



eye4:arts

THE CHASER Sense and Insensitivity

The Chaser Files takes place on Friday, February 22, at the Octagon Theatre as part of the Perth Writers' Festival. The event is sold out.

Known around Australia for their outlandish stunts and for their ability to embarrass and ridicule politicians, The Chaser team have built up quite a name for themselves.

A little less known than some of the other presenters, Dominic Knight works mainly off camera, helping to write and organise sketches that catch politicians and public figures off guard.

When asked to describe what the Chaser do, Knight recalls some words of wisdom imparted to the team by one of Australia's most well known journalists: "A quote that describes what we do is 'comedy=tragedy + time'. And that's the thing that we often disagree with people about is how much time is required in that equation. We used to work with Andrew Denton and he always said that and that's something I'll always remember," Knight recalls.

Knight has always been intrigued by politics, an interest that has served him well in his role on The Chaser. "I think basically I've always found politics perversely interesting. It really is where the principles and the real world collide. I've always followed it pretty passionately. Most of the guys at the Chaser have as well. I think that's one of the reasons we find what we do so enjoyable," Knight explains.

Before their antics became famous on the ABC, the Chaser boys produced a fortnightly publication satirising everything to do with politics.

"At Sydney Uni there's a newspaper called *Honisoit*, and that is a really old newspaper that's been around for ages. Most of us edited it on our way through uni - although not together - and I think basically, when Charles Firth finished uni and had enjoyed the newspaper editing so much, that he really wanted to start his own; and he's an extremely persuasive person and he got us all together and it was easier to say yes than to say no."

Although Knight has an obvious passion for politics, you would think that after making political satire his job, he would lose some of his interest in the subject,

but this is not the case he explains: "I think I probably consume more than ever. I've always found it really entertaining and it's my favourite way of interacting with these things because when there's anger to be felt, satire is a good way of expressing it. There's been so much anger to be felt about politics in the last decade or so with things like the war, and I find it a really refreshing way of dealing with it... it's great to laugh and cry at the same time," he clarifies.

The point when Knight realised he wanted to make a real go of the Chaser was back in 1999 when the team published an article ridiculing out-dated prejudices: "I think the first really good article, which was published in our first six months, was called *Gays Isolate Christian Gene*, and I really like that article because I thought it really made a good comment on the issue and was also quite amusing at the same time. That's when I really felt that we could make a go out of this and that it was really worthwhile."

With their faces being broadcast on nation-wide television screens on a regular basis, Knight explains that it's become a lot trickier to pull off particular sketches.

"It's definitely become harder - with the guys being recognised and people in the background shouting out '*hey, it's the Chaser!*'... But for the most part, it's still surprisingly easy. We have this strange thing where the Federal Police have almost come to recognise us - they know who we are, they know what we do and that we've got a right to be there. Sketches where we have to rely on people not knowing who we are, are harder.

"We did a thing in Brisbane where we turned up at Kevin Rudd's house. Chas had a whole bunch of people who were saying they were Kevin Rudd's Facebook friends and said they wanted to crash the night at his place and so sometimes when you're getting groups of people together, it works really well. It depends what we're doing.

"I think the things where we take people by surprise are harder; we had this thing in *CNNNN* where we pretended that Alan Cadman, the most dull backbencher we could find, who had been in the party for 30



years, was launching a leadership challenge. That episode really relied on us talking to a lot of polities and them taking us seriously. There was a Liberal Party member who was shocked and clearly believed it and was saying 'Oh no, I support the Prime Minister, I haven't heard about this'. That sort of reaction is really priceless and is very hard to get now." he says.

Coming to Perth as part of the Perth International Arts Festival's *Writers' Festival*, Knight and his colleague Julian Morrow will present *The Chaser Files*, a night that is sure to be full of interesting insights and laughs.

"We're doing a bunch of panels in which I'm sure we'll usually be really earnest and try to sound like we know what we're talking about and make a few dodgy jokes. But then the event on Friday night, which is Jules and me talking, we'll have a bunch of material but also answer questions. We'll probably make a few extremely insensitive jokes about dead people and crap on about ourselves, which is our favourite thing to do in the whole world," he laughs.

EMMA BERGMEIER

