

- ☺ Quick reactions, repartee and fast comebacks; verbal dexterity, fast-talking; good for learning scripts (and last-minute changes) and dealing with hecklers; a temperament suited to the immediacy of sitcoms, stand-up and live audiences.

This combination reminds me of the great *Monty Python* sketch, Argument Clinic, where a gentleman pays to have a row – and gets one! And interestingly, Mercury has been conjunct Mars in the sky every time I've given a talk on humour.

Here are some examples of Mercury–Mars funny people. **Caroline Aherne** (*Mrs Merton* and *The Royle Family*) was born with this conjunction in Capricorn. She played a senior citizen (Capricorn) talk-show host – the mild-voiced Mrs Merton – who had fun shooting down her celebrity guests' snobbery or pretensions (Capricorn) with some barbed, to-the-point questions. Very Mercury–Mars. To guest Debbie McGee: 'But what first attracted you to the millionaire Paul Daniels?' And to astrologer Russell Grant: 'Do you think they'll ever find a man on *Uranus*?'

Rude and crude is often the domain of Mercury–Mars, and we find quite a few offensive stand-up comedians with the aspect. **Chubby Brown** has this conjunction in Capricorn (plus the Sun in Aquarius opposite taboo Pluto). **Bernard Manning** was born with Mercury in Virgo square Mars in Gemini. The Gemini–Virgo mix in Manning's case suggests adding insult (Gemini) to critical injury (Virgo)!

'Motor-mouth' is another expression that fits this combo. Think of British funny lady **Catherine Tate** and her comedy creations, the foul-mouthed Nan ('Hup ... what a f**king liberty!') and scary 'Am I bovvered?' teen Lauren. And my two favourites: the Valley Girl ('And I'm like, no way ... and he's like, come on ...') and the easily irritated Backhander Woman (a very apt name for Mercury–Mars), who felt that a 'soap-dodger ... a tofu-eating hippie' needed a 'swift backhander right across his scabby vegetarian face' to bring him to his senses for running out of vegetarian lasagne. Tate has Mercury–Mars conjunct in Gemini, the sign of her Ascendant, too.

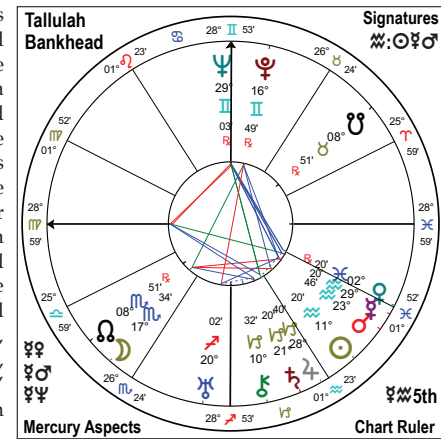
Matt Lucas, of *Little Britain* and *Shooting Stars* fame, was born with Mercury in Aquarius square Mars in early Gemini, and we can see this in his characters: the abusive, evasive ('Yeah, but no, but yeah') chav Vicky Pollard and overweight Fat Fighters rep Marjorie Dawes ('It's half the calories – so you can have twice as much'). Lucas's Mercury is conjunct Jupiter, too: think of his grotesque caricatures of over-the-top Jupiterians such as Bubbles De Vere and the Barbara Cartland-inspired Dame Sally Markham, and Lucas's role as narcissistic performance artist Leigh Bowery in Boy George's stage show *Taboo*.

Another fast-talker is political stand-up comedian **Ben Elton**, born with Mercury in Aries square Mars in Cancer (plus the Sun square Mars to Uranus). Fittingly, Elton was at the forefront of the vehemently anti-Thatcher comedy crusade of the 1980s.

David Frost made a name for himself as the cocky, smart-arsed TV host of the biting satire *That Was The Week That Was*. With a Mars–Saturn signature (and mutual reception), Frost's deadpan, monotonous voice (Saturn) belied a sharp mind and to-the-point delivery (Mars). He had Sun–Saturn in Aries (note his chilly Saturnian surname), while Mercury in Aries squared Mars in Capricorn. Although Mars (like Uranus) may mock the establishment, someone with a strong Saturn will join it as the years go by. Frost later took up with the elite, but for a while he was at the forefront of British comedy when the age of respect (Saturn) was being eroded by young upstarts (Mars).

4 *Men talk to women so they can sleep with them; women sleep with men so they can talk.*

Tallulah Bankhead, the mistress of the barbed and bitchy retort, had a devastating, malevolent wit. The most reliable sources of birth data for the legendary theatre actress and wit give Virgo on the Ascendant, the Moon in Scorpio and a Mercury–Mars conjunction. 'My father warned me about men and booze, but he never mentioned a word about women and cocaine,' she drooled. When told that her hotel room was where the Duke and Duchess of Windsor had spent their honeymoon, she replied, 'Ah yes, it's still cold.' When asked, 'Do you remember the minuet?' she replied, 'Darling, I can't even remember the men I f**ked.'



Singer-songwriter **Dolly Parton** is known for her endearing down-to-earth one-liners. An astute businesswoman, she is rarely afraid of being direct: 'If I don't like where you've got it, I can tell you where to put it.' Parton has Virgo rising and chart ruler Mercury in Capricorn opposite Mars–Saturn. The Saturn and Virgo influence suggests her humour is self-effacing and self-mocking: 'You'd be surprised how much it costs to look this cheap,' and 'I look just like the girl next door ... if you happen to live next door to an amusement park.' Some years ago, she had the sassiness to enter a Dolly Parton Drag Queen Contest. She came in third ...

Who can forget Mensa-member **Loni Anderson's** sharp wit under the dumb blonde image she cultivated so well as the self-possessed, inscrutable bombshell secretary Jennifer in *WKRP in Cincinnati*, and the icy calculation in her *Nurses'* character Casey? Anderson was born with Mercury rising in Virgo square Mars on a Gemini MC. Another actress stereotyped by her looks was *Three Company's* **Suzanne Somers**, who has Mercury–Mars in Scorpio setting in the 7th house (square Pluto, for huge generational impact as a comedy star and diet guru).

Acting thoroughbred **Maggie Smith**, famous for playing crotchety, formidable, aristocratic British harridans, has Mercury in standoffish Capricorn square Mars in Libra, and you'll see that instinct for razor-edged ripostes in *Downton Abbey*: 'I won't take sides, it's true, but I am anything but neutral.' In the film *Tea with Mussolini*, when one American character orders a Knickerbocker Glory, the oh-so-superior Brit laments, 'It's amazing, the Americans can even vulgarize ice cream!' Smith once shocked a shop assistant by responding: 'Seven guineas for a bra? Cheaper to have your tits off.' Another renowned dramatic actress with a gift for comedy, **Meryl Streep**, mocks her Grand Dame of Cinema image (see the black comedy *Death Becomes Her*). With Mercury conjunct MC-ruler Mars in Gemini, Streep is also famous for her mastery of accents.

Mario Cantone is an actor–comedian famous for being quick-witted, impatient and waspish. Remember his rapid-fire wedding planner Anthony in *Sex and the City*? When Charlotte rues the seasons passing without her getting pregnant, she asks,

Any impotent men here tonight? Oh, I see, you can't get your hands up either – Roseanne 5