



National

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Be astonished by a stranger; open a window in your mind

Daniel Kitson

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TWO years ago, the way in which I enjoyed the comedy festival changed quite a lot. I had, up until this point, arrived in Melbourne, shown off for a month and gone home with some money and an inflated sense of my own skills. But then, two years ago, something changed ... I started going to see other people's shows.

Now, going to see things is tricky. I had often struggled, not with the initial inclination to see a show but with the final motivation to get out of the apartment and over to the venue, particularly when there was a sofa to be snoozed upon and a seemingly endless array of snacks to be nibbled.

My intentions had always been good. I always made lists of shows to see while perusing the program (on my sofa, surrounded by snacks), looking at the list every day until I eventually popped it in the bin while packing to go home.

I don't know if it was me or a friend of mine who instigated it, but both of us, finding ourselves free in the middle of the evening, made a half-arsed pact to see more things, to bash our apathy over the head with our curiosity. And we did. We went out. We saw things.

Our decision-making process was incredibly sophisticated. I liked the poster,

we went. My friend had heard it was good, we went. It was on at the right time, we went. Being involved in comedy, we had seen a good many of the bigger names already and so we gravitated towards newer shows, newer artists, smaller rooms and, arguably I suppose, greater risks of disappointment.

A few shows were terrible. Some were fine. But many were utterly wonderful. Invigoratingly, enchantingly, enlighteningly, brilliantly so. And we both realised that this, this seeing of shows, is what the entire thing is about. This is the idea of a festival. To see things. To encounter ideas. To watch other people do their best. To be astonished by a stranger.

And so since then, at every festival I've been to, I've seen things. Based on whims, on information, on an appealing poster or an exciting premise, I've dragged myself from sofas the world over (Melbourne and Edinburgh, really) to go and see people I've never heard of before. And I may have been lucky, but I have stumbled upon wonderful people, and brilliant shows like Geraldine Hickey, Suitcase Royale, Josh Thomas and *Porthole Into the Minds of the Vanquished*. I've seen people known to others but new to me, like Anthony Morgan, Rod Quantock, Greg Fleet and Tripod. I've seen people famous enough to coast on their reputation refuse to do so, like Frank Woodley, and I've ventured to wonderful new venues like Trades Hall and the Bosco Theatre tent, where seeing a show genuinely feels different.

And, in a year when the big-name acts in big rooms seem to be draining sales from lesser-known acts in smaller rooms all around the festival, it is more important than ever to go to see people you haven't heard of, or seen before, or watched on television. Because seeing something new isn't just about supporting emerging artists, it's not solely about well-meaning and slightly self-important acts of philanthropy, it is your best chance of having your mind completely blown. Of walking out of a sweatbox venue, your world a little changed. The possibilities of things a little wider in the face of this discovery. A new name on the tip of your tongue.

In a purely selfish sense, seeing someone you've not heard of is one of the most exciting and important things you can possibly do at the comedy festival.

Daniel Kitson performs his new stand-up show, The Impotent Fury of the Privileged, at the Athenaeum until April 13 (but not on Fridays or Saturdays).

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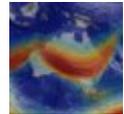
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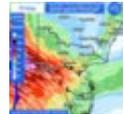
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