

Robin Ince interview

The comedian Robin Ince is best known for co-presenting Radio 4's The Infinite Monkey Cage alongside physicist Brian Cox. Passionate about bringing the wonders of science to the masses, he formed The Cosmic Shambles Network in 2013 "to create independent content fuelled by curiosity." This July, he and fellow founder Trent Burton will be returning to Henham Park's Latitude Festival, curating a brand new science-based arena at the popular music and arts fair.

Cosmic Shambles have been performing at Latitude for the past 19 years, but this is the first time you've been given your own dedication space. What can people expect over those four days?

It's great having this extra experimental space. We've got astronomers, musicians, comedians... We have such a network of different people, and we always want it to be as diverse as possible. I want to make sure that everyone can feel represented, whether it's culture, race, sex, gender, whatever. We love diversity, because whether it's science or art or comedy or music, the more voices you have the variety of stories changes and the variety of possibilities change.

You have some amazing guests working with you over those four days, including musician David McAlmont, Sky At Night presenter Maggie Aderin-Pocock and broadcaster Dr Helen Czerski.

For us, passion is the most important thing. It doesn't matter what they're talking about, if they're passionate, it will carry someone into a world that they thought was of no interest to them when they walked into that tent. I like to make sure that we have a variety of ideas, so someone might be walking in and hearing a story about Giacometti, or about the French philosopher Montaigne, or they might be hearing something about the latest understanding of how the universe began.

There will be lots of musicians playing Latitude, from Sting to Snow Patrol to Fatboy Slim - will be you networking backstage to get any of them to participate in Cosmic Shambles events?

I will be! Over the years, I've put on shows where we've had people like the Cure and New Order and Orbital. It's great to have this field in Suffolk with so many artists who, when you approach them, don't just go, "Please speak to my entourage", they go, "Oh that sounds fun, what time do you need me?"

Why Latitude? What makes this festival such a good fit with Cosmic Shambles?

I've been there since the very first year and I've always been given the space to create and program. Also, Latitude has been one of the pioneers of music festivals that are about a lot more than music. We've seen that catch on with more and more festivals, which are going,

hang on a minute, we should have a spoken word stage, not just a comedy stage, and a science area. There are more and more that are realising that for a lot of people, there's a point where you go, "That's enough bands for a while."

One of the events you'll be putting on is Robin Ince's Uncanny Film Club. What movies can people expect to see?

Some are documentaries that we've made and some of them are favourite films. There's a real joy in putting something on that no-one's heard of, and audiences are initially very suspicious. There's a film called Horror Hospital with Robin Askwith and the first 10 minutes people are going, "What's going on?" and then suddenly, at 15 minutes, they're going, "Oh, I like this ride!" Basically it's films where, whenever I show them, people go, "I'm not really sure about this" and then I make them sure about it. It's what most of my life is – I see it as constantly making a compilation tape, which is, I fall in love with things and ideas and people and then I get the chance to talk about what I'm enthusiastic about. It's lovely to contaminate other people.

You're also putting on something called An Uncanny Hour with Inside No 9 star Reece Shearsmith. What can you tell us about that?

The Uncanny Hour came around years ago with my friend Johnny Mains. We did a couple of anthology books called Dead Funny, which was comedians writing horror stories. Reese did something for that first collection and he enjoyed doing Latitude so much last year that he said, "I'd love to come back." So it's a celebration of horror movies and horror stories.

Latitude have an impressive line-up this year. Will you be seeing any bands or singers while you're there?

I don't get much downtime, but I always go to the smaller stages. I'll probably see Billy Bragg, because I know he's got a new album out, as well as Public Service Broadcasting. But like everything else in my life, I'm always looking to be excited by something new. I'll probably check out the main stage, but mostly I want to see stuff that will set me on a new road of excitement.