

****Info below embargoed until 00.01am Tuesday 29th August****

Mel Giedroyc and Martin Clunes explore Britain by The Book



TX: 6th September on ITV1 and ITVX [TBC in final schedules]

Overview:

Much-loved actress, comedian and writer Mel Giedroyc heads to Dorset on a travel adventure with a twist. Inspired by her passion for books, Mel hooks up with her friend and Dorset local, Martin Clunes, to explore the spectacular scenery and iconic locations made famous by some of Britain's favourite books and films.

In this funny, revealing and heart-warming travelogue, the two friends walk in the footsteps of Meryl Streep's French Lieutenant's Woman, stoke up the engine on a steam train ride through Enid Blyton country and having worked up a thirst Mel and Martin sample Dorset's finest cider on a farm overlooking magical Corfe Castle. A boat trip to the world-famous Durdle Door on the breathtaking Jurassic coast proves challenging for the sea-sick Mel despite Martin's best efforts at distracting her by reading bursts of Thomas Hardy and they meet, walk and talk with Raynor Winn, author of the blockbuster No 1 best-selling novel 'The Salt Path'.

Throughout this revealing and joyful episode Martin shares his love for Dorset, takes Mel to his favourite secret spot, explains how Peter O'Toole inspired him to get into acting and talks about the precious book his dad gave him as a boy, before his untimely death.

Mel Giedroyc Q&A

Why is Dorset special for you?

We used to take our little nieces and nephews to Dorset back in the day, probably 20 years ago. We used to go there a lot. It's always been a place of just joy, actually. And through Enid Blyton and reading the books as a kid. I've done a bit of camping there. I always associate it with good times and joy. And the fact that Martin lives there - that's a big draw!

What books do you enjoy?

I've become obsessed with Belfast. I've got about 20 books either set in or written by Belfast authors. I'm on a bit of a mission. One of my kids is at Belfast uni and I'd never been and I went over to settle her in and we were just obsessed. The whole family has become obsessed with Northern Ireland. The coast! My gosh! It's phenomenally beautiful. I don't know if it's because of this show, but I quite like the idea of reading a tonne of books just associated with one place. It must be because of doing this show, subliminally.

Which books from the series would you be more likely to pick up and read?

I've always been a big Thomas Hardy fan. Any teenage girl would have read Tess of the d'Urbervilles. I think I've read most of them. I'd never read any T.E Lawrence books. I saw French Lieutenant's Woman before I read it, so I came to that book via the film. And Enid Blyton, obsessed as a kid. We loved them. We still test each other on Malory Towers. I'll get a call from my brother and I'll think, 'Ok, I have to get into the zone of Malory Towers.' I'll pick up and he won't even say hello, he'll just leap straight into a question about the book. You have to be really on your guard!

Do you plan to write more yourself?

I've written draft one of a new novel. Set in Leatherhead, as the first one was. I hope to write a Leatherhead trilogy. It's set in the theatre. It's been such a bloody laugh to write. But I'm just at the end of draft one. The next one will be really hard. I've got a load of notes basically that I've got to address, aka, make it better!

In the show you see where Thomas Hardy wrote and you find it quite gloomy. Where do you choose to write?

I wrote my first novel in the local library, which I really liked. I like being surrounded by people. The second one I've written all over the shop as I couldn't take the time out as I did for the first one. So I've written it in dribs and drabs. It's got to be solid time in a library. I love libraries.

What was your favourite thing about teaming up with Martin?

Everything! It was so much fun.

Did you come away with a new favourite fact about Dorset, or a favourite memory?

We just laughed. We laughed solidly. I just came away thinking, I really love my job! But seeing Hardy's house was a stand out moment. I can't wrap my head around the fact that Hardy only died in 1928. Chris who showed us around was a fount of knowledge.

We see you feel quite poorly on a boat in the episode, has it put you off sea travel?

Yes! I thought it was going to be a large ferry! With a bar, possibly with a snack store...

Are you a convert to cider now after trying it out in Dorset?

I've been looking for the cider we had! I used to drink loads of cider as a teenager. But I'd like to find that one.

How would you sum up the show and travelling Dorset?

Martin Clunes. Those two words are enough... It would be great to do some more. You're spending time with a travelling companion, where they reside, and it's about getting to know them at the same time as learning more about the area through books associated with the area. It was brilliant, what a treat.

ENDS

Martin Clunes Q&A

What makes Dorset so special for you?

Our relationship with Dorset happened incrementally and kind of organically. First we went to Corfe for a wedding and then the next day we were driving around slack jawed at the beauty of the place and the way it made us feel, so we casually started looking. Then, two years later, we bought a very handsome Georgian vicarage and started spending our weekends

down here. Then we had Emily and everything changed when we decided that she would go to school down here. She's 23 now and we can't imagine living anywhere else.

Literature is a key theme throughout the programme - are you an avid reader and what sort of books do you enjoy?

I don't read as much as I would like, I think because when I'm working I have to learn everything. I read when I'm at home not working, but I always feel I should be outside "doing" something. But I love reading when I'm on holiday.

Would you ever consider writing more books yourself?

I'd like to but it's an easy act to postpone and go outside and "do" something. There's talk of doing a book about all the amazing islands that I have visited making my Islands Of... series.

Would you like to work more in your home county?

Yes, that would be nice. But to be honest I don't really mind where I work so long as it's not indoors.

You are teaming up with your good friend Mel for this project - is this the first time you have worked together?

Mel and I first worked together 27 years ago when we did a one-off sketch show called Never Mind the Horrocks with our friend Jane and then we bumped into each other a bit when Mel and Sue were doing their lunchtime show. But it's been a real joy to share this time with her in Dorset; she's terrific company and I haven't laughed so much in ages.

Do you travel a lot and what is your perfect getaway?

I travel a lot for work and it is the greatest privilege to go to the places I get to and to meet and hang out with people from all over the world. But when my wife and I go on holiday we like to lie still and read our books whilst kindly people bring us stuff.

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