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Both Barrels - an interview with Daniel Kitson

I'd have to be a desperate idiot to do that. And I'm not. Just yet.

Feature by Declan Dineen | 10 Feb 2007

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Daniel Kitson's play/monologue C-90 was considered a triumph at this year's Fringe. We managed to secure an interview with the magnificent Mr K in advance of his performance of the work at the Arches Theatre in Glasgow this month.

Was the process of writing C-90 very different to how you would usually write your stand-up material? Do you feel more comfortable performing explicitly written work?

The writing of C-90 was the most intensive and pressured writing of a piece of work I've ever done. Story

writing is always different to stand-up, in that it's genuinely written; stand up is more evolutionary in process. Yes, you heard, 'evolutionary in process'. I said that. You ask me to talk about the 'process' and I'm going to give you both barrels. That was one. Here comes the other...

With stand-up I have an idea or a feeling and I talk around it and into it. Stories very much have to be written out and learnt in. Phrasing and pace and so on are massively key because I want it to resonate beyond the moment. I want it to stand up in isolation. But I wrote C-90 in about three weeks in July. I knew the idea, the set build was already in place, the theatre booked and advertising out - but I really didn't have anything. It had to be that way due to the way work panned out last year, so I knew it was going to be a scary July. But it was VERY scary and VERY VERY hot. I wrote most of it in my kitchen, typing on a USB keyboard because my laptop was too hot to touch, with three fans pointing at me, in little more than my pants. The image of the writer is so poetic.

There you go, both barrels.

Which playwrights do you most admire?

The obvious ones really: Beckett and Bennett. Even though I know little of both of their stuff, you just get a sense of them as being genuinely wonderful. I saw *The History Boys* in New York, the film and the power of the writing is just utterly wonderful - so human and compassionate and really really funny. Bennett's stuff is so very generous and its writerly perfection beyond its humanity is what moves me.

Stories for the Wobbly Hearted is a very different style of performance. Were you initially worried about the presumptions of the stand-up audience? I'm thinking of the Bill Hicks line: "don't worry, the dick jokes are coming later." You know?

Not with *Stories for the Wobbly Hearted*, no. I was concerned with *A Made Up Story*. It was the first story show I did - in 2003. That one really split people: people loved it, people hated it, and worst of all, people admired the intention but thought it wasn't very good. That plays into your fears about your own work in a fairly accurate and saddening way. But by the time *Stories for the Wobbly Hearted* came around in 2005 there was a watershed moment when I realised I just had to commit to the thing from the start, no preemptive apology or warning or explanation. Just commit to the nature of the thing.

Do you see a promising future for the theatre, in terms of audience, intellectual development, form, or anything else that comes to mind?

I'm not really interested. I'm interested in people doing brilliant things and I don't care if its theatre or art or comedy or film or cooking or architecture or transport or public service. Anything that surpasses necessity is lovely.

Does the performance of C-90 differ from venue to venue? Would you be happy for someone else to perform C-90?

Well, at the time of writing I've only done it in one venue (*The Traverse* in Edinburgh). The layout will change a touch on the tour. But generally the performance will be the same.

It's weird: I've been asked if I would license the text for others to perform and I wouldn't do that. It's entirely personal - it's mine, it's me, telling my story. There would be something fundamentally wrong in someone else speaking it. It's not a play. It's me talking.

What reasons do you have for remaining such a resolutely live performer? You must have had countless TV offers by now, does nothing attract you? Not even a stint as guest host on the *World's Strongest Man* (Kitson has expressed fondness for the show in his routines)?

I've not had any good offers - that's basically it. The vast vast majority of television is a let down, as is the majority of comedy, and theatre and art and everything. But when you hear who won what at the British

Comedy Awards you do sort of despair. It's all pap. All the current heroes are just irrelevant to anything that's great.

So when the offers come in, there is just nothing appealing about them. You just go: well, why would I possibly do that; I'd have to be a desperate idiot to do that. And I'm not. Just yet. So I'll probably leave it thanks.

The Arches, 253 Argyle Street, Glasgow

Box Office: 0870 240 7528

C-90 runs 23-28 Jan <http://www.thearches.co.uk>

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