

## Punk Science on... science-based comedy events

### What's Punk Science about?

"Punk Science is about breaking down the popular perception of scientists as hyper-intelligent but socially clumsy people who are unable to get across elegant scientific ideas. We're actually neither punks, nor scientists, but we try to inspire interest in science among those who think it's too dull or difficult for them.

"We do 'the pub understanding of science'. For example, we might take one of Einstein's theories, which even scientists struggle to explain, and try to get people who wouldn't normally be talking about Einstein to understand it after their second or third pint."

### How do your shows make science funny?

"The over-riding thing we've learned is that the more science you talk, the less funny it is. So our aim is often to get across an accurate impression of some pretty abstract ideas, without all the boring detail. Our method is currently to do large-scale demos, experiments and surveys using the audience as our main prop.

"People do love to volunteer – our shows aren't like stand-up comedy where people are scared to sit in the front row in case they're picked on. We want people to realise early on that a Punk Science event will be stupid, fun, generally non-humiliating... and then we can pick on them regardless of where they're sitting. The comedy is not from a funny script, but from getting people to do things they never normally would, in an anarchic and chaotic, but friendly way."

### Is your science accurate as well as funny?

"A good analogy for what we do is that we take the useful diagrams you find in popular science books, and turn them into a 3-D demo to create a visual metaphor. We do a demo of Brownian motion where

the whole audience has to perform a hand-waving gesture, then we chuck balls in to represent the particles being buffeted around by the moving water molecules. It's a great warm-up to relax the whole audience, and it's pretty realistic. One great endorsement was from a woman whose husband was a physics teacher. She said in 20 years of marriage she'd never understood Brownian motion, but our show had made it clear."

## **Who are your shows aimed at?**

"We've done shows for festivals, corporate events, primary and secondary schools at home and abroad, and everyone seems to enjoy them, but we tailor things to fit, too. With teenagers we tend to be a bit ruder because they're less prudish than some adult audiences. For the Lates programme (which is for 18+ only and tends to be a singles night) we like to encourage awkward interactions between two single people. In one show we mixed up an ancient toothpaste recipe – it was gritty and horrendous – and made two people try it out after eating garlic and onions."

## **Can you make any topic funny?**

"Our shows in the past have covered topics from climate change and cosmology to something as apparently dull as friction reduction. We often perform a particular show just once, so we now have a modular approach, bringing together a performance from tried-and-tested demos that are relevant and memorable. Audiences tend to like big props, and we do too, but ours are cheap and silly, made out of masking tape and cardboard, with crude drawings on."

"Our focus is on entertainment. We get a lot of spontaneous feedback from people who've enjoyed the show, and seem to have learned things, too. The Punk Science approach is the opposite of blinding people with science. It is the blind leading the blind. If we can understand something, literally anyone else can too."

***The Punk Scientists are Dan Carter-Hope and Jon Milton***

## Further resources:

Find out how to do what the Punk Scientists do in their book *Do Try This At Home*:

[http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/about\\_us/doing\\_business\\_with\\_us/publications/DoTryThisAtHome.aspx](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/about_us/doing_business_with_us/publications/DoTryThisAtHome.aspx)

Read Punk Scientist Jon Milton's view about making physics funny:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2005/may/16/science.highereducation>

See how Punk Science's shows have evolved since the opening of the Science Museum's adult's-only venue, the Dana Centre by viewing webcasts of their performances:

- Punk Science: Climate Change 30 May 2007  
<http://www.danacentre.org.uk/events/2007/05/30/267>
- Punk Science: News Review 27 June 2006  
<http://www.danacentre.org.uk/events/2006/06/27/140>
- Punk Science: Aliens 6 December 2005  
<http://www.danacentre.org.uk/events/2005/12/06/55>
- Punk Science: The Albert Einstein Experience 8 February 2005  
<http://www.danacentre.org.uk/events/2005/02/08/37>

Find out when Punk Science is next performing at the Dana Centre: [www.danacentre.org.uk/events](http://www.danacentre.org.uk/events)

To book Punk Science for a show (lasting anything from 20 minutes to an hour) at your school, festival, corporate event or birthday party, email [punkscience@sciencemuseum.org.uk](mailto:punkscience@sciencemuseum.org.uk)