

# Sanity fair



Ruby Wax: Picture by Steve Ullathorne

Liz Nicholls speaks to comedian, writer and mental health campaigner Ruby Wax OBE ahead of her new one-woman comedy show *Sane New World*

**Q. Why does the modern world frazzle our brains?**

"It was easier to be content in the old days, when we were milking cows all day, or avoiding predators. Our brains aren't wired for the 21st century; all the worry, fear and unhelpful comparisons. You read a newspaper, everyone's dead. You go online, you're force-fed details of some celebrity who's had sex with someone else you don't know. And, in our lives, constant 'busyness' is the goal. No wonder we're nuts. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is you can change your mind and the way you think, which is pretty good news for a change, right?"

**Q. Do we all have it in us to change our negative thinking?** "Yes! And I'm not on about wishful thinking, I'm not a 'New Age' type person. There's something called neuroplasticity; go look it up, or read my book! Your brain is malleable, it changes until you drop dead. You can no longer say 'this is who I am'. Not my philosophy; science."

**Q. How does it feel to have gone from The Priory to being accepted by Oxford University [for a masters in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy] and academic community?** "I loved it. I always was gonna study this stuff, so during my Oxford interview, I told them 'whether you guys take me or not, I'm still gonna study this'. Neuroscientists like me because I'm writing about what they want to get out, but I can do it in a way they can't. They're the smart ones; I'm just the translator."

**Q. Have we lost the stigma of mental illness?** "It's getting better, but still misunderstood. One in four of us suffer and then we hit ourselves over the head with not being able to 'fix' it. Depression is the result of something going wrong somewhere in the brain. We're just as discriminated against as alcoholics, let's get together!"

**Q. Are you a positive person?** "I'm pretty cynical. But if I didn't have that, I wouldn't have comedy. You need that ingredient; you need to stand back and sneer."

**Q. You've said you would have made either a good serial killer or a comedian?** "Yeah, true! Because I was ambitious but didn't know what I was ambitious for. It was just sheer Rottweiler 'want' until I figured it out."

**Q. What makes you happiest?** "I'm just off to Burning Man Festival. I'm going with my husband. What will I do there? What do you think?! Have you seen that place? It's a zoo! I've got costumes; American Indian, a tutu, a ball-gown, pirate and waitress. That's pretty happy-making..."

**Q. How do your children feel about your career?** "They like this bit, because now I'm a nicer person. My son is in mental health and 'techie' and my two daughters are actors, so I kinda influenced them. But they like me more now, because I can focus. My family come to my shows sometimes and they love it."

**Q. Who inspires you?** "Bill Bryson. I try to do what he does; take something interesting and make it funny."

**Q. How do you feel about performing?** "Oh man, now that's fun. Now, I don't have fear, and if I do, I know how to manage it a little more."

**Q. What's the best advice you've been given?** "Everything changes. Don't be scared. When it comes to parenthood; don't do what your own parents did!"

● Ruby Wax performs at New Victoria Theatre, Woking, on November 15th. Visit [www.rubywax.net/tour](http://www.rubywax.net/tour). *Sane New World: Taming the Mind* is published by Hodder & Stoughton and Ruby has a new book out early next year.