

## Where comedy and brains collide

Zarinah Agnew (UCL Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience) performs at London's Bright Club. E-mail 'Big picture' ideas to [jon.sutton@bps.org.uk](mailto:jon.sutton@bps.org.uk).

How does one attempt to make people laugh while talking about functional brain anatomy? That was the challenge facing Zarinah Agnew as she prepared for a spot at London's Bright Club, a night run by UCL head of public engagement Steve Cross, where scientists come to talk on a theme whilst attempting to make people laugh.

'Having battled through the initial "I can't believe I've agreed to do this" paralysis, I decided that my priority was to make sure that people went home having learnt at least something about how the brain is organised. Trying to think of something that people could relate to, I focused on body representations and somatotopy in somatosensory cortex. The problem was the jargon, neuroanatomical terms automatically make you sound like a lecturer; try saying dorsolateral post-central gyrus without sending someone to sleep! So I fashioned a brain hat out of an old Trilby and

a brain jelly mould, and built my talk around the idea that the genitals are, somewhat surprisingly, hidden away in the medial surface next to the feet and toes. A pink-faced neuroscientist talking about willies has got to be worth a fiver! So I had the bones of a script, although perhaps not much remaining dignity...

'The day of the show was honestly one of the most nerve racking I have had. In the evening the event sold out, as it does every month now, and once up on stage I was on a roll. I had a fantastic time, it went down pretty well and a few people came up to me after and said nice things. I learnt a lot about how to talk about science in a more casual way which has been great for other public engagement things that I have done since. I'd highly recommend giving Bright Club a go, both as a speaker and as a punter.'

For more information, see [www.brightclub.org](http://www.brightclub.org)

