

BBC @Potterrow – Infinite Monkey Cage

The BBC is letting its hair down at the Edinburgh Festival this month. A mammoth field trip to the liveliest city in the world this August is great news for the presenters, but also great news for the Edinburgh Festival-goers who have a rare chance to participate in a host of BBC shows.

The end of term feeling was obvious at the recordings of Radio 4's award winning science comedy show 'The Infinite Monkey Cage'. Festival goers were greeted by caricature puppet versions of the hosts to make sure no-one was labouring under the misapprehension that this was going to be anything but fun. Sure enough, poking fun at themselves (and each other) were Robin Ince and Professor Brian Cox, joined by an illustrious panel of top scientists and comedians for an unmissable show.

Hanging out in the green room after The Infinite Monkey Cage
<https://t.co/0nHj8nl3Ij>

– BBCEdFest (@BBCEdFest) [August 2, 2014](#)

The success of the show lies in its unique ability to make science and scientists accessible, funny and entertaining without 'dumbing down'. No knowledge of science is presumed by the panel, but the details are there for those who want to delve deeper. And by capturing the imagination and presenting high level science in a fun way, this is pretty much every listener.

For us non-scientists though, it is entirely reassuring to hear a top cosmologist admit "Infinity gives me the urge to

scratch my head". The scientists on the panel use humour, metaphor and clarity of thought to relate complex theories and hypotheses to scientists and non-scientists alike.

With humour and intelligence the panel debate subjects such as 'What happened before the Big Bang?' and 'Is Irrationality Genetic?' They discuss the theory of Inflation, and explain why Universe is like a teenager. They ask whether our collective IQ is improving over generations, and how much of this is due to environmental factors such as education and how much is in our genes.

As expected of a group of scientists who are at the cutting edge of their fields passions inevitably run high, and a discussion on the Anthropic Principle almost leads to fisticuffs between a Theoretical Cosmologist in the red corner and an Experimental Cosmologist in the blue corner.

The diverse viewpoints of the panel sparks lively debate and some downright silliness. We learn how our irrational positive illusions are a fundamental part of being human, and how intelligence correlates with racism, liberalism and, bizarrely, how strong your handshake is.

Listen out for some suggestions for highly unethical but potentially enlightening experiments on the children of racist parents, a bit of Dr Seuss, and Brian Cox gleefully encouraging the panel to 'go after the post modernists'.

The Infinite Monkey Cage is surely one of the most engaging and innovative shows on radio, and is infinitely more entertaining than any other panel show you have ever heard. It broadcasts on BBC Radio 4 at 4.30 pm Monday 4th and 11th August. Tune in to find out if how fast you walk can really indicate how intelligent you are.

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