

VARIETY

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Ricky didn't lose their number

HFPA counts on a ratings boost when Gervais returns to host

By Josh Chetwynd



Millions will be closely watching Ricky Gervais' opening remarks when he emcees his third Golden Globes on Jan. 15.

Ricky Gervais' scalding humor raised eyebrows and hackles for his hosting of the most recent edition of the Golden Globes.

The Brit comedian took shots at a handful of folks in the Beverly Hilton ballroom, including Robert Downey Jr., Johnny Depp and past HFPA president Philip Berk. Those who weren't happy with Gervais' jokes expressed their displeasure to the press and the story continued on for several days after the last acceptance speech was made.

So how has the HFPA responded? By hiring Gervais again.

The January 2011 telecast garnered solid ratings, bringing in an average audience of 17 million viewers. This return engagement by Gervais could draw even more, with viewers waiting to see at whom the host will hurl insults.

Leading up to the announcement that Gervais was coming back for a third time, the Brit funnyman had done a bit of a flip-flop on whether he would return. In an October interview on "Live With Regis and Kelly," Gervais suggested that he would likely turn down another gig emceeing the Globes.

"I don't think I should really," he said at the time. "I did it twice and the reason I did it twice is I wanted to improve on the first year and I don't think I could top it, so I'll probably leave it there."

As the Gervais stint's storm raged, the old adage about "no such thing as bad publicity" also began circulating.

"Clearly it was the most outrageous and irreverent Golden Globes show we've ever seen," recalls TV Guide critic Matt Roush. "The show has a reputation of being looser and funkier in some regards, but they revere the stars and Gervais insulted them to their face. That crossed the line."

Some don't mind a Globes host taking shots at those in the room as long as the material is worthy.

"I think if you go after famous and powerful people you have to go after them with material that is so good that it is going to translate to everyone," says AOL TV critic Mo Ryan. "You must make it fresh so it isn't just 10-year-old Hugh Hefner jokes."

The Golden Globes enjoys its reputation as one of the awards season's most laid-back affairs with wine flowing from bottles visible on the telecast. As a result, it has been marketed in recent years as an anything-can-happen event.

That aura has long been a nightmare for Globes directors and producers but a boon to reality-addicted viewers looking for something to shake up the telecast.

Before Gervais officially repped for the job, the HFPA had the option of going hostless or with multiple hosts, both of which has occurred in the past. While that might have been the safer move, it clearly wouldn't have the ratings impact of Gervais coming back. And thus the org decided that a Gervais-hosted-Globes is dangerous but makes for good television.

So now that he is returning, it's highly unlikely he'll take it soft on to the industry in which he skewered. The comedian has remained confident his previous performance was the right way to go.

"I was surprised (by the media reaction)," Gervais said on "Regis and Kelly." "I don't think I went over the top. I went there to entertain. You can't regret something you meant to do and I meant to do every second of it."