

How was it for you?

Kris King – December 30th 2012

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2012/12/how-was-it-for-you/>

Don't look at me like that! Unless we spent the night intensively researching the contents of each other's underpants and you've somehow forgotten (it's perfectly understandable – I am, after all, the sexual equivalent of Alzheimer's), then you'll know perfectly well that I didn't mean it like *that*. I was merely asking, albeit in a "nudge nudge, wink wink" sort of a way, how your 2012 has been? Did you have a good christmas? Survive the Mayan apocalypse okay? Did you enjoy the Olympics? What about the Diamond Jubilee? [if you answer "yes" to that last one, please fuck all the way off right now]. Was it, by and large, a good year for you, your family, friends, and/or insert suitable noun to indicate other members of your social circle here? Okay, look, I admit it, I'm completely shit at dealing with life's little pleasantries whenever a detectable measure of sincerity is required, and especially when, hands in the air, I kind of *did* mean it like that. Well, I meant it in a *metaphorical* way ... let me explain ...

As regular readers (that'll just be me, then) will know, I tend not to talk too much about work, primarily because I quite like my job and don't fancy munching on my own size nines by saying anything that would prompt my employer to cease funding my crippling food, heat, and living indoors addiction. One or two of my colleagues may have scored a mention in these pages previously, but I've never really elaborated on the secret, double-life I've been leading as a web monkey. It's very nice of you to think that I was able to devote myself full-time to being an anti-theistic, word-strangling blog super-hero, but I'm afraid to say that, until someone is prepared to pay me a shit-ton of cash for swearing at religion on the internet, I must do my 9 to 5.30 with the rest of you. Fortunately, as I said, I quite like my job – I work for a pretty groovy company staffed by some even groovier people (one of whom bought me "The Atheist Bible" for Secret Santa, and had written "blog fodder" on the label).

If you've ever worked in IT, especially software development, you'll know that pretty much **everyone** plays a musical instrument of some description (I think it might actually be the law). At least *half* of the people with whom I share a roof and some dark blue carpet every day own a guitar, and a good number of those are in bands outside of work. So, when last year's Secret Santa handout on the afternoon of the christmas party was preceded by a twenty-minute set from "Support Act", a band consisting of four members of the support department (do you see what they did there?) it wasn't really all that surprising; if anything, I was amazed that no-one had thought of it before. Sure there had been attempts to form a company band in the past but, since they largely involved people getting together to play the same cover songs that various members were already playing in their own bands outside of work, it didn't really go much beyond a semi-regular series of jam sessions.

I have to confess that, while watching my colleagues belting out a couple of tracks (thus delaying the opening of presents by a full third of an hour), I felt somewhat jealous; why didn't they ask me? I'm a living rock god – the very embodiment of stage charisma and raw sexual energy – so how come I wasn't the one they emailed begging to front their rag-tag, rudderless group of musically anaemic no-hopers and lead them all to immortal audio glory? If I'm being honest (and, let's face it, there's no point in lying because you'd see right through it anyway) it was probably due to having never actually expressed an interest in being part of such an endeavour ... well, that, and my sonic output thus far has been the chunk of [sub-Marilyn Manson noise pollution on my website](#) that doesn't really speak to a deep ocean of musical talent lurking beneath this calm, quiet, self-effacing exterior. Alright, it's mostly down to the fact that I'm not that good a guitarist and I'm even less of a singer. There, I said it ... happy now?

Despite being less a musician and more the kind of person that environmental health keeps permanently miked up and fitted with an electro-shock collar in case I try to sing in the shower, I still felt that, were the opportunity to arise, I would quite like to do my own little "Support Act"-style bit at the next office christmas present-fest. There was, of course, the small matter of not actually being terribly good, but that was nothing a decent amount of practice couldn't sort out ... what was more

problematic, however, was the presence of a rather large psychological issue that would need dealing with were I ever to find myself in the highly unlikely situation of agreeing to take part in some kind of office talent show. Fortunately, since this was all completely hypothetical, I didn't really need to worry about it and could it put it far from my mind ... until September, of course, when I found myself in the highly unlikely situation of agreeing to take part in some kind of office talent show.

It started off as a couple of jokey emails between myself and Aerynne, the support department's resident pedal-pounding glamour-girl and one of my favouritest lady-woman friends that I'm not related to; at first we suggested, as part of a running joke for the two of us, that we should do a cover of Tim Minchin's "The Pope Song" before bouncing around a few other ideas which, while still silly, were far less likely to be seen as an exercise in synchronised career suicide. Then, without warning, the idea that turns a frivolous conversation into a serious one was thrown on the pile, and suddenly the whole game changed. "Let's do *that* song", we agreed, "it'll be a laugh!" What the fuck happened there? We were just pissing about a minute ago, now we're agreeing to meet up on Sunday for tea, biscuits, and *band practice*? How in the name of Lucifer's poo-pipe did we end up there? And what about that "rather large psychological issue" I mentioned? Yeah, about that ...

