

2008/March ANDY STANTON PROFILE - Publishing News

Reviews can be somewhat hard to come by, especially if you're a children's author; rare though they are, rave reviews for a writer's performance at an event are even harder to come by, so when a buzz starts to circulate - created by unbiased PRs and other authors no less - that you really would be doing yourself a favour by catching Andy Stanton live, the moment the opportunity arose it had to be grabbed.

Stanton burst onto the scene about a year and a half ago with his debut, an undiluted slice of anarchic humour titled *You're a Bad Man Mr Gum*; it immediately won praise, prizes and plaudits from all and sundry, including the discerning, if wilfully eclectic radio presenter Danny Baker. It was a book to make you laugh out loud, and, as it happens, so was Stanton's event at King Alfred's School in north London. His belching contest with a very talented member of the audience was sublime, and the fact he never lost control of that audience something of a wonder, considering the amount of spirited participation involved.

If you assume Stanton must, therefore, have been some kind of performer prior to becoming a writer, you'd be wrong. "I was a temp medical secretary in the NHS for six years and spent my twenties avoiding a proper career and thinking I'd do something 'creative' one day. Each year I'd say it to myself with less conviction." So what finally convinced him to become a writer? "What happened was I finally started something and finished it, always a good ploy...if you want to get somewhere, do some work."

It has, he says, been widely misreported that he'd worked as a stand-up comedian. "The truth is I did do a few bits of stand-up when I was at college, but it was very stressful...and I was very reticent about doing events at first - not because I thought I couldn't, but more like why *should* I have to monkey about on stage?"

Not only has Stanton conquered whatever fears he had about treading the boards, he's also the voice of the audio version of Mr Gum. "I got my cousin, a radio producer, to come and direct me as I hadn't done it before, and we've just finished the American version - the spellings are different to the

untrained ear, and there's a glossary. This whole performance thing that's come with the books has been a way back in to areas I avoided years ago. The other thing is - and [every time I perform] I hope this holds true and isn't bitterly ironic - I really like talking to kids and they make me laugh."

Stanton needn't have worried, his event an object lesson in how to communicate with an audience. Egmont have just upped his profile with a nationwide ad campaign for his latest book, *Mr Gum and the Power Crystals*, and you'll be able to catch the man at all the major festivals this year. But, if you miss him, there's always egmont.co.uk/mrgum and all the madness that lies therein.