



## Television

BY DIANA WICHTEL

# Talk like a man

Time for a refreshing look at the art of conversation.

**T**alk, talk, talk. For a highly visual medium, television has never shut up. Talk shows are as old as the medium: Steve Allen, Johnny Carson, Oprah, Letterman ...

We've had the spoof talk shows: Alan Partridge, Mrs Merton, Ali G, *The Kumars at No 42* ... the satirical talk shows: *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* ...

We've had the talk show as combat sport on Jerry Springer, the awful Jeremy Kyle and that time John Pilger made Kim Hill really cross.

It seems like another world, the days when Clive James' talk show, *Saturday Night Clive*, and *Parkinson* were considered mainstream viewing. These days, talk in prime time amounts to Mark Sainsbury bellowing "Look!" 25 times on *Close Up*, followed by Gordon Ramsay shouting "F ---!" for the rest of the evening.

So good on UKTV for importing *The Jonathan Ross Show*. "Wossy", as he's known, can't match the standard set by David Bellamy's multiple speech impediments – "Vese twee fwogs!" – but he has done very well for a man who can't say his "r"s.

Followers of bizarre British media scandals will know Ross as the one who got in trouble for a radio prank with Russell Brand, in which the two left rude messages on the phone of poor Andrew Sachs, the actor who played the much-abused Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*. Hadn't he suffered enough? No wonder Ross'

book is called *Why Do I Say These Things?* Parkinson he ain't.

So far Ross is on his best behaviour. "I haven't been reading the paper as much as I used to, for obvious reasons," he said pointedly. The set has the obligatory random mobile blobs in the background (why?) and the band, a sort of slightly camper version of the Wiggles, is called 4 Poofs and a Piano.

Never mind. The first night I watched, Ross interviewed William Shatner, a match made in surreality heaven. Ross put it to Shatner that, thanks to his years as Captain Kirk, everyone knows who he is.

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Shatner: Everyone knows who I am.

Ross: Do you get special treatment?

Shatner: No. Because everyone knows who I am.

So it went on. Ross specialises in fixing his guests with a look of avian concentration, like a chicken in the throes of laying a particularly challenging egg. This expression was on hyperdrive as Shatner reminisced about his romantic encounter with Koko the talking gorilla.

Arrgh. Where do you go from there? Death.

"We must have you on more often to bring us down with our impending mortality," grumbled Ross.

If only all American stars were like that. Glenn Close was a good sort apart from being slightly delusional about the deranged bunny boiler she played in *Fatal Attraction*. "She

was not an evil person," insisted Close. "She just needed help."

This is the sort of show where Lionel Richie is on but it's Ross who sings *Three Times a Lady*. Badly. As for the jokes, he had on actor Vin Diesel – "He looks like he was hewn from wock!" "Can I call you VD?" wondered Ross. "Probably not." In other words, this is *Rove* with better guests. Or Graham Norton, but less gay. I like it.

**T**here have been New Zealand talk shows but even recalling most of them – think Susan Wood on *5.30 Live!* – is enough to send me screaming from the room. Honourable exceptions: Gary McCormick, the pathologically affectionate John Campbell, the idiots on *Sportscape*, who were the Jeremy Clarksons of sportspk ...

And Finlay Macdonald, back with a new series of the imaginatively titled *Talk Talk*. Macdonald is more of the Parkie school of chat – not too many bad jokes and, so far, the host has refrained from singing. The show can be quite funny – watch Macdonald try to get Judith Tizard to shut up – and the set is still such that you expect Vincent Price to wander in.

But Pita Sharples blossomed in the relaxed atmosphere as he was gently encouraged to talk about himself – "You're everyone's favourite Maori at the moment" – instead of the foreshore and the seabed. "When I missed School C the first year, my town had a party because I almost got School C," he recalled.

The inevitable chat show musical interlude can be punishing but this show lets the guests choose the entertainment and, so far, they have had good taste: Lawrence Arabia for Tizard and House of Shem for Sharples. No bells, only a few whistles, and classic chat. Now that digital channels TVNZ 6 and TVNZ 7 are screening on Sky, this should get the audience it deserves. ■

**THE JONATHAN ROSS SHOW, UKTV, Friday, 9.30pm; TALK TALK, TVNZ 7, Saturdays and Tuesdays, 9.10pm.**



Jonathan Ross