

# fest

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FESTIVAL PREVIEW

## COMEDY

Mark Watson **Jim Jefferies**  
**The Blanks** Adam Hills **Tony Law**

## THEATRE

The Intervention **Monkey Bars**  
**David Hasselhoff** Hip Hop **Othello**

## MUSIC & CABARET

Camille O'Sullivan **Barbershopera**  
**Creative Martyrs** Brazil! **Brazil!**

"Edinburgh's different  
to everywhere else...  
there's a different heat"

RUSSELL  
**KANE**

COMEDY, THEATRE, MUSIC AND MORE: THE HOTTEST SHOWS AT THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL



# The kids are alright

Fringe First-winning writer and director **Chris Goode** embraces his inner child as he talks to Jo Caird about his new verbatim show, *Monkey Bars*.

**“If you ask me who I was as a 10-year-old I’ll tell you I was obnoxious and precocious and all of those things, but actually if I try to think about it from the inside, I find myself thinking about a very complicated human being who just happens to be little and to not have a voice, but who is capable of intense feeling – more intense feeling than probably I’ve ever experienced as an adult.”**

Chris Goode has been thinking about childhood a lot recently. The Fringe First-winning writer and director is concerned about how we treat children in our society. “I think children get a raw deal,” he says – we project onto them, underestimate them, ignore them. His new verbatim show, *Monkey Bars*, which puts the words of children into the mouths of adult actors, is an attempt to redress the balance.

The show comes out of many hours of conversations with children between the ages of eight and 10 conducted by Karl James (with whom Goode worked on Tim Crouch’s *The Author*, one of the most discussed shows of the 2010 Fringe). The children were encouraged to talk about “moments of change in their lives” and reflect upon times when they experienced loss, sadness or bravery.

“We’re not trying to hold them in upsetting places or ask them to talk about traumatic things, but in a way I suppose they’re all things where they, as children, are measuring themselves against the adult world,” Goode explains. These interviews are then taken into the rehearsal room, where Goode will work with six actors to devise scenes that integrate the children’s words into grown-up settings (the director is in the process of casting the show when we speak). A crucial element of the project is its honesty; Goode is adamant there will be no cleaning up of the verbatim transcripts and no additional material introduced. The scenarios presented will be fiction, but every word spoken will be an accurate representation of the conversations conducted by James.

Goode is confident that *Monkey Bars* will make audiences laugh. “We had a very hysterical time in the pilot when taking some of the children’s words and trying to deliver them as political speeches.” But he hopes there’s more to the show than that. The aim, the director says, is that audiences “end up sort of hearing the child’s voice inside the adult; the child that all grown-ups carry around inside them that has never really grown up.” The show will “create a space in which everyone gets to look again at who they think they were when they were that age and maybe just treat that child with more kindness or more forgiveness than we otherwise might.”

The process of creating the piece has been full of personal resonances for Goode, which is perhaps unsurprising given part of the impetus for developing *Monkey Bars* was to do right by the child version of himself, a little boy who felt that he “wasn’t being heard.”

Transcribing James’s interviews with the children, Goode was struck in particular by how many of them expressed trepidation and excitement about moving to secondary school, a feeling he remembers very clearly himself. “I am always looking for the drama in what I’m making and I think that the transition that nine and 10-year-olds are experiencing and facing up to is where the drama is in this piece. It’s kind of thrilling if you think back on your own experience of that, just remembering being in that moment of transition. I think it’s been good for me to see how brave I was at a bunch of different points in my childhood because I remember being really cowardly.”

Another anecdote that was particularly evocative for the director was one little boy’s experience as a mascot at a rugby match (which may or may not make it into the final show, Goode stresses). The boy is excited to be the centre of so many people’s attention, but terrified at the same time, a contradiction that Goode recognises from his own child-



Claudine Quinn



Claudine Quinn

hood, which was spent “getting up and trying to be entertaining... for people’s approval.”

Not that he’s ever stopped doing that, of course. Goode has been a professional theatremaker for nearly two decades, during which time he has run companies, made large-scale devised work, performed solo shows, acted in and written plays for other people. But occupying that territory – part fear and part excitement – never gets any easier, he says. “That’s a feeling I still have now as a performer. More and more actually, I’m less and less confident about that moment where I have to stand up and go, ‘look at me!’ Which is why it was quite nice just to be directing this time and be sitting in the dark.” **f**

**Top**  
Chris Goode  
**Bottom**  
Karl James

**Monkey Bars @ Traverse**  
times vary, 14-27 Aug, not 20, £12 - £19