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Peking Duck and Triple R

By Daniel Kitson

The first time I encountered RRR was in 2002. As a first-time comedy festival visitor I was engaged in rounds of interviews, organised by a festival understandably keen to recoup their investment. Flattered by the invitation and smitten with the festival I was doing my best to oblige. I had never enjoyed interviews at home. And here, as there, I was struggling to keep my rather pompous disdain for dim questions and poorly informed interviewers under wraps often choosing to hide my actual disdain under mock disdain which is a dangerous tactic when dealing with people who are a bit dim and poorly informed.

The low point came on Triple M. Which is, I should imagine, the home of many low points both artistic and existential. I was being interviewed on The Cage in the afternoon. It was on this day that I learnt one crucial lesson. That I should never ever listen to the programme I'm about to appear on in the car on the way there. This was a blunder with far reaching ramifications. I had long since learnt that I should never watch an audience as they file into the theatre. Due to my entirely superficial, slightly uncharitable and yet frustratingly accurate judgements I would often arrive on stage already having decided precisely how well this gig was going to go. And that generally, was not very well at all. The trouble with self-fulfilling prophecies is that they do tend to fulfil themselves.

I'd already warmed to the lady from the PR company at previous interviews due to her rather charming lack of time for the dim and the poorly informed. This is a quality I value almost as highly as the ability to eat a disproportionate amount of Chinese food. But on this day, on the car radio, the inhabitants of The Cage sounded not only tinny and crackly due to the reception in the car but also, dim beyond dim and poorly informed to the point of wilful ignorance. Which is a skill of sorts I suppose, but not one as impressive as having the wherewithal to eat an entire crispy Peking duck in one sitting.

I sat in the car growing increasingly concerned about how this would go. Then I sat in the studio increasingly concerned about how this was going. The questions were of the wacky variety. And it's a commonly held fact that anything of the wacky variety is shit. So. The questions were shit. They were smug, self-regarding, self-consciously crazy and bawdy. They were questions without answers; they were jokes, jokes at the expense of some laboured, comedically lazy notion of Britishness. Now, I wasn't offended on the part of my country or my Queen (both of which I take far less pride in than the time I ate a special set menu for three all by myself) no, I was offended on the part of comedy itself. These jokes were offensive, and perhaps even more so because these people thought them dangerous and edgy when they were in actual fact just dim and poorly informed.

I had been ill at ease from the moment I set foot in the studio. There were some men and a woman 'holding her own' in a way that set feminism back 50 years and darkened the soul. A woman behaving like a cuntish man is not striking a blow for feminism. She is striking a blow for cunts. Having said all this, I didn't want to be rude. I genuinely didn't. I had no desire to be rude. But the rudeness was filling me up. I was brimming with it. And I knew that if I

allowed words to come out of my mouth many of those words would be inappropriate for drive time radio. Words like stultifying, reductionist, cretinous and strangely, hope. And so in a somewhat misguided attempt to maintain cordial relations I chose not to speak. Now, radio, as some of you may be aware, is largely a verbal medium. If a guest chooses not to speak, however honourable the reasons it can make things a little tense. So I started saying 'no' and 'not really' just to lighten the mood. That didn't help much and eventually I left. Roundly disliked by some men and a woman.

Some days later I arrived for the first time at RRR, there was an arcade machine in the hallway and no elevator. I was there for some manner of afternoon show, presented by a lady called Meshel and a man whose name escapes me. And, as I sat outside the booth and listened on the relay I heard these two perfect strangers, entirely without prompting, seemingly instinctively mocking Triple M. My heart leapt a little, like I had received an extra portion of roast pork quite by accident. That interview was largely taken up by Meshel and the man taking it in turns to say 'ice cold can of coke' whilst I giggled. It felt a little like coming home.

My next visit was to see the Breakfasters that same year, I had always thought of breakfast radio as a kind of broadcast suicide watch, just getting people through to lunch time without the despair of early morning swamping them entirely. The forced energy, plastered on joi de vivre and unctuous bonhomie with the listener was enough to make me kill a man. After of course, I had been back to bed for a bit. So imagine my delight, when I arrived to a darkened studio and saw people inside it looking entirely disinterested in joy. It was after all, very early in the morning and joy, like everything else, has a time and a place. The afternoon. Clearly. I was allowed to put my face flat on the desk and mutter into the microphone. And for that I will be eternally grateful.

For the past few years during the comedy festival I have hosted (originally with Chris Addison and more recently with a variety of guests) the graveyard slot on Monday and Tuesday nights. And it is no exaggeration when I say that I consider this one of the greatest privileges of my life. There is something incredibly generous about a radio station willing to let me play whatever I want and say whatever I fancy for four hours through the night. It doesn't matter to me that barely a soul is listening at that time, it doesn't matter that the few people who call in are generally, seemingly, lonely to the point of heroism. What matters is that when I get out of the taxi and walk into RRR, it smells the same as five years of memories, memories of a radio station that is, in my experience the finest in the world. For many reasons, not least, the fact that it is, without even trying to be, the antithesis of everything that makes me despair. And in the middle of those graveyard nights, with my favourite music playing and an English muffin toasting in the kitchen I can go outside the back door, look up at the sky and know that I am in Melbourne which I love and that I am at RRR where I belong.

POSTSCRIPT

In 2003, the year after The Cage debacle, my then girlfriend was working in PR for various comedians at the festival and whilst accompanying one to Triple M asked why they were doing a pre-record rather than a live interview. The reply came in the form of a question –

“Have you heard of Daniel Kitson?”

She said that she had heard my name. Which was true. She had heard my name. She declined to mention the fact she had also heard my snoring. And so they continued...

“Well he did this last year and he was so bad that now we insist all comedians do pre-records so we can edit if we need to.”

I was proud when she told me that. Almost as proud as the time I ordered crispy skin suckling pig at 4am.

Daniel Kitson brings *It's the Fireworks Talking* to the Athanaeum Theatre in April as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival and can also be heard on Triple R in the wee hours during the Comedy Festival.