



Welcome to... The World According to Johnny Dean



TV and radio presenter Russell Brand who, with Jonathan Ross, is at the centre of a huge row over offensive messages left on the answer phone of actor Andrew Sachs, which were subsequently broadcast on Radio Two

Brand's teasing crossed the line

THERE is clearly a point at which teasing can become unacceptably offensive. As I've said before in this column, teasing can be a good thing. It helps to stop people getting too big for their boots; it can sometimes take the sting out of difficult situations.

However, sometimes it can cross over the line; sometimes it simply backfires; but sometimes it can turn into deliberate cruelty and gratuitous offensiveness. There doesn't seem to be much doubt that it did so in the hands of Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross two weeks ago.

You are probably well aware of the facts. The host of a BBC Radio 2 Saturday morning show and his studio guest at the time left a series of answering machine messages on the phone of a television actor now in his 70s; they concerned his granddaughter — they were crude, cruel and offensive. These recorded messages were subsequently played on the radio show, and have rightly provoked a huge protest.

There have subsequently been apologies to the actor concerned and a not particularly urgent review by parts of the BBC. Unusually, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have made public comments of disapproval. Meanwhile, newspapers have called for the offenders' heads to roll — and not simply those of a few scapegoats in the production department. As I write this, it is already clear that some of that is beginning to happen, and by the time you read it, the situation may have moved on.

The national newspaper I usually read focuses both on the offensiveness of the two radio stars, and also on the failures of the BBC's systems which did not prevent the broadcasting of this pre-recorded item. On the face of it, the BBC appears to have systems designed to prevent that happening. Either they didn't work, or there were considerable failures of judgement within the production department concerned.

It appears as though Russell Brand was reacting to a previously made arrangement which was not honoured. If he felt that he had been let down by a no-show interviewee, there may have been some irritation and desire for revenge on his part. Perhaps so, but this went way beyond anything like an acceptable line. In the transcript of the first message they left, there is some indication of both Brand and Jonathan Ross realising that. Both of them need to be left in no doubt of the total unacceptability of their behaviour. The full apologies they have made indicate they have realised this. I am not sure how much more would be achieved by sacking them.

And what of the BBC's responsibility? Clearly there are policies and procedures that are meant to avoid this kind of mistake. Clearly they did not work properly for one reason or another. The BBC has, in effect, admitted as much already. Should heads roll there? Well, that depends on what the investigation finds. A former chairman of the BBC suggests that "the star power of Brand and Ross could have intimidated junior staff". If that is so, then clearly those staff have been failed by more senior producers.

But I would want to ask: what of our responsibility? To what extent did our apparently insatiable greed for scurrilous gossip encourage those two to think we might want to listen to such stuff? To some extent at least, society's obsession with both making and destroying celebrities must lie behind this particular display of bad manners. We need to find a way of addressing that, rather than watch for more heads to roll.

● Since this article was written Russell Brand has resigned from the BBC and Jonathan Ross has been suspended without pay for three months. The controller of Radio 2, Lesley Douglas, has also stepped down.

JONATHAN MEYRICK, DEAN OF EXETER CATHEDRAL

See Dean Jonathan Meyrick's video blog on our website www.thisisexeter.co.uk/johnnydean

Travel

Home from home in heart of capital



Above, one of Egerton House Hotel's luxurious bedrooms, which features hand-stitched mattresses with down pillows and duvets. Right, the hotel's main entrance and the head barman, Antonio Pizzuto, who is reputed to make the best martinis in London

Just a short walk from Harrods, Harvey Nichols and the Kings Road, the Egerton House Hotel is the ideal base for your luxury break in London

BY BECKY MORAN

WHEN my parents-in-law bought me tickets to see the Royal Ballet for my birthday, I vowed that this time I would do London in style.

And style is certainly a word you would use to describe the Egerton House Hotel.

This five-star boutique hotel nestles unobtrusively in the heart of Knightsbridge, just a short stroll from some of the city's most popular attractions including the Natural History Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

The Egerton is a member of the Red Carnation Hotel Collection, winner of the AA small hotel group of the year 2007-2008 accolade. Originally two grand townhouses, it has been sympathetically refurbished and upgraded with fine fabrics and antique Italian furnishings.

It is also home to a collection of original artworks by artists such as Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec and Ma-

tisse. Slightly flustered on arrival — why anyone in London would bother owning a car, I don't know — the hotel staff couldn't have been more obliging.

Our car was driven off to be parked, while we were shown to our room and served a welcome cup of tea.

There are 29 rooms in the Egerton, all different but all offering the same level of luxury, including hand-stitched mattresses, down pillows and duvets or 16-thread Egyptian cotton sheets, a well-stocked minibar, an iPod docking station, Wi-Fi, cable TV and air conditioning.

Lovely touches included the personalised welcome card from hotel manager Sandra Anido, fresh fruit, complimentary bottled water and some rather decadent chocolates.

Our room had a glorious four-poster bed, a huge flat-screen television and en-suite with the most inviting bathtub I have seen for some time.

After a luxurious soak, my husband and I wandered down to the intimate dining room for a pre-ballet cocktail and light meal.

Head barman Antonio Pizzuto is reputed to make the best martinis in London, served with a theatrical Italian flourish, so it seemed churlish not to indulge as we waited for our food.

I ordered the glazed goat's cheese on a bed of sauteed vegetables with basil sauce, while my husband decided on crispy calamari with homemade chilli sauce. Both were excellent.

Declining the staff's offer to order us a taxi, we sallied off to the Royal Opera House — just a short tube ride away — dressed in all our finery for the evening's performance of *Swan Lake*, a truly magical experience.

On arrival back at the hotel, we were impressed to find the bedcovers turned down, chocolates on the pillow, slippers laid out beside the bed and a candle lit beside the

bathtub. There was even a card with the next day's weather forecast for our information.

Declining Antonio's tempting offer of another martini, we settled on a bottle of champagne in our room and reluctantly decided that ordering anything from the extensive night menu might be an overindulgence too far.

Consequently we both had a good appetite for breakfast the next morning, after perusing the Sunday papers.

Served in the delightful breakfast room, we had a choice of Continental breakfast or an à la carte meal.

I opted for the Continental, which included cereal, fruit, yoghurt, toast and pastries, while my husband made short work of a full English breakfast with all the trimmings.

It was with real regret that we checked out of this home from home, but I sincerely hope to visit again soon.

Details: 0207 589 2412, www.egertonhousehotel.com.