



MILLER'S TALE

COMEDIAN-TURNED-SERIOUS ACTOR-TURNED CHILDREN'S AUTHOR...
BEN MILLER'S EVOLUTION CONTINUES APACE. AHEAD OF HIS IMMINENT APPEARANCE IN NETFLIX'S *BRIDGERTON*, HE TELLS PHILIP GOODFELLOW ABOUT BLACK HOLES, *BIG FISH* AND *GONE WITH THE WIND*

PORTRAIT BY ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Grooming: Paul Rodgers / Photographer's assistant: Paolo Navarino / Ben wears his own clothes

Bridgerton airs on Netflix later this year

About a year ago, Ben Miller – comedian, actor, author, father – took up meditation. Having been on a course 15 years ago, it wasn't until he read David Lynch's book *Catching the Big Fish* that he was inspired to give it a proper go. "I thought the book was going to just be about him and his filmmaking," he explains, "but it had a lot in there about meditation. Then I remembered the course I'd done, so I thought I'd give it a go. It wasn't that I'd been going through a particularly stressful time; I just got curious. I think it's helped massively. I realised that I've always been quite an anxious person, but didn't really know what it was until I started to feel my anxiety levels drop. It felt like I was medicated to begin with because I wasn't in this high state of alert all the time. At the beginning, my wife said to me: 'What, you're going to meditate twice a day? How are you going to find time to do that?' Now she says to me: 'Don't you need to go and do your meditation?' She's on side now she doesn't have to deal with me being stressed and anxious all the time."

Stress and anxiety featured quite heavily in *Sticks and Stones*, last year's well-received ITV drama in which Ben played the boss of a bullied employee whose plight he was largely oblivious to. The series marked the latest foray into television drama for the comedian, who first came to the attention of many with *The Armstrong & Miller Show*, a sketch series in which he appeared alongside his comedic partner Alexander Armstrong. The next big project on the horizon for Ben is another television drama, *Bridgerton*, Netflix's ambitious period drama based on the novels of Julia Quinn and set around Regency-era London. Ben plays Lord Featherington, a morally dubious character whose daughters are in preparation for the approaching "coming-out" season, putting them in rivalry with the Bridgerton family. "It's one of the most extraordinary things I've ever been involved in," says Ben. "It's period, but very contemporary, and on such a huge scale; there are about 75 people in the cast, let alone the 250 or so background artists, with all of the costumes made for them. It's like *Gone with the Wind* in terms of scale; *Gone with the Wind* to the power of *Gone with the Wind*."

As if he weren't already busy enough, in recent years Ben has also successfully turned his hand to being an author, a decision prompted by his intention to write a story for each of his three children. "My eldest son, Jackson, was getting to an age where he was questioning Father Christmas, so I thought: 'Right, I'm going to write the Father Christmas story to end all Father Christmas stories and convince him that he is real.' So I wrote *The Night I Met Father Christmas*, about a boy who stays up to meet Father Christmas and goes with him on his sleigh around the world. This year, I've written a story for my middle child, Harrison, who really loves stars and space and also has a bit of a temper, so I've written a story about a boy who misbehaves at a birthday party and instead of a balloon is given a black hole on a piece of string. Anything that makes him angry goes into the black hole – his homework, broccoli, the school bully, his parents. I'm now writing one for my daughter Lana. The main idea is that the characters aren't just named after them, they are the characters. Who they are dictates what each story is about." So what's the plan, once he runs out of children to write stories for? "I don't know how I'm going to deal with that; I'm sure something will emerge. I definitely want to write more, because I'm enjoying it so much. I think life is best tackled with no plan, just trying to do what's best at the time. We keep being told you need a goal and a plan and I always think: 'Really?' I just muddle through."