

# DARK STAR

An unknown Australian comedian is the big hit in Edinburgh

In five weeks Tim Minchin, a 29-year-old Australian musician-comedian, went from earning \$300 a week in a Melbourne covers band and hassling for gigs at Australian festivals to being the toast of the Edinburgh Festival, winning the Perrier Newcomer Award and being compared to Bill Bailey, Stevie Wonder and Cole Porter. *limelight* caught up with him as he packed up his dressing room after his sell-out season in Edinburgh. Minchin self-directs his act, *Darkside*, a solo vaudeville-flavoured pastiche of virtuosic piano playing, ironic lyrics, comic self-reflective rambles and much playing up to the audience.

He thought Edinburgh would be a "struggle for the first couple of years, [where I'd] lose a lot of money, but it's all right because it's a right of passage." What he didn't realise was that the cancellation of another act would give

him, on his first visit, the 350-seat Debating Hall and a white grand piano. He filled it mainly through word of mouth (and his sister Kate's efforts in publicity).

**PEOPLE WHO HAVE HOLLYWOOD A-LIST ACTORS ON THEIR BOOKS SAY, 'COME TO L.A., WHATEVER CAREER YOU WANT WE'LL MAKE IT HAPPEN!'**

"The big publicity push wound down in the first week and he was then generating his own and selling tickets," says the venue manager, Australian Ged Wood. "On this level you're competing against the rising stars of the UK scene on their way up. It's very competitive."

Minchin describes one of his songs as "rock and roll nerd," then sings the opening lines: "There's not much depth in what he's singing. He's a victim of his upper-middle-class upbringing."

"I lay it out there. The whole show is about not being a good artist as I'm too comfortable. I can't be a rock and roll star because I'm not deep enough, because I haven't had enough trouble in my life.

"I guess my explanation is that I'm a musician who writes comedy because I can't write what the market wants, which is depth. Put it this way: the one album I have recorded, the record companies I approached said, 'the songs are great but we wouldn't know how to sell you. What are you,

a comedian?' So I thought, 'I'm going to get this comedy off my chest.' I haven't done a serious gig since."

Australian producer David Bates, who owns one of the seven Spiegel tents touring the festivals of the world, saw Minchin at the Adelaide Cabaret Festival in June, and knew he was destined for greatness. "I saw him in a not very satisfactory room and not very satisfactory timeslot and I was actually being very cynical about it and I thought, 'Oh yeah, here's another cabaret performer,'" he tells *limelight* in Edinburgh. "And about 15 minutes into the show I thought, 'This guy has got a very lateral and creative mind and is a fantastic piano player.' He is a great prodigious talent who is at the very beginning of his career. I really appreciate his lateral take on the world - he's quite political."

"I've had to change my perspective on myself," says Minchin. "Five weeks ago I was wondering if I could make a career out of this. I'm by nature fairly cynical but I can't deny it. The head of comedy of the BBC came down here and just freaked out. I've been offered seasons in Soho. And people who have Hollywood A-list actors on their books say, 'Come to LA, whatever career you want we'll make it happen!'

"What they all say is that I have a presence on stage. That's what I've been told in smaller versions my whole career, since playing a cat in grade five. And so I'm going, 'Oh OK, that's something that an agent from LA says, not just my nana.'"

**Ruby Boukabou**

*Tim Minchin is performing at the Spiegel tent, Melbourne, 3-4 December. Bookings: 1300 136 166.*

