

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018 – Only Fools and Three Courses

Warm up man to the stars of comedy owes it all to Glasgow

Denny Hodge may not be a household name, but he's been a key figure on some of Britain's most popular sitcoms and prime-time entertainment shows over the past 30 years – and he owes it all to Glasgow.

In between takes, Denny – who played his first gig at the Rangers Social Club alongside Paisley comedy legend Hector Nicol – has kept studio audiences roaring with laughter with his impressions, one-liners and stand-up routines and his CV reads like a TV hall of fame.



As an off-camera funny man, he's been present during some of the greatest moments of comedy gold on hit shows including Birds of a Feather, Keeping Up Appearances, As Time Goes By,

Goodnight Sweetheart, The News Statesman, New Faces, Blind Date, Bullseye and Blockbusters.



He worked alongside some of the country's top comedy and acting talent including Dame Judy Dench in *As Time Goes By*. He formed a close working relationship with her and she mentioned him in her autobiography, describing him as 'her rock'.

He also worked with Bob Holness on the popular TV quiz *Blockbusters* and with Cilla Black on *Blind Date*.

After watching David Jason play the irrepressible Del Boy on the set of *Only fools and Horses* for three seasons, Denny perfected the character and he now plays the Peckham chancer in a cabaret show to audiences worldwide.

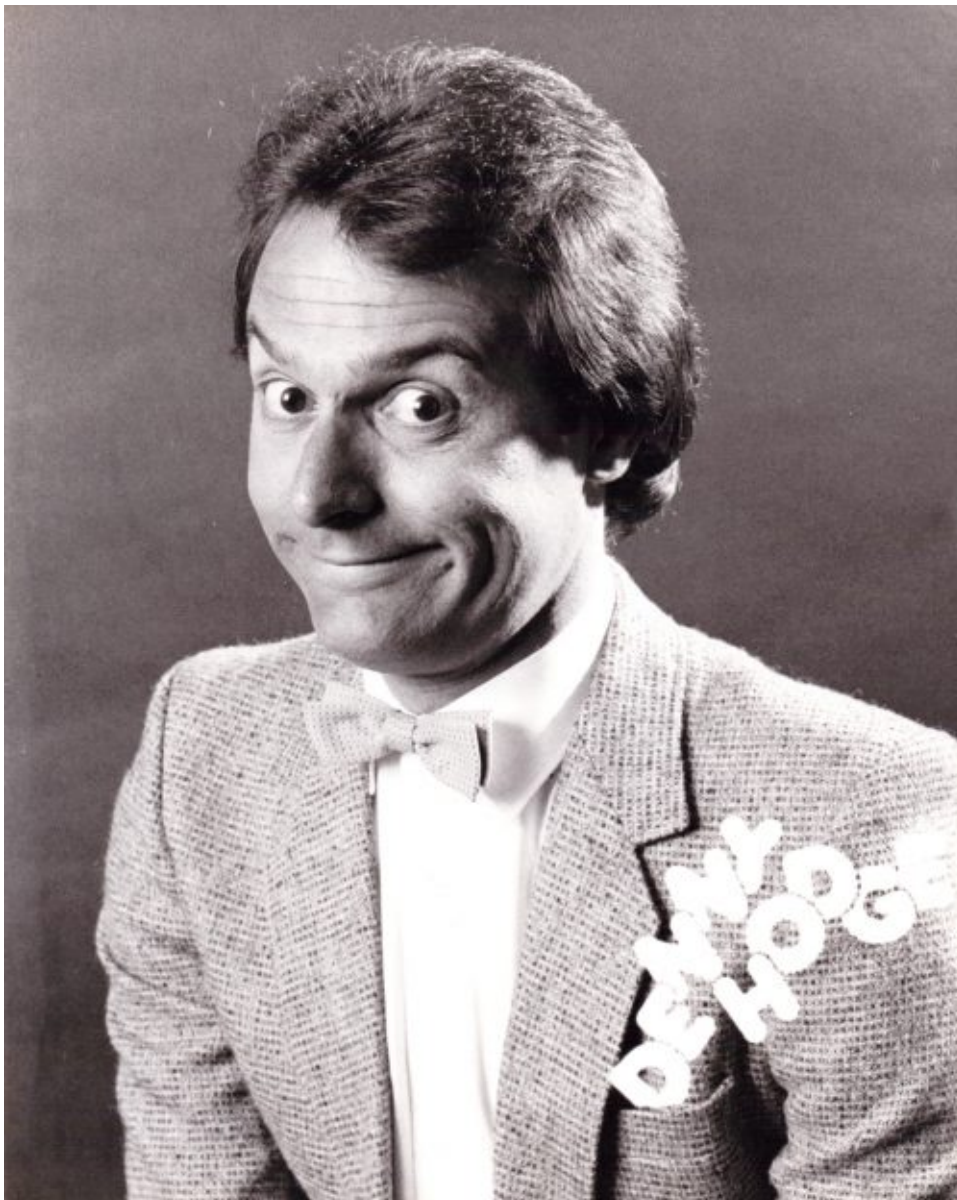
Denny and his fellow cast members recently returned from a run in Australia and next year they are taking the show to Thailand and Singapore.

