

He's a master of profanity yet he looks like your dad. He's sweet and vulnerable, yet he gave Bob Holness lip on Blockbusters. DANIEL KITSON is a comedian destined for greatness.

'Best comedy performance, Daniel Kitson. That's me.' Lounging in the upstairs room of a pub in west London, Daniel Kitson is fondly admiring his Time Out Comedy Award. 'That's what I just won, isn't it pretty?' he muses. It's a flower-shaped block of clear perspex with a little red star in the middle, and no, it doesn't look like an ashtray. Two hours previously, he was in a room full of people for *Time Out's* annual live awards hosted by Omid Djalili and there was posing to be done.

'I've got an aversion to getting my photo taken,' says Kitson coyly. 'I don't mind people taking my photo at all, like if there was someone there taking my photo when I was walking along, I wouldn't give a shit, it's fine. It's just when people say "do this" or "look wacky", I just can't. It's not fun anymore.'

Despite his protestations, it's Kitson's image that everyone remembers and photographers seize upon. A nerd/geek/square/whatever, the trademark Lincoln-esque whiskers may have been tamed, but the specs and unkempt hair endure. And then there's the stutter; Daniel Kitson, the comedian with the speech impediment. For his first gigs, Kitson confides he was more worried about dying on his arse than stuttering, and he's come to accept the individuality: 'Everyone identifies people in different ways. I don't think anyone's going to go: "Oh, is that the one with skilful command of the English language and a romantic heart?" They're going to either say: "Is that the one with the beard?" or: "Is that the one with the stutter?" So that's fine.'

Peculiarly, Kitson's stutter is more pronounced relaxing in this bar than it is on stage, but in a business as cut-throat and volatile as comedy, doesn't this handicap make him an unlikely stand-up? 'I'm an unlikely stand-up in as much as I'm a bit of a social spastic. I don't drink, I don't go out, I don't like clubbing, I've got a stutter, I look weird.'

Like a sensitive soul trapped inside the mindset of a stereotypical blue northern comedian, the Yorkshire-born comic exposed his 'romantic heart' in his Best Comedy Performance-winning and Perrier-nominated show *Love, Innocence And The Word Cock*. It was a beautiful, sensitive and painfully funny coming-of-age confessional that generated a buzz and clamour for tickets akin to Johnny Vegas' show of 1998. In the years preceding the show (which included the 'fucking disastrous' Fringe 1999 *Number One Show* with Andrew Maxwell and Trevor Lock, and then stormers of sets at *Late 'n' Live* in 2000), Kitson had established himself as a master of profanity and audience annihilation. Subsequently, the contemplative, sweet and vulnerable Kitson was something of a shock.

'What was really nice was that four big blokes walked out on the first night.' What's nice about audience members leaving? 'I think because they'd seen me at a lairy gig where I'd been dealing with heckles so I'd been really aggressive and putting people down, and when I started talking about love, they all just walked out. I was really pleased because it meant that people who I didn't want to like me weren't liking me. The worst thing is when people that you really dislike, like thugs and bullies and twats, say: "Aw mate, that was really good." And you're thinking: "I don't want you to like me." So when they walked out, I felt like I was making progress.'

Vulgarin fans rest assured, the man who doesn't believe being intelligent and swearing are mutually exclusive, isn't about to turn his back on what he does best. 'I still am really, really rude at gigs. The Edinburgh show is what I want my body of work to be. It's like the gigs are my sketch book and the Edinburgh shows are my exhibitions. That's quite good isn't it? I'm going to use that again.'

Any mention of last year's Festival immediately makes the 24-year-old comedian more animated. The momentum that had built up in London before his Edinburgh appearance meant talk of Perrier glory reached fever pitch when he finally delivered on his potential with a publicly and critically acclaimed performance. 'It's really horrible because it wasn't a surprise,' says Kitson. 'I'd had people saying I was going to get the nomination for ten months by that point. And even though I'd been saying: "No shut up, I don't want to talk about it," I still, on a subconscious level, assumed that I'd get a nomination. When I got a call from the agency to say I'd been nominated for the Perrier, I was like: "All right, fair enough," and then I realised about two days later that I'd expected it. Which was a bit annoying because it should be really exciting to get a nomination.'

Five months on from his brush with Perrier celebrity, Kitson is settling back into his routine. He's just finished filming the second series of Peter Kay's Phoenix Nights, but mentions of more television work or adverts elicit yawns; like his biblical namesake, he refuses to sell-out to a false financial god. 'I intend to avoid mass market appeal. I'd far rather be in a room with 500 people who have seen me before and liked what I did, than 1000 people who'd seen me on an advert.'

Of course, shying away from mainstream success doesn't preclude having your own website (go to www.danielkitson.com to 'ride the Danny train'). Evidently frequented by the same 'scary women' who find Johnny Vegas attractive, his cult followers will soon be able to download his first television appearance: as a contestant on *Blockbusters* at age sixteen. 'I was sitting with my knees up on the table and Bob [Holness] said: "Is that how you sit at home?" And I said: "Yeah," and he said: "Bit of a habit then," and I said: "Yeah," and he said: "A bad habit," and I said: "But not as bad a habit as heroin." They had to cut that out.'

Even then, getting laughs was more important than material success. Nonetheless the mental image it conjures of a precocious, back-chatting teenager doesn't exactly endear.

It's these paradoxes in Kitson's character that fascinate. He's three months younger than me, yet could pass for my old man. He talks like a wizened cynic, then every so often playfully picks up the dictaphone to provide enhanced running commentary on the events around us ('There's some blokes behind us who I think might be wankers'). One moment he's the introspective soul and the next the lairy, swearsy northern git. Then there's the goofy laugh that could, and probably should, belong to an eleven-year-old girl. His CD collection is chock-full of alternative indie material from the I Am Kloot/Eels/Hives ilk, yet asks in disbelief if I've heard that Kym's left Hear'Say. Sensing a conversation avenue, I ask if he's been following the progress of Pop Idol's (Gareth Gates. 'Oh, that bloke who's got a stutter; everyone loves a cripple. I saw him once and he was all in white and I just thought, you fucking wanker.'

I consider myself privileged to be sitting in Daniel Kitson's presence; the interview was squeezed into a 'window' in his schedule. Returning the evening before from Dubai to attend the *Time Out* awards, three days later he jetted off to Singapore. Shanghai, Melbourne and Paris all beckon before another month in Edinburgh in August. So as the emerging antidote to stand-up banality, is his lifestyle as glamorous as it sounds? 'Oh yeah, yeah, get me.'

I do, and it's only a matter of time before he has the popular success he scorns . . . whether he likes it or not.

Daniel Kitson is at the Stand, Glasgow, Fri 15 & Sat 16 Feb; the Stand, Edinburgh, Sun 17 Feb