

Real-life politics blurs lines with satire: **'Veep'** creator

British satirist Armando Iannucci didn't have to look too far for an example to prove his point about the surreal nature of modern-day politics. At the annual gathering of Britain's Conservative party, two of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's aides were this week caught on camera battling over whether he should be seen holding a disposable coffee cup. The scene, widely shared on social media, was reminiscent of Iannucci's hugely popular TV satire "The Thick of It", which caricatured British politicians and their advisers as largely inept, hapless and image-obsessed.

"It's almost like now is sort of a parody... they've taken the storylines but then decided to muck about with them," the 55-year-old filmmaker added. Iannucci, who also created the multiple Emmy-winning US TV show "Veep" and the 2009 big-screen satire "In the Loop", said the rise of controversial leaders like Johnson meant "nothing feels real anymore". "I don't quite believe that Boris Johnson is the prime minister—I don't think anyone quite believes it," Iannucci told AFP in an interview on Wednesday.

Iannucci, who spent more than two decades creating hit comedy TV before moving on to cinema, said today's politics is changing how satirists like himself approach their craft. "The comedians who are most effective are the ones who then turn into kind of journalists," he said, citing John Oliver, the British comic who hosts a popular weekly show in the US. "It's not just about jokes, but it's about if the politicians aren't going to deal with the facts, then it's left to the comics to deal with it."

Positive celebration

Iannucci spoke before his latest movie, a quirky adaptation of Charles Dickens' 1850 novel "The Personal History of David Copperfield", opened the London Film Festival on Wednesday. He opted to adapt the semi-autobiographical story of a young man's colourful exploits and interactions in Victorian-era Britain out of love for the book and an eagerness to do something different from his 2018 historical comedy "The Death of Stalin".

But Iannucci concedes that the country's current Brexit-dominated politics

probably played a "subconscious" part in the choice—and his light-hearted, highly satirical approach to the 170-year-old story. "The debate in the last two or three years here has been quite negative and toxic," he said. "I wanted to make something that was actually a positive celebration of what defines Britain today."

"It's not just that kind of negative isolationist quality, it's that sense of vibrancy, life and creativity and fun," Iannucci added, noting that adapting the novel highlighted the country's rich comedic and literary heritage. The movie also showcases an array of British acting talent, with colour-blind casting seeing a number of non-white actors play white characters in the book, including Dev Patel ("Slumdog Millionaire") cast as David Copperfield.

London's annual film festival will this year showcase 229 feature films from 79 countries over 12 days, closing with a screening of Martin Scorsese's new film "The Irishman" starring Robert De Niro and Al Pacino.—AFP



British film director Armando Iannucci poses upon arrival for the European Premiere of the film 'The Personal History of David Copperfield' during the opening night gala event for the BFI London Film Festival in London. —AFP

Three men indicted in connection with rapper Miller's death

Three men were indicted Wednesday in connection with the death of rapper Mac Miller who overdosed on counterfeit fentanyl-laced pills at his home in California last year. Cameron Pettit, 28, Stephen Walter, 46 and Ryan Reavis, 36, were charged with conspiring to distribute controlled substances resulting in death and distribution of fentanyl resulting in death, according to the indictment. Walter was also charged with being a felon in possession of ammunition.

The 26-year-old singer born Malcolm McCormick died on September 7, 2018 after ingesting a lethal combination of fentanyl, cocaine and alcohol, according to the Los Angeles medical examiner. Authorities said that three days before Miller died, Pettit had agreed to supply him with 10 "blues"—a street term for oxycodone pills—as well as cocaine and the sedative Xanax. But instead of providing Miller with genuine oxycodone, Pettit allegedly sold the singer counterfeit oxycodone pills that contained fentanyl—a powerful synthetic opioid that is 50 times more potent than heroin.

The indictment alleges that Pettit ordered the fentanyl-laced pills from Walter, and then Reavis delivered the narcotics to Pettit. "It has become increasingly common for us to see drug dealers peddling counterfeit pharmaceuticals made with fentanyl," United States Attorney Nick Hanna said in a statement. "As a consequence, fentanyl is now the number one cause of overdose deaths in the United States," he added.

Hanna said that all three defendants charged had allegedly continued to sell narcotics after Miller's death despite the deadly effects of their products. The three men each face up to life in prison without



In this file photo Mac Miller performs on Camp Stage during day 1 of Camp Flog Gnaw Carnival 2017 at Exposition Park in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

parole if convicted. Walter also faces up to 10 years in prison on the charge of being a felon in possession of ammunition. Fentanyl has become the deadliest drug in the United States, killing more than 18,000 Americans in 2016, the latest year for which full data is available, according to federal health officials. The opioid, which acts on the brain like morphine or heroin, was blamed in the high-profile deaths of icon Prince and rocker Tom Petty, both of whom died of overdoses.—AFP

French soprano steps up to save Handel concert

The show must go on, and in Paris this week that meant convincing a mezzo-soprano who came to enjoy Handel's "Messiah" to hastily take the stage after a soloist bowed out halfway through the concert. Adele Charvet, who had never before sung the famed choral work, was in the audience at the Radio France Auditorium on Tuesday night for the concert being led by her friend, the conductor Valentin Tournet.

All was going well until the intermission, when the South Korean countertenor David DQ Lee informed Tournet that he was done for the night. "During the break I ran into the stage manager, who told me the countertenor couldn't sing another note and asked me to go backstage," Charvet told AFP on Wednesday.

Stretching out the intermission by 15 minutes gave her time to run through her parts, but hardly any time to warm up her vocal chords and no time to dress up—she sang in her jeans. "It went better than I thought... the audience was incredibly encouraging and happy," Charvet said. The concert will be broadcast on France Musique radio on November 5. —AFP