



There's something quite intriguing about Jerry Lewis addressing an audience in the lecture theatre of a London hospital.

Fielding questions from eminent doctors on the subject of chronic pain, the comedian, whose most famous alter ego was a professor, embodies the notion of life imitating art. As for the "nutty" epithet, perhaps that element of his on-screen persona would emerge during the one-to-one chat we were due to have after his talk. That was my hope. The 78-year-old legend had other ideas.

The buffoon who sparred with Dean Martin's cooler-than-cool straight man, clearly was not at home. Unwilling to engage in chit-chat, the stream of monosyllabic answers was broken only when I asked asked why he had got involved in the muscular dystrophy association—a charity he's promoted for more than five decades. "That's the only question I've never answered," he replied. "So don't ask it."

Strictly speaking, that wasn't true. During our time together I stumbled on other questions he wouldn't answer. Why did he split up with Dino? "That's not important." What about *The Day the Clown Cried*, his

Now for that bungee jump with the Queen

JERRY LEWIS EXCLUSIVE by ZEDDY LAWRENCE

controversial Holocaust movie? "You've just stepped into Armageddon. You can't go there."

Not every subject was a closed book. For instance, while he may not have been prepared to discuss his clash with Dean Martin, Jerry sang the singer's praises: "He was the best there was. There was no one that ever lived in the theatre or the cultural syndrome (sic) that we inhabit that could ever get as close to the talent that Dean was."

Jerry, born Joseph Levitch,

was equally effusive when it came to the rest of his Ratpack chums. "Everybody's dying. They're all leaving me. Look at this table. It's empty. Where's all my friends? Get back here."

He may be the last great survivor from a bygone age, but one thing he doesn't do is live in the past. As well as his charity work and his more recent role as a global spokesman for *Tame the Pain*, he is working his "ass off".

"I keep doing it because I

love to do it, to make people laugh and do silly stuff that other people cannot do.

"I still perform in Vegas five or six times a year. When I'm on that stage, you'd think I was 22 years old. I do two hours of physicality you can't believe. I'm also very heavily involved producing six films that are going before the cameras in the next four and a half years."

As with Eddie Murphy's turn in *The Nutty Professor*, which Jerry also produced, these six

films are also remakes of his own classics.

But the performer, who has appeared in more than 60 movies, refuses to be drawn on which stars will step into his screen shoes. Those he admires include Steve Martin, Jim Carrey and Billy Crystal. And singled out for special praise is Robin Williams: "He's a cut of cloth unlike anyone else."

There are those who feel the same way about Jerry. Admired as much for his charity work as

for his turns as a performer and movie-maker, in 2001 Newsweek named him one of the five most recognisable people on the planet.

The French, meanwhile, for whom the forename Jerry is equivalent to such stand-alone monickers as Madonna or Pele, have awarded him the Legion d'Honneur.

Perhaps the most impressive honour is his nomination for a Nobel peace prize. Hailed as "a man for all seasons, all people, all times", Jerry says: "It was a huge surprise and great thrill to be considered."

Such accolades are just some of the achievements Jerry can look back on in a career that's spanned 73 years. The performer can claim to have taught Steven Spielberg and George Lucas on a film-directing course at the university of Southern California.

At various times, he's also been both Broadway's and Hollywood's highest paid star.

So what ambitions remain for the self-styled "Jew guru"? "I want to bungee jump with the Queen of England," he says. "I'm planning on calling her at the beginning of next week."

And realistically? "Realistically," he muses, "I'd like to bungee jump with Prince Philip."