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## Felix Dennis the poet with nine lives comes to...

Felix Dennis the poet with nine lives comes to... YOU CAN'T accuse Felix Dennis of leading a boring life. The self-made entrepreneur, whose current net worth is £500 million, has become one of the country's best-loved poets, fought life-threatening throat cancer in the past year and has led a life of excess that would have killed off lesser men years ago.

Indeed he told me that when he took up poetry at the age of 53 he was "an ex bad boy who'd spent the best part of \$100 million. I was pissing away \$30,000 to \$40,000 a night. Once I stopped doing that I had nothing to do at night, hence the poetry".

With typical gallows humour in the wake of his treatment, Felix has named his latest poetry jaunt The Cut-Throat Tour - it comes to Falmouth's Princess Pavilion on Friday, July 5.

For a man who spent a great swathe of his life boozing, womanising and drugging (including a huge appetite for crack cocaine), Felix's poetry is surprisingly beautiful. Author Tom Wolfe has described him as the "best poet writing in the English language" while Sir Paul McCartney declared: "His poetry sings like a summer breeze through a playground."

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From his publishing business empire (he launched The Week, Mac User, Viz, Auto Express, Maxim, Bizarre and PC World among others), Felix told me: "I'm a different person when I write poetry - I become the man I could have been; my life has not been one of poetry."

He first came to prominence in the 1960s as one of the editors of Oz, London's leading underground magazine, which hit the headlines with the infamous obscenity trial, which followed the publication of the Schoolkids issue and a naughty Rupert the Bear cartoon.

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He then built his media empire off the back of that unlikely of hits, King-Fu Monthly (he was a Bruce Lee fan). As his business grew so did his prodigious appetites.

How could he juggle two such very different lives?

"Well, the first reason is I didn't sleep for many years. I had an extraordinary capacity to go for days. I would shoo away all the ladies of the night and stop drinking and taking drugs at 4am, then I'd relax with some coffee until my first business meeting at 9am. I'd go through a whole day on adrenalin.

"It went on like that for a decade. Actually, like Randy Newman wrote, it was a decade that lasted 14 years.

"I'm glad it's all over. It was a wonderful time, but it really is silly to live like that. I remember looking in the mirror when I was 50, thinking 'you silly sod, what must you look like going out with 18-year-old girls?'"

Despite rising above it all now, he did tell me, with a modicum of pride, that he slept with "over 1,000 ladies of ill repute".

It's surprising then that such a man has produced seven books of verse - his latest Love, Of A Kind was published last month by Ebury Press.

His Did I Mention The Free Wine? poetry tours have entertained thousands of poetry lovers worldwide (and, yes, audiences do get to drink his expensive fine wines as part of the ticket price). The Royal Shakespeare Company has even performed his works on both sides of the Atlantic.

How did he discover he could write verse?

"I came to it very late. I was 53 at the turn of the millennium - literally as the 21st century came in I started writing poetry. It was like a bell tolling.

"I wasn't very well and was in a Harley Street clinic. I started to write a poem on a pack of Post-It Notes I nicked from the nurses' station.

"I always read poetry but I started immersing myself in it. I started writing a poem every two or three days, it was like a dam breaking. Since then I've written 1,490.

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That other noted British poet Benjamin Zephaniah has said that Felix is one of the few poets left who writes in the Romantic fashion.

"I write sonnets, ballads, stanzas - they all have to rhyme, like my heroes Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Byron and Tennyson. I stand on the backs of giants."

Felix's goal is to reinvent that type of poetry.

"I start my shows with a reworking of WH Auden's Night's Night Mail. I've taken the meter but rewritten it for modern life; so instead of the post, it's now about the massive servers making the internet work while we sleep."

I was then treated to a performance of the poem and, believe me, it is a treat. Felix has a wonderful voice, described as sounding like Winston Churchill on steroids, which fortunately was saved by his surgeons.

"My health is excellent now, but like all people in remission I suffer the same problem - the wait for the all-clear.

"My doctor told me to drink one-part wine to four-parts water. I'm not showing off, but I've got one of the best wine cellars around - cases of Petrus. It's annoying for me, in fact it's a tragedy!

"In a year I should be down to 50/50 wine and water. Gradually working my way to becoming drunken again ... I mean, a responsible social drinker."

He added: "People say to me, 'you know how to market your poetry because of your business experience', but that's balls. You can't make people pay £20 to come and see a poetry show, even if the audience does get a glass or two of nice wine."

If his life wasn't full enough, the sensitive new man is also a keen tree planter, having set up the Heart of England Forest Project, which is due to plant its millionth tree this year.

"I suppose it's fitting I'm called Felix as I've had nine lives, but the poetry shows you can really transform your life."

Tickets for the performance at 7pm on July 5 are £20 / £10 concessions from [www.felixdennis.com](http://www.felixdennis.com) and 01326

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<http://www.westbriton.co.uk/Felix-Dennis-ndash-poet-lives-ndash-comes/story-19407246-detail/story.html>