

# EDDIE IZZARD

## The Real Malloy

BY SUSAN MICHALS  
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GROOMING RACHAEL BENSON

**E**ddie Izzard, in addition to being a first rate actor, also happens to be a world class raconteur. During a recent thoroughly delightful, balmy afternoon chat, all manner of topics are tossed about, including a conversation in French, a snippet of a Beatles tune, and commentary on Liz and Phil (that would be Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip, for the record).

Needless to say, when one's French is only a notch or two above *comme ci, comme ça*, a full-on tête-à-tête can be a little daunting, especially with someone like Izzard, who admits to practicing his language skills up to four hours a day. But that kind of dedication is typical of Eddie Izzard. Legendary for his quirky, intellectual stand-up, the actor was determined not to be type cast as the funny man; in fact, he wanted to be taken seriously. "I loved comedy, but I always wanted to do drama," recalls the buff Brit. "But none of the acting agents would actually touch me... Comedies would come my way, and I wouldn't do them." After parts in films like *The Velvet Goldmine*, *Shadow of the Vampire*, and *Ocean's 12*, Izzard has finally found the role he was destined to play: Wayne Malloy, con artist extraordinaire, on the new hit F/X series, "The Riches."

The concept of "The Riches" revolves around the Travelers, a nomadic group of Irish origin. With an estimated 7,000 residing in the United States, mostly in the South, this clan lives by their own rules and regulations — they are virtually untraceable, as the majority have no legitimate form of identification (e.g., Social Security numbers).

When we first meet the Malloy family, who are indeed members of this group of grifters, Wayne and his children are picking up mama Dahlia (Minnie Driver), who has just spent two years in the slammer. At a party to celebrate Dahlia's homecoming, there is an obvious clash between Wayne and his nemesis, Dale (Todd Stashwick), both of whom are vying to succeed the ailing leader of the clan. Stacked against Wayne is the fact that not only is he an outsider and a half-breed, "One of my parents is a Traveler and one isn't," says the actor, "but Dahlia was originally promised to someone else," and Wayne stole her away. This doesn't exactly make him the







most popular guy among this shady sect. Looking for a chance for a better life for himself and his family, on impulse Wayne empties the camp's safe, and the Malloys have no choice but to hit the road once again. Fate steps out in front of them when an auto accident (caused by a fellow traveler trying to run the Malloys off the road) results in the deaths of Doug and Cherien Rich, who are on their way to their new home smack dab in the middle of upscale southern suburbia (think "Weeds" tract homes, but wealthier). Wayne sees an opportunity, and the family adopts the identities of the dead couple. Soon they are living (or rather, stealing) the American dream, embroiled in the trappings of wealth and a superficial society, while constantly having to look over their shoulders for Dale and assorted Travelers.

They must be quick on the draw and have an answer for everything. They are now forced into a scenario of constantly proving themselves, not just to this community, but to each other as well.

Izzard confesses that he and his character are quite similar — relentless, in fact, in their tenacious consumption of knowledge. He believes we're constantly learning. When he discusses what he wants for himself and his career, it is with the voracity of an innocent on the cusp of a new experience. There is that unencumbered eagerness to soak up information, like it is yet another new adventure, and looking into Eddie Izzard's azure eyes which literally are sparkling with excitement, it is clear as a bell that he is fully aware that he's gotten the ticket and he's taking the ride.

**Venice:** I've seen the first six episodes of "The Riches" thus far. Your character, Wayne — is he starting to crack? Is he subconsciously feeling the burden of taking over someone else's identity?

**Eddie Izzard:** Yeah, I think the conscience is working away underneath him and is going to continue to eat at him — even though it wasn't his fault (referring to the death of Doug Rich, whose identity he has assumed). But I think of the family as jackals; scavenging... like in the pilot, when the Riches die and Wayne says, 'Strip the car' to his family — it's from the point of view of a jackal — you can't waste anything; it's a fucking crime to waste — and if we don't, someone else will take it. And we didn't kill these people (Doug and Cherien); we actually tried to help them. So it's







actually their duty to take all this stuff, and to take this life.

