

Need to know

Daniel Kitson, comedian

Interview by **Stephanie Merritt**

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The name [Daniel Kitson](#) may not strike an immediate note of recognition with the man in the street, but this is entirely deliberate on Kitson's part. If he were interested in fame, wealth and his own television show, the 25-year-old winner of this year's Perrier Award could have become one of the biggest names in British comedy over the past 12 months. Since his debut Edinburgh show *Love, Innocence and the Word Cock* was nominated for the Perrier last year, he has been deluged with offers from television people who want to turn him into the next big thing and, resisted them all, save a cameo role in Peter Kay's *Phoenix Nights*.

At the moment he's engaged in an argument with his agent because he wants to preface the boast, 'Winner of the 2002 Perrier Award' with the words 'reluctant and ungracious' on the posters for his London run. 'It's a joke against myself more than anything,' he says, in the faintly weary tone that always creeps in when he has to explain himself to journalists. 'I'm aware that it looks as if I've just been obstreperous and self-important about the Perrier, but really I haven't. If I'd played up to the Perrier thing, I'd have been undermining what I do in my show. Because who I am on stage, and the nature of what I think and feel, all come from not being part of the mainstream, not fitting in.'

His is the perspective of the boy always picked last for team games at school, the kid with the stammer and thick glasses who was always on the fringe by default, and in adult life remains that way by choice. Much of last year's show was based on anecdotes relating to his appearance, but he is tiring of critics who dwell entirely on the way he looks and his speech impediment, and wishes that these elements could now be accepted as part of him and not the focus of his material. *Love, Innocence and the Word Cock* was largely about growing up and the end of childhood dreams; in this year's show, he is markedly less vulnerable and more experienced in the ways of the world, but the childlike quality that has earned him comparisons with Eric Morecambe is still abundantly visible. On stage, Kitson shines; his body language may be gauche, but he is so clearly a natural performer that audiences give him their trust and affection without hesitation, which explains why he sometimes gets away with murder in terms of content. Kitson swears profusely, on stage and off, in a sweetly inoffensive manner suggestive of a small child who doesn't know

quite how bad the words are; he has a rare gift of making all profanities incredibly funny.

He was born in Denby Dale, Yorkshire, the son of a teacher and a lecturer, and decided that he wanted to be a stand-up at the age of 13. At 16 he began performing and was the youngest runner-up of the Daily Telegraph 's Open Mic Award. After a drama degree at Roehampton Institute he began to get regular slots at clubs, was signed by an agent and was being talked about in hushed tones among critics and fans of live comedy a year before the extraordinary success of his first Edinburgh show. His early shows were based almost entirely on banter with the audience, and the transition to more structured, story-based shows came with Love, Innocence , though it's a foolish heckler who would pit himself against Kitson's whiplash responses.

'I really like the idea of people having discovered me for themselves,' he explains. 'We've all had the experience of having a song that we love and it's special and we think it's our song, we found it, and then it becomes really popular and everyone knows it and the song's spoiled for us. The wider the audience, the less magical it becomes.'

This resistance to mainstream success is not overtly political. Kitson is reluctant to outline his beliefs, though he becomes vocal on the subject of the corruption he has encountered in so-called charity gigs, and has some wonderful material in his show about how he was duped into taking part in a commercially sponsored tour. But the one word that crops up more than any other when he talks about his own work is 'humanity'. His aim for this year's show was to make it 'as deeply moving as the "You And Me Song" by The Wannadies, and as innately funny as a pigeon walking.' He is interested in developing his act, incorporating multi-media, perhaps making his own film, but he wants the material to retain the warmth and human connection that won so much praise. 'The one positive thing about winning the Perrier is that it's over with now. So I'm really excited about next year at Edinburgh because I can just concentrate on doing good work and enjoying doing the show for the audience, which is the whole point really.'

• Daniel Kitson's Something plays at the Soho Theatre, Dean Street, London from 4-23 November.

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