For many years I have been suffering from a debilitating condition that doesn't, as far as I'm aware, have a common name within the wider medical community (if they'd like to name it after me, may I suggest "Rant's Paradox"?) In essence, I am a latent show-off, trapped in the body of a massively insecure nerd; for every molecule of me that wants to be out there like Freddie Mercury, clutching a microphone and making the entire world my bitch as I command them "Look at me, motherfuckers!", there is an equal, if not perhaps slightly greater, number of molecules that are urging me to wrap myself in a blanket and hide in a dustbin while gibbering "Don't look at me, you bastards!" Okay, so it's not exactly the big, glamorous, telethon-inspiring disorder you might have been expecting, but then it would have been even less glamorous for me to have told you that I'm equal parts braggart knob-end and pusillanimous wuss ... and, as if to prove a point, I've just used two words to disparage myself that you may have to look up in a dictionary.

Pretty much everything I've ever done that has been the slightest bit creative bears the stamp of someone who's trying to show off in a peculiarly passive way; whether it's [writing music](#), creating [browser plugins and game route planners](#), [ranting about religion](#), or even just building websites as part of my day job, I tend to present them to the world with a mixture of (probably hugely misplaced) "Fuck, yeah, check this shit out!" pride and a quiet, almost dormouse-like, "I hope this is okay?" timidity. Some times I find I'm almost on the verge of apologising for the intrusion, as if I'd sneaked downstairs and into the front room where the grown-ups were gathered in order to solicit friendly opinions on the cacky, crayon-scribbled eyesore I was trying to pass off as "art" before I was told to put my pyjama bottoms on and piss off back to bed. Okay, enough of the pointlessly self-indulgent and unnecessarily revealing psycho-bollocks ... back to the plot (such as it is).

Having not, as far as I can recall, performed in any capacity in front of people since my primary school nativity at the age of 6 (in which I stumbled over my lines announcing Mary and Joseph's bugging off to Bethlehem, prefacing the moment when forty children would loudly murder "Little Donkey"), it took slightly less time than that required by a neuron to self-destruct in despair whenever the existence of Rylan Clark is considered for the paralysing terror of what I had let myself in for to take hold. It didn't matter that I would be performing before a moderately sympathetic audience of my colleagues – the presence of a kindly, sweet-faced old lady in the front row at my school nativity, staring, clearly willing me to remember my lines, only added to the bum-twitching terror of having ballsed up – I was still absolutely terrified at the idea of what we had signed up to. There was only one thing for it; tell everyone. Well, that and practice like fuck.

Once Aerynne and I had had our first practice I decided to tell everyone of our talent show ambitions via the medium of Facebook. This might seem at first like a hugely stupid thing to do, raising expectations amongst friends and relatives to potentially unfulfillable levels, but there was a rationale behind it; generating interest in this way meant that I had forced myself into a corner, relying on the anticipation of others to ensure that I would actually go through with it and not chicken out before the big day. Although the whole thing was meant to be "a bit of fun", I was rather taking it seriously – the way I saw it I had an opportunity to confront one of my fears head on, yet, with the reasonable safety net that came from playing before a familiar and friendly audience. If that wasn't enough there was also the reassurance that, in the event our performance sucked an enormous back of dicks, it didn't matter too much because it was just a silly Christmas show for co-workers who were hardly going to bottle us off (well, Sales might).

So, for a little over two months, Aerynne and I would meet up most Sunday afternoons so that we might practice our way out of the hole we had dug for ourselves – she supplied the venue and the tea, while I brought the chocolate biscuits. Getting over the fact that I had to sing (in addition to getting a few chords in the right order) took less time, and was far less painful, than I had envisaged, something I should attribute to either the biscuit-induced sugar rush or Aerynne having made minor, favourable comparisons between my singing voice and that of two far more famous vocalists of whom I am a fan (flattery will get you everywhere, dear!) In the meantime, I would update Facebook with our progress to maintain interest and ensure that friends would keep me to my somewhat self-imposed challenge ... naturally, we remained secretive as to what *exactly* we would be performing in order that some element of surprise was maintained (that and revealing our chosen song's title rather blows the gag).

As our practice sessions continued we became more confident, especially when, during our fifth session, we were finally able to get through the song every time without making any mistakes. Perversely, none of this had a diminishing effect on my gradually rising panic, quite the opposite in fact; as the date of the talent show approached, both my bum and digestive system went into high gear and began ageing at twice their normal rate (my rear end is now old enough to remember the coronation of Queen Victoria). By our sixth practice session, we began exploring the possibility of a second song, much to the horror of my nervous system – in what could only be described as an attempt to up the ante and research ingenious new ways to cultivate stomach ulcers, we had to transcribe *and* learn a whole new song in just over two weeks, barely one-third of the time we had spent working on the first. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot – this was like reloading because you didn't think your foot was quite bullet-y enough.