**Do you think Wayne wants to fit in, maybe settle down?**

I think he does. Their life has always been about scavenging and taking; and I think Wayne has always looked for that 'grass is always greener' ideal. He has to have a life with meaning and get away from this parasitic existence. He wants to change it, but he can't. So when this opportunity presents itself, he grabs it really tight. But eventually that's just going to gnaw away at him—because he shouldn't have stolen a life. It helps, though, that Doug Rich doesn't turn out to be a great humanitarian.

**And now the Malloys always have to be on their toes — even if it's just going to the grocery store, because one wrong move...**

They gotta be ready to feign left or feign right, just to come up with some spurious answer — just make something up and run for it.

**Of all the things you've been offered, why this?**

I've been trying to develop a knowledge and sense of structure, because my stand-up is very instinctive and very stream of consciousness and doesn't fit into a structure. It's like a conversation, that goes on and on and on, and then we say goodnight. So, I was watching a film some years ago, and just started to wonder about the arc of that story and thought, 'I need to study this.' I took the Robert McKee course here in Los Angeles, and McKee said the best writing in the world right now is in American television. I hadn't really looked at drama in television, and thought, 'I should look at this more closely.'

I had a meeting set up with Maverick Productions, and Michael Rosenberg, the head of the television department was outside having a cigarette, and it was due to tobacco that this whole thing happened. He said, 'I heard you're here for a meeting, and I'm not going to go to it because I heard you don't do television.' But the story was I just wasn't interested in sitcoms.

So about half an hour into our meeting they threw out the idea of a family of travelers that end up in a housing subdivision and take over a family's life. And I said, 'Well, yeah, I'd like to do that.' This is the weird thing — it was like being in school, and someone says they're going to play cowboys and Indians and I say, 'Can I play?'

**It does remind one of Showtime's "Weeds," going inside this pristine slice of Americana. But when you look underneath the manicured lawns, everyone's got a secret.**

People have mentioned "Weeds" and

"Sopranos" to us (as a comparison) and we're like, 'Oh, yeah, we'll go between those two.' And I think the show's come in at a perfect time, with the Democratic Senate coming in, and the war, and people maybe looking at everything and wondering if it's all airbrushed—what's actually underneath.

**Have you had a lot of input into the storyline?**

I was part of the breaking story, developing the pilot with Dmitry (Lipkin, the show's creator). And the other writers and we'd get notes, and rewrite, constantly over the period of a year until F/X accepted it. Pitching is something that I'm good at doing...

**I bet that comes from doing stand up.**

It could be — I like doing piggyback pitching — someone suggests an idea, and I jump onto that — I'm just making up my own technique as to what it is, or what it will be. I see two phases of story — one is pitching — throwing out these story bombs. And then once we've got it all laid out, it becomes like the rewiring of a piano — we check this key, and that one, and move this one over here. Then we cut this character right out, change the sex of that character, pull that 'round. That part (of developing the story) is much more complex.

I was just talking to one of the show runners — she asked me if I wanted to come back in on the writers room and I do — I love it. But for the writer, it's high stakes; mine are much lower. It's their life's blood — getting their episodes done and getting them done in a way that people actually like them. (On the other hand) I just get to throw ideas around and comment and whatever and leave the room. That screwed up my mind a bit. Writing is god-like; and acting is mortal. I found that when I started playing Wayne, in the first season, after we'd worked out the 12 extra episodes after the pilot, I was in a mental place where I was constantly trying to change things, like 'This shouldn't go there, and this should be over here' as opposed to saying this script is a bible and we can't change an inch of this. It's a weird change of mindset. It overlapped in my head and I found myself saying, 'I don't think he (Wayne) should say this, I don't think he would do that.'

**Your background is comedy — but wasn't your goal to get into drama?**

Always. I loved comedy, but I wanted to do drama and when it took so long for my comedy to take off in Britain, I said, 'Bugger it, I'm going to do both.' I made a pact with myself to start up and do tandem careers.