They are bringing their 'comedy-dining' production of *Only Fools and Three Courses*, to the Edinburgh Fringe next month and tickets are already selling faster than a case of Del Boy's dodgy Albanian radio cassettes.

The show is performed at the Kama Sutra restaurant where audience members are served a meal while the performance goes on around them with actors playing all the show's favourites including Rodney, Uncle Albert, Boycie, Marlene and Trigger.

The cast, who play to jubilant audiences across the UK and Ireland, recently returned from run in Australia where the sitcom is hugely popular, and they're booked to play in Bangkok and Singapore next year. In October the cast begins a residency in Covent Garden.

"It's astonishing how enduring the show is," says father of two Denny. "Even after all these years, people still go wild for it. Some of its greatest fans are outside of the UK."



Denny Hodge

Denny, 55, who started his career as a Blue Coat at Potter's holiday camp in Great Yarmouth, says he owes his success to Nicol.

As an aspiring club performer in the 1980s, he cut his comedy teeth playing in some of Scotland's lesser entertainment venues where he was taken under the wing of the Paisley-born comic who inspired a generation of Scottish performers from Billy Connolly to Elaine C Smith.

"I honed my craft doing local clubs, including the Bellshill Miners' Club, Billy's Bar in Musselburgh, Jackie O – known locally as Jacks – in Kircaldy, the Aberdeen Arms Hotel in Tarves and the Shotts Bon Accord Social Club," he recalls.

"The most memorable nights were at the Rangers Social Club at Ibrox when I performed alongside Hector who was the resident compere. I learned a lot from him, watching his professionalism and comic timing. He would introduce me and I'd do a 40-minute spot.

"Even then, coming to Glasgow with an English accent was a challenge. It was still regarded by performers as the toughest audience of all, but I got away with it because much of my act was impressions."



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This is a Tribute Show

With the help of his wife and agent Gill, Denny soon found work on sitcoms where there was a need for a warm up person to keep audiences amused during breaks from filming.

While he was working on the filming of an episode of The New Statesman, he was approached by John Sullivan the writer of Only Fools and Horses, who was in the audience and who was so impressed with Denny's routine, he invited him to work on the show.

"It had been going for a few seasons and was already a big hit – the actors were all household names. Del Boy had become a yuppie and he was living with Rachel," Denny recalls.

"The way it worked was that they would shoot the outside scenes on location in Bristol. They would then shoot three or four scenes in the studio, in front of a live audience of around 300 people. Those would be the indoors scenes at the Nag's Head and in Del and Rodney's flat.

"I would arrive early for the dress rehearsal which I had to watch carefully so that I knew the script. The audience would arrive and, at around 7.20pm I would introduce all the actors.

"I didn't need to tell any jokes because the audiences were always high as kites. All I had to do was to introduce the characters and they would go wild. Trigger was the most popular after Del Boy. I only had to mention his name and it would bring the house down."

Observing David Jason playing Del Boy at close quarters and watch his mannerisms for three seasons meant he was able to do a near perfect impression of the character and he began to introduce that into his warm-up routine. That he also bears a physical resemblance to the actor was a bonus.



Two years ago, Gill spotted a newspaper ad from Preston-based agency Comedy Dining, which was looking for an actor to play Del Boy in the show. The company stages performances of other popular sitcoms, including Fawlty Towers and Allo Allo.

Denny said: “The job description looked like it was tailor-made for me. I couldn’t believe it and I jumped at the chance. It’s like a dream come true. I now travel the world playing one of my favourite characters and making people laugh.

“It’s such an enjoyable experience for the audience and that rubs off on the cast. Two of the great joys of life are eating and laughing and we get a ringside seat watching happy people doing both every night. I couldn’t imagine a better way to earn a living.”

Only fools and Three Courses is being performed at the Kama Sutra, Drummond Street, Edinburgh from August 3-26. To book phone 0333 666 3366 or visit www.comedy-dining.co.uk

[Tickets here](#)