal, because you don't want to be so drunk before you eat your meal. I don't understand the Martini thing. Have you ever had a Martini?

Ed Gamble

I love Martini.

James Acaster

I like Martini, yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

They're really strong though.

James Acaster

Yes.

Ed Gamble

Yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

It's like pour a large glass of gin, add something like Vermouth, or put on an olive in it, drink. What is the shaken, not stirred thing? It's just a pint of gin. The first Martini I had I couldn't even talk afterwards, I was so, kind of like, shocked at how strong it was. Anyway, so rum punch is just right, as long as, you know, a maniac hasn't made it. I've had some maniac made rum punches, where people can't move. If you use Wray & Nephew rum, and put it in a bowl, and people are just dipping into it at a party, there is quite a lot of Uber's to call, with a stretcher that you need, because people are so drunk, they can barely move. So, a lightly made rum punch with fruit, and stuff, in it, and that is a lovely thing to have with your starter, to sip at, and chat. And then during the meal, you know, I like a glass of wine. I used to like, Polleni Montrachet, was a nice white wine. I went to a farm once in the south of France, and the farmer was selling wine in gallon plastic containers, it was 1 of the best wines I'd ever had. It was a white, and it was delicious. We had it for a week, it was fantastic. I was just drinking it from the container, and pretending I was drinking paraffin. 'Look at me, I'm drinking paraffin.' But, um, it was really delicious.

Ed Gamble

I'm trying to work out which musical legend it turns out the farmer is.

James Acaster

Yes, yes.

Sir Lenny Henry

It wasn't a musical legend.



Ed Gamble

Meatloaf.

Sir Lenny Henry

It was just a farmer.

James Acaster

Do you have a rum punch recipe for the listeners?

Sir Lenny Henry

Some sweet, some sour. So, you need some rum, you need some, kind of, glycerin type sugary type, syrup thing to put into it. You could put lemonade in it, you could have some pineapple juice in there, it would be quite nice to have some of the pineapple on the side of the glass, and then you, kind of, mix it a bit. There will be better recipes, but it's some sweet, some sour, some alcoholic, drink it.

Ed Gamble

People often forget to put that as part of the recipe.

Sir Lenny Henry

Drink it, yes, just make it. There like looking at it, and going, 'See what I've done. My work is done.'

James Acaster

So, we arrive at your dream dessert. Is this from a certain time in your life, or has it always been a favourite?

Sir Lenny Henry

Um, yes. Well, crème brulee is great. And trifle is legendary. School spotted dick, and, kind of, sticky toffee puddings are very popular in our house. Can't really eat a lot of puddings at the moment, because I'm trying to watch my weight, because I'm diabetic, but I do like a dessert still. But, there is a legendary one. There was a restaurant in Manchester, I can't remember it's name so I apologise in advance, chef made a bread pudding with brioche, it had currants in it, chocolate, and a thimble full of whisky. It was literally mind blowing. Because the custardy bit just made this chocolatey, whiskey custard, and the brioche, because it wasn't bread wasn't too orneriest, eager. Sometimes, the bread bit of a bread pudding can be a bit claggy. But when you put your spoon in it, it went (made a sound), like that. There was resistance, but not too much resistance, and so oh, this thing. And guess what chef did? He gave me the recipe.

James Acaster

Oh, wow.

Sir Lenny Henry

So, somewhere in my house, tucked into a book somewhere is a recipe for this chocolate, brioche, bread pudding. And it's literally 1 of the best things that you've ever eaten.

Ed Gamble

And do you make that at home?

Sir Lenny Henry

I've made it a few times when I've wanted to impress people, and it's a very nice dessert to have, very, very nice. You can serve a nice little whisky with it. I got into a thing, I was doing a Phil McIntyre gig up north, in Scotland, and we were staying in a very, very nice hotel where they had a whisky bar with every whisky that you could probably name, and lots of local ones. And, um, it changed my mind about whisky. Because my family, my uncles used to drink Johnnie Walker, and Johnnie Walker is just like, drink, fall down. Whereas, like with these people who taste tea, there is a



whole thing with whisky where it's not just about drinking, and falling over, it's about taste, and nuance, and texture, and stuff. So, I had a really lovely whisky tasting night, which I can't quite remember, but I did learn that whisky is not something to be drunk just because you want to get drunk, it's something you can actually drink like a very, very fine wine, or a liqueur. So, if you serve it with a very, very nice whisky, pucker.

Ed Gamble

Oh, it does sound delicious.

James Acaster

Yes. Also, for instance your face completely glows over when you pictured it, your eyes were half open, you were staring into the distance.

Sir Lenny Henry

Sorry, I'm a very visual person.

James Acaster

Also, when you said Manchester, and bread pudding, I thought it was going to be Gary Rhodes thing. He used to make a...

Sir Lenny Henry

I'm not sure it was Gary, it might have been Tom Kerridge, I don't know, but it was somebody, 1 of those up, and coming chefs in the late '80s, 1 of those people. But it was in Manchester, and it was, like, a little restaurant. I remember it was quite steel, and graphite. 1 of those nice, kind of, new restaurants. Sci-fi, blade runner type things. And, um, God it was good.

James Acaster

Sounds delicious. All the different components.

Ed Gamble

I never thought, as a kid I was always, sort of, anti bread and pudding, because it sounded so weird. But the first time I had it, I was like.

Sir Lenny Henry

It's good isn't it.

Ed Gamble

It's mind blowing. It's so good.