**How'd you do that?**

You get a separate agent. [laughs] I had my comedy agent, and I had my acting agent. And for a long time, none of the acting agents would actually touch me, except for one woman, Nicky Van Gelder. And I said, 'I want to do drama,' and comedies would come my

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way and I wouldn't do them. So I had these plans that were big — ten year, twenty-year plans and some people would just say to me, 'Look, it's just not going to happen'. Like doing gigs in France; I couldn't get a French promoter interested in me and I couldn't get a British promoter interested in helping.

**How've the French received your comedy?**

Well, there's about a hundred people in Paris right now, who know I exist.

Last time I was there, I did intensive French lessons, which are extremely tiring — I was doing 4 hours a day, one on one. It burns your mind out. I got so tired — but I did three weeks of that, and then did a gig that was strictly in French. Now my plan is I'll go over there, I'll do two hours a day (of French practice), I'll do gigs at night, and I'll get it down in two months. It's such a mad idea — people don't know quite what I'm doing — they're looking at me like I'm saying I push peanuts up mountains.

**You recently attended the White House Correspondents Dinner. That's a pretty prestigious honor.**

It was interesting to hang out there, seeing the White House — especially compared to Downing Street (the Prime Minister's residence). Downing Street — it's like being in a student union, really — there's a café in the middle of it where you can go and have tea and buns and stuff. And they don't have this hierarchical thing — Tony Blair had this sort of, first-name-basis thing...

**Speaking of Blair, have you seen *The***

**Queen? Prime Minister Tony Blair is portrayed as quite an approachable person.**

No, I haven't; I'm not really into monarchy systems. Hereditary privilege is outdated and immoral. That whole system — you have to judge them on what they do in life, as humans. This whole monarchy thing is bull-shit. I didn't even know that Tony Blair had to bow and walk out backwards (leaving the Queen's presence); I thought that had gone out years ago. I think Charlie (Prince Charles) does a lot better with this and he'll have a much better take when it's his turn. I think he's very proactive with the Prince's Trust; I believe he's stopped taking money from the National Pledge and takes the money off the estate he was given. He has all his organic farming. He's thinking ahead. And I just don't feel Liz or Phil (Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip) have done any big, open minded, 'Where should we go with the monarchy' third millennium sort of thinking.

**I did want to ask you briefly about the film *"Across the Universe,"* the Julie Taymor film coming out in September.**

I play Mr. Kite. Have you seen the trailer?

**Yes, it's quite surreal and looks much like a *Moulin Rouge* sort of film.**

I probably look quite alarming in it. I did "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite"... [He goes off into his own world for a moment, and begins singing the song]

"For the Benefit of Mr. Kite, there will be a show tonight on trampoline...the Henderson's will all be there, late of Pablo-Fanques fair, what a scene..."

I did three takes for that and I learned it all

very quickly. And I ad-libbed all through the instrumentals; I had to lip sync with no music. To get the timing right is really difficult because it's all out of sync with the beats. There were all these ad-libs all over the place. I had to play it round and round in my head endlessly.

**Do you feel that now you've finally reached the level of success that you want?**

It's closer. I'm at base camp at Everest. I wanted the 'I'm ready when I was 17' approach, but the world said, 'No.' So I've decided it must be the fine wine approach — that there are things I've got to do first, so I've just got to keep learning, keep pushing, keep expanding, keep finding out.

**Isn't that kind of like Wayne Malloy? He's always trying to discover different approaches and new things — primarily because he needs to be on point and ready and not get caught.**

Absolutely. I think that fifty — maybe sixty percent of Wayne is me; or of me is in Wayne. Overall, the relentless notion of, 'I will not stop.'

**Is that I will not stop or I will not fail?**

With myself or with Wayne, you can't really use the word 'fail.' Failure teaches you more than success; I will not stop until I get to a place of calmness. Maybe that's chasing your tail, but you really have to try to be calm, and just be in the moment. ▼

*"The Riches" airs Mondays at 10 pm on FX*

