



Photographed by
EDD WESTMACOTT

Simon Amstell: he's 26 and the
last album he bought was by
Peter Cook and Dudley Moore.

What has *Popworld* given us?

We made a pop show that was watchable for people who weren't just interested in the music. We do what Jonathan Ross and Ruby Wax do with people, which is to occasionally ask them questions that are actually interesting. If you watch *CD:UK* or *Top Of The Pops* then you might as well be watching an advert for the artists. We didn't kill *Top Of The Pops*, it's been dying for years. There's no personality and there's no opinion, comment or thought-provoking moment, there's no humour. So we wanted to do a show that we could watch.

Was your brief to upset the acts as much as possible?

Nor at all. On our first show Atomic Kitten started singing a capella for some reason and one of them was pregnant and she said, "Oh, the baby's kicking", and I said, "It's probably saying 'stop'." Afterwards the producer said, "I don't think you should say that sort of thing to Atomic Kitten" and it took a year to convince anyone that we actually should say exactly that sort of thing to Atomic Kitten. It just comes down to truth again. We responded in an honest way to people who were on the show. And it worked. When I made Britney cry I suggested she had gone a bit mad lately, that's all. But I felt that, I've never said anything I've regretted. I only ever come out of an interview regretting something I didn't say.

"Ant & Dec's audience are whooped into a moronic state like a coachload of people from a clinic. It's disgusting"

But you're the entertainment on *Popworld*. People watch it to see you two rather than the guests.

But if someone has something interesting to say I hope we don't prevent them from saying it. I guess that's because our influences have been those chat show hosts such as Jonathan Ross and Frank Skinner rather than Parkie. I remember taping the Comedy Awards with Jonathan Ross one year and playing back exactly what he said and analysing where the laughs were.

Where does this burning desire for truth come from?

I think it's because my parents divorced when I was 13 and my mum always wanted to keep the peace when she remarried. She would always say, "Don't talk about it", and I've always thought it was better to say what you want to say and get it out there. I hate having to bite my tongue. And the thing about comedy is that you can say what you like as long as it gets a laugh.

You're gay and yet that seems to be the least interesting thing about you.

I never wanted to make a big deal of it. That's the most important thing with any minority issue, is to make it an irrelevance. I came out when I was 21. I had just started *Popworld*. I thought, "Shit, I'm on a terrestrial TV show, I've got to sort this out now". I felt that if Miquna was saying Justin

Timberlake is hot, there should be no reason for me not to agree. So we did that a couple of times and there was an email from a commissioning editor - who isn't there any more - saying something like "even Frankie Howard pretends!". She actually said that. I can't name and shame, but everything she said was fairly stupid so I just took it as something else stupid she'd said and ignored it.

Is anything safe from your ridicule?

No. I do hate pretty much everything on television. I hate *GMTV*. It's difficult to hate Lorraine Kelly because she's so "nice" but I have never ever heard her ask a question. I get very angry. If it's going to be a polite conversation, have it in your house, don't broadcast it. Ant and Dec are loved by the nation but it's all very mainstream stuff. The thing I really don't like about programmes with Ant and Dec is that the audience are whooped into a moronic state like a coachload of people from a clinic. It's disgusting. They get to that state and they'll do a joke that isn't really a joke and then there's these laughs and I think, "Who's watching?". I don't think it's good enough. Poor, lazy, lazy jokes.

Simon's last Popworld is on April 15. He's currently "sitting in" for Mark Lamarr on Nevill Mend The Bezzcocks. He hosts a comedy night every Sunday at the Pleasance, Islington.