After rejecting "The Monotremes" as possibly being too clever, and "BLT" as being too easily thought of as a sandwich (rather than three of the four letters Aerynne and I could use to represent our gender identity and sexuality), we settled on "Intermittent Explosive Disorder" as a band name; we thought it appropriate, given our initial choice of song to cover. We were, of course, aware that the initials, I.E.D, were more familiar to people in reference to explosives, but figured this gave us potential for the band members to be known as "Sex Bomb" and "F-Bomb" – there are no prizes for guessing which one of us was which. All of this was, at least for a while, a good way of mentally distracting myself from how close we were getting to the actual day, as well as getting to grips with the fact that a number of people who would not be able to attend in person had asked whether there was going to be a YouTube video of the event? Oh, shit, well, I guess there's going to be one *now* ...

So, the day of the talent show finally arrived, and I was awoken by my stomach's announcement that, just for me, it would be doing the spin cycle for at least the next 5 hours. Our colleague Chris had helped transport our gear into the office and, when we made our way to the first-floor café we saw that Rich B had gotten his PA set up the night before. To stand there, with one end of the café cleared to accommodate wedge monitors, input boxes, microphones, and cabling that lead to the other end of the room where sat the mixing desk (manned by Rich I), suddenly made things very real, and my stomach decided to ramp the spin cycle up to 1800rpm. The show was at lunchtime, to coincide with the christmas buffet, and as every minute ticked by I began to realise that we were in office full of computers; that rhythmic pounding noise was not an analogue clock, but my own ticker going mental at the stress I had maliciously subjected it to. Finally, the time came for me to change into my decent shirt and go do my first ever "sound-check".

Within minutes, people began gathering in the café, occupying every available square inch of table with snacks, sweets, nibbles, cakes, and all manner of things that I was feeling far too nauseous to contemplate enjoying any time soon. When Rich B and Tom asked if they could go on with their sketch first, I cheerfully said yes – it didn't matter to me when I went on, I'd still be heading into panic overdrive regardless! When Marie, who was gamely compèring this festival of "Holy buggery, what the fetid arse am I doing?", announced it was our turn I thought "Fuck it – if you're going to screw up, screw up, giggle, and then move on". It didn't make me any less nervous, but it did make me more able to put on my game face and better conceal how terrified I was. For the first minute and a half of the first song, my voice bears the wobbly echoes of completely shredded nerves, particularly after a muted response had been received for a line that we thought would get a big laugh.

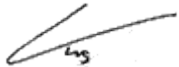
When the song ended and a reasonably appreciable applause came without any detectable sarcasm, I felt sufficient relief that I was calmed enough to be able to introduce the second song which, despite being the less rehearsed, we seemed to launch into with confidence, ultimately pulling off a better performance than the first (this despite my missing a line, changing a chord half-a-bar too

late, a stumble in the final chorus, and Aerynne involuntarily having to improvise the bass run a bit after forgetting what she'd rehearsed). At one point I spotted, out of the corner of eyes that were trying desperately not to look at anyone, a colleague sat cross-legged on the floor and singing along with the chorus – I let out a slight giggle and my fears all but vanished. At the end I felt a massive sense of relief that we'd gotten through it and, yes, a curious buzz at having performed my first ever gig; it didn't matter that we were ultimately beaten in the contest by Thomas who, that morning, had decided to enter with a bit of last minute juggling. I was just glad that I'd done it.

There's an old cliché that performing on stage is like "making love to the audience"; I'm not entirely sure I agree with this (although I did need a cigarette afterwards). The audience role is more passive than that of the performer so, if anything, it's more like standing there wanking while everyone watches. This, in many ways, is scarier than making love to the audience because at least, in that scenario, they then bear *some* of the responsibility for having a good time, and an equal share of the blame when they don't; when you're wanking, you're on your own – you have to put some serious effort into giving everyone a good show (making *yourself* feel good is hardly a challenge), and there's a far greater emphasis on whether or not you've got decent enough equipment and skills to get the job done. Actually, I think it might be best if I refrain from exploring this analogy further – it can only go downhill from here, if we're honest.

So, yes, it was terrifying and, yes, it was fun ... that's kind of how it's supposed to be, though, I think. It's more rewarding to take on little challenges, to face fear where you can, because the joy that results is always greater for having **earned** it. Think about that as we head into the New Year; give yourself something to *do*, something to take on. Sure I could have spared myself the hair-tearing stress, but I'd also have been spared that feeling of having actually done something I'd always wanted to do and, more importantly, doing it reasonably *well*.

And if you're wondering whether I would do it again, I shall say simply: see you next year 😊

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ang', written in a cursive style.