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The Southland Times

Unwind

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Carell gets smart

Actor Steve Carell is as surprised as anyone by his success. **Chris Vognar** finds out why.

STEVE CARELL pops out of his hotel suite wearing well-tread sneakers, jeans and a modest sports coat. He could be anyone: your accountant, your neighbour. What he doesn't look like, or act like, is a top-line comedy star.

The head of TV comedy *The Office*, the surprise star of big movies both sublime (*The 40-Year-Old Virgin*) and regrettable (*Evan Almighty*), he says he still feels like a stranger in a strange land of fame. And he says it so earnestly that it's impossible not to believe him. "It's nothing I ever expected to happen," he says at the end of a long day of interviews to promote *Get Smart*, the big-budget comedy that opens in New Zealand theatres on July 10.

"It's nothing I ever anticipated or prepared myself for." "The other side of that is: I don't assume it will continue." Come again?

He's got back-to-back Emmy nominations for playing guilelessly insensitive paper supply office honcho Michael Scott. He's a go-to guy for intimate indies (*Little Miss Sunshine*, *Dan in Real Life*) and *Get Smart*, based on the popular Cold War TV spy comedy.

It's just that it's all happened a little fast for Carell, who a few years back was just one of the fake news correspondents of *The Daily Show*. So he keeps expectations low because . . .

"I think it protects me from buying into the whole idea and getting too high on myself," he says.

"I know it can go away as quickly as it came, so I'm trying to enjoy it and not be wary of the other shoe dropping. I try not to take it too seriously."

Which is another way of saying he's a genuine guy with a good head on his shoulders, although he's far too self-effacing to put it in such complimentary terms. He's far more likely to take a dig at himself.

Which does he prefer, TV or film?

"I can't believe I can even answer this question," he says. "The fact that I've been able to do both is so remarkable to me."

Is he sent a lot more scripts than he used to be?

"That whole idea of being sent a script or being asked to be in a movie still feels relatively new to me," he says.

"I'm very used to auditioning for things. To just have someone ask you to be a part of something is a weird and unique thing."

"I never want to take that for granted. I still have my resumes. They're in a drawer in case I need them. I'm not assuming anything."

Does he think he's funny?

"Not particularly, as evidenced by this interview," he says.

"I'm not the life of the party. I'm not someone people gravitate to and want to hear the stories from. I know people like that, but I'm not one of them."

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The other shoe: Steve Carell in a scene from the movie *Get Smart*.

Broadening horizons

MATE
 MARK WILSON



GROWING up in Invercargill it was easy to think of the world as a simple place — full of treehut buildings, morning rugby on frosty grounds, wool shed parties and family holidays to exotic locations such as Riverton, Manapouri and the once-laid-back village that was Queenstown of the 1980s.

A charmed sort of life — its greatest threats came from losing rugby or having a few too many Speight's at your mate's house at the weekend.

Your dad mowed the lawns in his stubbies and enjoyed a cold stubbie afterwards. Mum bought his clothes and yours, and despite her efforts to get you wearing the latest in matching tracksuit top and bottoms you adorned yourself with Canterbury pants and a rugby jersey, which seemed to do the trick in most situations. It was Kiwi culture at its best — the simplicity of an idyllic childhood in provincial New Zealand.

Heading to Dunedin for university didn't change things much. The same crowd up to the same antics, albeit with a few additional like-minded recruits and a touch more rowdiness.

Diversity was a slightly dirty word. Too much of it and you were a carnie or a hippie.

However, with increasingly mobile populations in a new-age world, experiencing rampant globalisation, even the most narrow-minded of us are exposed to an ever-expanding, infinitely diverse and often bemusing array of cultures, trends and characters.

As a lad I would never have fathomed the concept of a rampantly heterosexual male drying his hair with a hairdryer . . . my German flatmate informs me it is perfectly acceptable behaviour in Europe.

After visiting Europe last year nothing would surprise me . . . many beautiful women and many men who act like beautiful women.

I thought that all karaoke singing was drunk Kiwis screeching to *I've Lost That Loving Feeling*, by the Righteous Brothers. Yet after visiting Panama I learned that not only are Panamanian women blessed with extremely generous helpings of chest mass but along with their male sidekicks they make Friday night karaoke at the Pig 'n' Whistle look more amateur than Paris Hilton's performance in *One Night in Paris*.

I still don't understand some cultures' fascination with food that burns like an Aussie rainforest on the way in while causing equal levels of discomfort on the way out or why, unlike Kiwi kids who learn to drive on the farm at a young age, some of our new more frequent visitors still haven't picked up this key skill yet.

However, while I still fail to understand numerous aspects of today's culture I think the increasing diversity has grown on me slightly and maybe there is hope for even the most narrow-minded of us to broaden our horizons, at least a little, or perhaps the abundance of hot Swedish and Danish tourists who flock to Queenstown have clouded my judgement . . . one thing I do know — I won't be reaching for the hairdryer next time I hop out of the shower.

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