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Kitson unpacks rental baggage

Ahead of the World Theatre Festival at the Brisbane Powerhouse, Daniel Kitson speaks of his new show.

Stephanie Bunbury

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It started with the suitcases. Daniel Kitson likes old tat, as he puts it, on stage and on his person, although he's looking surprisingly crisp and pressed today. Perhaps that's what comes of working at the Opera House. It's an odd meeting, the hairy home-made comic musings of Kitson performed in, as he puts it, what is primarily a tourist attraction. His couple of dozen battered old suitcases are strewn over the Playhouse stage, an oasis of dust amid Utzon's Scandinavian cleanliness.

You might expect a show inspired by a collection of suitcases to be about travel, but *66A Church Road* is about being at home. Specifically, it is about a house

Kitson rented for six years, mostly alone, in the south London suburb of Crystal Palace. As the show progresses, the suitcases are lit one by one, revealing that their sides are gauze and their innards exact, miniature models of the rooms in that house, right down to kitchen utensils. Nobody's home, though: there are just the rooms, the bric-a-brac and the windows. Kitson designed them, he tells me, from memory.



Daniel Kitson will perform along with a host of other international acts at the Brisbane World Theatre Festival, Brisbane Powerhouse.

I remember some of those rooms; I went there once to interview him. A staircase led straight up from the door; there was a neat '60s kitchen and an oddly positioned toilet. What was good about it was the unusually sunny lounge room, host to a mess of wires, boxes and Playstation stuff around the television.

This was Kitson's secret stash, evidence of his other, techy self and the last thing you would expect to find when you'd gone to talk about a show about the loveliness of fireworks. "Exactly! I'm an interesting dialectic!" he yelled in triumph at the time.

"I remember," he says now, "saying to someone - and being quite pleased with myself - that if you lived on your own, then the biggest relationship in your life was with your house. I can't remember exactly when that was, but I was already collecting suitcases." His show describes moving into the house, his various travails with his landlord and his fruitless attempt to buy it. It is, as he says "an anecdote told in a very formal style".

The narrative is regularly interrupted, however, by spells in the darkness when Kitson's recorded voice relates seemingly random memories of things that happened there. They range from the momentary - looking at the streetlights outside the window as he's lying in bed - to the great themes of anyone's life, the growth and death of love, the mates who are lying in wait when he comes back from a gig, the day the moving vans come and he's leaving. It's not really a show about a house, more of an extended metaphor. Actually, all of Daniel Kitson's theatrical shows work this territory, the space between memory and yearning. They work as powerfully for him as anyone else, especially as he moves further from the events he describes. He wrote *66A Church Road* for the Edinburgh Festival 18 months ago and, he says, worried that he might not be able to perform it now with conviction. "But it's very interesting. In all sorts of ways, I feel more capable of engaging with it as a thing. It was like when you find an old

piece of school work and you think 'Oh, I can't remember having thoughts that clear! That well articulated!'

"But what's also nice is that the memories I articulate in the show, particularly the ones in the suitcases, I had forgotten. So it's really nice to have these things and have that process of remembering. When it goes dark and the memories are playing, I'm sort of being quite moved by them, generally. I've not had to fake anything. The things that really annoyed me still annoy me. The things that were lovely memories are still lovely memories and the things that were sad memories are still sad memories."

In the past, Kitson generally disapproved of people taking snaps of happy events or anything else they wanted to remember. "I'd say, 'Just trust your heart and your mind, and if it's beautiful and strong enough it'll be there' ". Now, he says, he realises that he does the same thing with his shows. "You look at old photographs of your life and old things of your own and you remember things you didn't know you remembered. I've realised I do a lot of that.

"In *Fireworks*, I talked about swimming in the sea and I can very much feel and see that moment, but I feel it now through the filter of that show. I don't think I remember that day any more; I think I remember that thing about that day." He wants to rewrite parts of *66A Church Road* to acknowledge the fact he has used it to fix his memories of that time.

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Perhaps, I suggest, it's just that Kitson is now old enough to have enough past to forget if he is not vigilant. He looks doubtful.

"I've always had a propensity for nostalgia." That certainly isn't fading.

But he remembers something else, just as I'm getting up to go to the airport back to Melbourne. There is a point in *66A Church Road* where he says that one of the things that drew him to the house was the many power points in the lounge room, enough for all his electrical gadgets. Someone last night laughed really loudly at that.

"I remember," he says now, "saying to someone - and being quite pleased with myself - that if you lived on your own, then the biggest relationship in your life was with your house.

"Was that you?" he asks. "You were very struck by the number of wires in that room that time you came. I remember that." Of course it was. One look at the suitcase model of his old lounge and, clear as day, I remembered it, too.