Sir Lenny Henry

But the normal bread pudding is delicious, the idea of custard, and bread, and currants, I love currants. If you say to me, 'It's got currants in it.' I'm there. You know, you had me at, 'It's got c.' I love currants, and raisins, and things. So, I love chocolate raisins, and I love anything with a raisin thing in it. You know, rum and raisin ice cream, I love that. So, bread, putter, pudding, custard, raisins, it's like you're talking to a 7 year old Len, and going, 'Eat this child.' It's, like, so great. So, that's it, is that good.

James Acaster

Well, let me read it back to you, see how you feel about it, I'll read your menu back to you. You like still water, you like poppadoms.

Ed Gamble

In a big, crisp bag.



James Acaster

In a big, hessian sack, filled with poppadoms. Starter, your hand diced scallops from the Ritz. Main course, Mums Saturday soup. Side of 2 ribs, fall off the bone. Drink rum punch, and also you would like a Polleni Montrachet white wine throughout the meal. Dessert, the brioche bread pudding with currants, chocolate, and whisky from the place in Manchester.

Sir Lenny Henry

That sounds fantastic.

James Acaster

It sounds very good.

Sir Lenny Henry

All day long, I'm eating that.

James Acaster

Yes. I'm on board with that. I'm desperate to try Saturday soup from somewhere.

Ed Gamble

I want Saturday soup, I want the dessert, obviously.

Sir Lenny Henry

I mean, fine dining is weird isn't it, because hand dived scallops are on every menu. But the bread, and butter pudding, and the Saturday soup, you don't see when you go out. But there are more, thank God, there are more Caribbean restaurants opening all the time. It's been a thing with Caribbean restaurants in Britain, because whenever you go to the ones that exist from, like, late '80s to now, there is very little on the menu when you get there. 'You got the soup?' 'No, the soup done.' 'You have the stew?' 'The stew done.' 'You have the cooked chicken with the rum, and the curry?' 'That done.' 'You have the coconut?' 'That finished.' 'What you have left?' 'Let me go, and ask the chef.' 'We have the random stew. You want some of that?' 'Alright then.' I remember taking Richard Curtis to a Caribbean restaurant and it was like that in Ladbroke Grove, they didn't have anything on the menu. We had some weird, bizarre, whatever was left in the kitchen, we had. So, now, with the advent of programmes like Master-chef, and Great British Menu, and everything, we've got some great chefs going around from Caribbean heritage. There is this attempt to make, successful attempt to make, Caribbean food fine dining. And, I think, you're going to see, in the next 10 years perhaps, a transition from this side you have peasant food, fish and chips, and curry and rice, into something that we can savour, and enjoy, in, kind of, a take your partner out for a nice meal way. Rustie Lee's restaurant was that, in Birmingham, but unfortunately it closed down after a while. But there are a few place now, where you can, kind of, go for a nice meal, and eat Caribbean food, and it's great. Certainly in France, certainly in places like Antigua, and certainly in Jamaica. They're not ashamed of their heritage. They, kind of, elevate it. And, I think, you'll see that in the next 10 years with Caribbean food.

James Acaster

Well, fingers crossed. There will be, more to such restaurants, we'll all have Saturday soup any day of the week. Am I allowed to eat it outside of a Saturday?

Sir Lenny Henry

Well, we did, because, you know, if we could get her to make Saturday soup on Thursday for instance, that was good, because it wasn't pilchards. 'Can't you make Saturday soup today?' 'Well, it's not really politic, but I will try, for you, because you asked nicely.'

Ed Gamble

Did you have to have pilchards on the Saturday then?



Sir Lenny Henry

Oh no, no.

James Acaster

Thank you very much for coming to the dream restaurant.

Sir Lenny Henry

Thank you, it's been lovely. I'll have what they're having.

Ed Gamble

Well, there we go. We managed it James, we kept ourselves together.

James Acaster

I was even more in awe than I thought I was going to be. Do you know what? I'm going to be honest with you, it was quite an emotional experience.

Ed Gamble

It was a fantastic episode. What an absolute gentleman. So funny.

James Acaster

I felt regaled by the end.

Ed Gamble

I felt regaled. But, also, I know that you missed a lot of what he said after sugar sandwiches, because you were just thinking about that.

James Acaster

I think I need to do that, as soon as possible. On the way home I'll go to the shop, I'll get some bread, and some sugar, and some butter.

Ed Gamble

An absolutely amazing episode, and he did not say plain kombucha, surprisingly.

James Acaster

Thank you, Sir Lenny. We didn't have to have that awful moment, a night of the realm, that would be awful.

Ed Gamble

So, do go and buy rising to the surface, Lenny Henry's new memoir.

James Acaster

Published by Fabour.

Ed Gamble

Published by Fabour, out on 1st September. And his new kids book, Book of Legends, published by MacMillan, and that's out on 13th October, and do watch him, he is in the new Lord of the Ring series, The Rings of Power on Prime Video, and that starts on 2nd September. He is a very busy knight.

James Acaster

He is a busy knight.

Ed Gamble

Busy, busy, he's busy.



James Acaster

Busy knight, working like a dog.

Ed Gamble

I'm quite busy, I'm on tour, Ed Gamble Electric, go and see it, EdGamble.co.uk for tickets.

James Acaster

Yes, and also I've got a book out.

Ed Gamble

James has got a book out. Who is it published by James?

James Acaster

Headline.

Ed Gamble

Headline. Thank you very much for listening to this episode. We can't believe it happened either, bye bye.

James Acaster

Good bye.