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What do you do when everyone thinks you're brilliant? If you're Daniel Kitson, something they probably won't like. He spoke to Stephanie Bunbury.

There is only so much success a reasonable man can take. So says Daniel Kitson, who says he has been feeling increasingly contrary since he won the Perrier award in Edinburgh a couple of years ago. People who started coming to see him

just wanted to hear him swear (which he does, a lot, but he comes at vulgarity from a rather different place than the suited jobs who roll up wanting to hear filth). He is increasingly disturbed by the people who visit his website to leave messages about how much they enjoyed his gigs but who were, quite obviously, "complete idiots".

But they won't like his latest show, *A Made-Up Story*. He's got them this time. This is a romance with music that he describes as the comedic equivalent of the Scottish indie band Belle & Sebastian. "It's about two people who are a bit weird and a bit left out by the world at large, who fall in love. That's it, really. Hardly anything happens. Either you love it or you go, 'Eurrgh'."

Quite a few people who saw it in Edinburgh the year after he won the top prize, he says, found it insufferably bland. He had some awful reviews as well as some good ones and never managed a full house. Great!

I last spoke to Daniel Kitson two years ago, before he won the Perrier. "I've become more contrary since then," he says. "It's a level of contrariness you get when you get a level of success you feel you haven't earned. You go, 'Well, I'll f---ing show you! I'll teach you to come to my show and tell me I'm f---ing great!' And he cackles a bit, because, as he says, he is more proud of *A Made-Up Story* than of anything else he's done. It is just that it is too fragile to sustain the attentions of beery hecklers out for laffs. It isn't their kind of show.

What Kitson would really like is to apply the same principle to his entire career. "It is a nice project to try to whittle your popularity down to something manageable," he says.

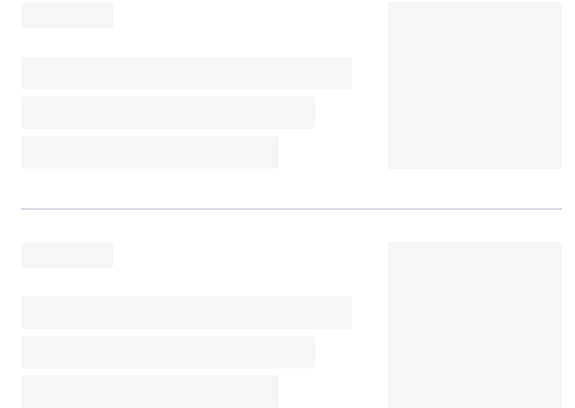
The Perrier was seen as his big break. He simply refused to take it. "I suppose it's partly that I've always been quite fortunate with good reviews, but I've never really had that sense of having to seize an opportunity. I just have this thing where I think another chance will come along and if it doesn't, that's all right, I'll just open a cafe."

So while his agent urged him to tour big venues doing stand-up while his name was still hot, he decided he would rather tour small ones and do more difficult material. He just wouldn't do any publicity, which would effectively keep audiences down. He was more likely to find his sort of people that way.

Is this snobbishness? He doesn't think so. Kitson is much too comfortably embedded in his own peculiarities to bother about anyone else's cred or cool. "There are no age barriers or, oh, what if you work in a McDonald's, then you're not invited," he says seriously. "It's purely and simply that I don't want c---s coming."

There is no avoiding the obscenity: as far as Kitson is concerned, c---s are a distinct category, easily identified, who deserve everything he can dish out. He

FROM OUR PARTNERS



remembers, for example, a table of drunken businessmen who sat at the front of a first-timers' night at a comedy club where Kitson was compere and talked loudly through every act. On came Kitson. "I started shouting, 'You're c---s, you're all c---s' and eventually they're, like, 'Easy'," he says, giggling wildly. "And I said, 'No, not easy, you're c---s and you have to know, you have to leave here knowing that you are f---ing scum!' You know, not a single joke at all. And no one's laughing, they're all going, 'Oh shit, this is a bit weird'."

We are both hooting with laughter by now; he is clearly still chuffed that he gave some nasties their come-uppance.

Here's an interesting thing about Daniel Kitson: off stage, he has a terrible stammer. On stage, dealing summarily with c---s, that stammer disappears. Shambolic as he seems, he is the master.

Kitson loves stand-up. Our expectations of the form may be limited, but he believes its possibilities are infinite. "I basically think that the majority of everything is a bad example of what it is," he says. "The majority of stand-up is a bad example of stand-up, the majority of music is a bad example of music. I don't want to be part of that, I want to be part of the minority."

We mull over what that might mean, but it is harder to nail good comedy than it is to point at bad. Honesty is crucial. "All the stuff I do has an emotional weight, an emotional core that a fair amount of stuff on the circuit doesn't really have," he says.

When some comedian gets up and says how much he hates boy bands, he says, you know it's rubbish. "It's just like, 'Hang on, everyone knows boy bands are bland shit, you cannot truly be this angry about that'. I don't think boy bands are half as annoying as watching someone talk about anger without really feeling it."

He talked recently, by contrast, of being caught in a road rage fracas with his father and the strange sensation of wanting to hit back. "And there is still genuine fury there, 'How dare you do that?', you know. It still makes me go goose-pimply when I talk about it."

There are moments, he says, when stand-up can feel sublime.

But, he says, there are also moments, plenty of them, when you can't maintain the performer's divine arrogance and doubt sweeps in like a tide. "You become aware that every emotional experience you have in your life is basically open to being co-opted into this f---ing sort of dancing monkey boy - 'Ooh, look, I've got a soul' sort of thing - then you feel like a bit of a fraud. So it is this ongoing thing of wanting to be better and not quite knowing how."

One way, of course, is to grate a little more firmly against the grain. He wants to do another story-style show at this year's Edinburgh Festival that will be so low-tech that he will run his own Super-8 film and play the incidental music on a portable record player. That should keep out the chaff.