

The Observer

'My show was bad, but the crowd were kind and quiet and a girl hugged me'

Special report: the Edinburgh festival 2001

Daniel Kitson

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Friday the 17th

0.00am

My show was bad. It was lacklustre and plodding and not fun, the crowd were kind but quiet and I was not the stand-up that the papers may have you believe. Anyway, after running across town to the Dome to take part in the BBC-sponsored stand-up show *Alive* (starting only 30 minutes after my show ends), I find out that I am not on. I needn't have turned down a lucrative gig on the other side of town. More importantly, I needn't have run. Money comes and goes but my exercise has a legacy of wheezing that isn't wholly pleasant.

0.20am

Still wheezing.

0.30am

Meet my flatmate, John Oliver (a mediocre comedian with delusions of originality). He has just talked a gig down from a very high ledge. I try and convince him that his vaguely misanthropic act would go down better if he took to the stage giving a double thumbs-up sign. He seems to disagree. Still wheezing.

1.03am

Me, John and a collection of others stand outside the Gilded Balloon debating whether we want to go in and watch *Late and Live*. It's my first night not compering *Late and Live* this week and I had planned on taking advantage of not having to be there, by not being there. In fact, I won't go in. I'm going home. Early night. A girl who works there hugs me. I've had a bad show. A girl has just hugged me. She works inside.

1.05am

I'm inside *Late and Live*. I comper this gig four nights a week. It's a gig unlike many others. Opinion is divided on whether standing on stage between 1am and 3am and talking over a sweaty, drunken, sleepy mixture of locals, comedians and TV executives has any actual merit. The division is generally along the lines of those

who can do it and those who are gay. I think it is often the most exciting gig in the world, although once I was a bit gay. For an embarrassing 10 minutes, I was very gay. But I think a lot of my gayness was the fault of the compere. To clear up any confusion in this context, gay is a metaphor for not doing well at Late and Live. I'm not gay. Late and Live is a beast of a gig, it's a slobbering, swaying, red-faced drunk. Coming dangerously close to falling as it crushes all in its way as it drags each act to its logical conclusion, pushing stand-up as far as it can go. Parading its parochial energy and raging libido as acts stumble to their knees before its majesty. If you are in Edinburgh then you must see at least one Late and Live. It may be the greatest night you have ever had or it may be the most disappointing and ultimately pointless waste of money you have ever encountered. That's all part of the fun. And there's dancing.

2.15pm

Wake up and realise that the piece I am typing now was due two hours ago. Go back to sleep. It will go away.

3.15pm

It hasn't gone away. Me and John are sitting at the table in our front room. He is writing something for a thing he's doing (I don't really care about it, he keeps reading me bits). We have procrastinated through going and buying biscuits and crisps, like the proper writers do. I really should start this. I'm going to do it like a diary. I ask John the date. He tells me and says that I should include me asking him the date in the piece. I think that it would be a desperate and pretentious measure.

4.15pm

I'm desperate and pretentious.

Daniel Kitson - Love, Innocence and the Word Cock is at the Pleasance (0131 556 6550) until 27 August

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