

Originally published in *Time Out London*, October 23-30, 2002.

## Funny Peculiar

*As one of the most thrillingly original stand-ups in the land, **Daniel Kitson** should get used to winning things. The Time Out Live Award winner has now taken the Perrier too – but why does he wish they'd never given it to him?*

Interview **Jessica Cargill Thompson**

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Pantry. Daniel Kitson is the sort of person who uses words like pantry. And brisk. And balderdash. In fact, it would not be unreasonable to say that Daniel Kitson has a way with words. Not always nice, slightly antiquated words like pantry. Fuck, cunt, knob, cock and wanker all get quite high billing, but as he points out in his act, if you avoid all those words you've vastly limited your vocabulary by five words, and that's before you've conjugated the word fuck.

'I got this book off my dad for my birthday called "The Superior Person's Book of Words". It's just loads of obscure words which you can basically just use when you want to show off in conversation.'

For those who haven't already caught him live – in his Perrier-winning Edinburgh show '*Something*' (he was also nominated last year for the charmingly titled '*Love, Innocence and the Word Cock*'), or numerous compering spots including Edinburgh's notorious Late 'n' Live – Kitson is the slightly shambolic-looking figure on posters around advertising subsequent London gigs; hands shoved in pockets of trademark brown flared cords, and an expression that says, 'I really don't want to be having my picture taken with this cheesy silver mineral-water smile.' On stage, he can be endearing, intelligent, rude, pompous and/or puerile. As well as fucking funny. There are shades of Eric Morecambe, particularly the way he rearranges his glasses, and the better bits of Steve Coogan. Women want to mother him. Men want to play video games with him. And right now everyone, it seems, wants a ticket to his gigs.

When we meet, Kitson is on good form, engaging company for one who protests discomfort in social situations and who notoriously hates doing press. He chats and giggles through a fair amount of tape, easily distracted by passers-by in corduroy suits, fellow comedian Danny Bhoy ringing up apropos of nothing for a spot of schoolboy banter, and the need to see how to write 'fuck off' in shorthand. The effort he hasn't made is almost studious – spectacularly greasy hair, over-washed T-shirt, and inexpertly cut-off cords, allegedly the result of a tear sustained that morning that was easier to rip than to mend.

So, Dan, tell us about the show your agent has persuaded you to plug. 'If you actually try and put it into words, it sounds a bit wanky, but the basic theme is the sort of intangible ways in which people interact and the inadequacy of language to express who you like someone

or why you dislike someone... You see, that doesn't sound like fun, that. People aren't going to be going, "Oh yeah, that sounds like a giggle."

But it is, and not because it's wall-to-wall, grade-A funnies. It's more that Kitson's feel for language and his skill as a technician make him a joy to listen to. When he describes trying to get to meet a friend in Herne Hill by using a pro-cannabis march as a form of public transport, the pleasure comes not from the obvious gags linking drug use and his appearance, but from his left-field thinking, his knowledge of London bus routes, and his use of the word 'brisk'.

For all his *faux naïveté*, Kitson's success is no fluke. He knew at 13 that he was going to be a comedian, and has seen to it that he is. He started doing the occasional gig during his A-levels, was a finalist in the *Daily Telegraph* Open Mic awards at 17, then strategically chose to come to London for university, knowing that was where the clubs were. Hard graft on the circuit has led to, at just 25, a loyal audience, a *Time Out* Live Award and a turn as the formless Spencer in 'Phoenix Nights' (which he begs me, head in hands on the table, not to mention). And, of course, the Perrier. You'd think he'd be chuffed.

'To be honest, I'm fairly uncomfortable in it. It's weird. I didn't enjoy the [Perrier] process at all. It's lovely for someone to say that they like you, it is, but it's just the opinion of ten people. And it's not unconditional. They go, "We really like you so now you've got to be here at this time, and go to this press conference, and get your photo taken here." I didn't ask for any of this. I'd rather not have it. I didn't want to be considered for it this year, but that in turn gets you loads of attention.

'It's flawed on almost every level. It's artistically flawed. It's ideologically flawed. It's just wrong in so many ways, and yet I'm the champion.' Even getting him to turn up at the awards proved a nightmare. 'I have an automatic inclination to tell them to fuck off.'

Perrier aren't the only ones to fall foul of Kitson's willfulness. When *Front* magazine (one down from *Loaded*) asked him to do a column, he produced what he describes as 'a really gentle heartfelt whimsy about falling in love with a girl at first school,' mainly because he thought it would look funny in amongst pages of tits. Strangely, they didn't run it.

Is this refusal to toe the line just reluctance to grow up? 'I don't know. It's not like I'm going, "Oh, I wanna be a kid." It's just that I find that element fairly refreshing at times. My show is clearly an adult show. I think it says fairly complex, grown-up things. I enjoy playing PlayStation, I don't think that's particularly childish. I like playing football. I like sweets. But then I'm also incredibly arty-farty and up my own arse. That's the fascinating duality that is Daniel Kitson. Hee hee.'

And presumably you won't be doing more TV.

'I'm far more interested in doing secret gigs at midnight somewhere. I find the idea of that really exciting. I don't particularly want to be famous. I've got an innate distrust of mainstream success and I do think that anything that's truly beautiful and good is inherently a bit of a fringe thing.

'In music, people can have a large enough audience that likes and trusts their work and will fit them into other artistic arenas. I think the world of music is just more of an overtly artistic environment. People don't see comedy as an artistic thing, whereas I do.

'I said something incredibly pretentious about a week ago. I'm still quite proud of it. I was speaking to this girl and she was saying, "The thing is Dan, and I don't mean this in a bad way, but I think you are capable of so much more than comedy." And I said to her, "Well, the thing is, I think comedy's capable of so much more than comedy.'" He sniggers. 'Read it and weep!'

*Something* is at the Soho Theatre November 4–23.