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Nothing funny going on

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There are many misconceptions about Daniel Kitson. First, that the 26-year-old English comedian lives for nothing more than swearing.

Second, that he is an arrogant loner who hates the media. Certainly, Kitson, a native of Denby Dale in West Yorkshire, and one of Britain's most talented comedians, dabbles keenly in profanity (his 2001 Edinburgh Fringe show was called Love, Innocence and the Word Cock) and self-indulgence (he titled this

year's UK tour Lover, Thinker, Artist and Prophet). And he does reserve a special bile for imbecilic media experiences in his latest stand-up act. But nothing to match the rumours that preceded this interview.

Stories of journalists storming out of his shows in disgust were followed by dire warnings from publicists and management about Kitson's temper in interviews. Further, one of his fellow British comics urged extreme caution whenever encountering the award-winning bearded one.

"He d-d-d-doesn't suffer f-f-f-ools gladly," the comedian warned, imitating Kitson's stutter.

So, when a cheery, if dishevelled, man sporting damp, shoulder-length hair and blue fluffy slippers arrives, it smacks of a crafty comedic mind-trick.

"A lot of my friends think they have a very pivotal role in my life by constantly telling me that I'm in deep shit," Kitson says. "They all have this massive misconception that I wander around with massive delusions of grandeur and that they're the only ones that can bring me down to earth. Yeah, I'm tough. I'm really anti-media. I'm dangerous."

Onstage yes, but not in the flesh. Onstage, Kitson can charm an audience with poignant tales of his beloved gran's funeral or the moment when he found himself protecting his dad from a road-rager. But it is his ability to conquer hecklers with a blistering rebuke and a giggle that has become legendary. At odds with his stuttering, tea-drinking, myopic appearance, Kitson's also sick of his foul-mouthed reputation.

"I had a bit in the show two years ago about swearing," Kitson says. "A point of that was that it didn't really matter if you swear, it matters what you're swearing about.

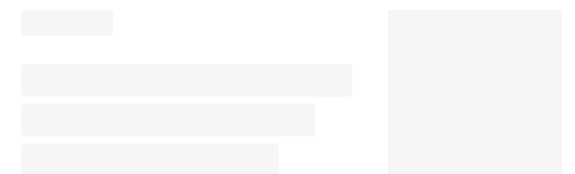
"But loads of people would go, 'I love the way he says c---. It's great the way he swears.' So basically loads of people I didn't like started to like me and come to my shows."

Kitson agrees it's a pompous opinion, and he hasn't entirely stopped swearing, but when that show, titled *Something* and part of the 2002 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, won the Perrier award - the premier comedy prize in Britain - things got considerably better, yet also worse.

Winning the Perrier is an instant ticket to stardom with guarantees of powerful agents, top-notch gigs, global tours and lucrative television deals. But Kitson hated it.

"The thing about the Perrier is you're co-opted into this competition that I didn't really want to be a part of. Once you win it, it's excellent, that's that done, but I don't want to think about it.

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"But then everyone starts going, 'Oh right, we need you to come here and do this and that' and I don't want to do any of that.

Then you get accused of being obstreperous and awful and self-important. It's none of those.

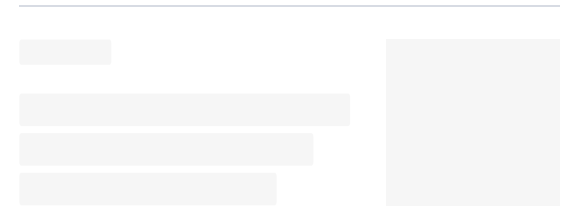
I didn't court any of this. All I did was a show."

At the award presentation, Kitson, who dislikes having his photograph taken, raised the ire of a frenzied bank of British press photographers by refusing to strike a pose with the award.

"I just lost it with one of them. And then all of them just went 'Roaarr'. It was fairly horrible.

"It smacks of egotism when you try and control how you're seen, but it's not. It is so easy to be misinterpreted and then to have that misinterpretation objectified in the press is a bit f---ing annoying as well."

To follow up, Kitson surprised all by returning to Edinburgh the following year with a show that divided fans and critics. Titled a made up story, it was a scripted tale "for romantic misanthropes" about love, sadness, luck and suicide, and featured film and Polaroid stills with narration by Kitson. Showered with praise the year before, his anti-stand-up stance tightened his fan base but disappointed many, not least those who appreciated the way he swore.



"I had the idea for it when I became aware that a happy by-product would be a large portion of people not liking it. Loads of people would be coming because of the Perrier and I didn't trust that relatively instant level of success. So more than anything else it became a way of putting a halt on that sort of thing."

He has plans to release the show on a double vinyl album with plenty of pictures on the gatefold. And for this year's Edinburgh Fringe, Kitson foresees a low-key stand-up show with old household lamps, vinyl records and film on Super 8 he'll load up while talking.

"A friend of mine says I'm painting myself into a corner by deconstructing everything and throwing laughter you don't want back into the face of the audience."

If his Sydney shows are anything like his Melbourne and Adelaide performances, Kitson will ruminate on "why the world is divided into c---s and slags", pigeon flirting techniques and whatever else takes his fancy.

"I just think about things too much. I think about things until I can't enjoy them and then I go, 'Nah, I don't like that'."

Daniel Kitson is at The Studio, Sydney Opera House, from Tuesday until May 1.



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