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## So, this cocker spaniel walks into a video store...

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By Kevin Prokosh

STAND-up comedy is the hardest job in show business. And kids are the toughest audience.

The idea of performing stand-up comedy for kids is so daunting that only one man claims it as his profession -- Englishman James Campbell.

The first impression created by the 33-year-old Londoner, who is performing at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People, is that he doesn't talk down to children. He talks dog to them.

Prior to the public opening of his *Comedy 4 Kids* last night, Campbell entertained school children earlier this week with a quick-moving, hour-long routine littered with canine comedy that made them often howl with laughter. It's clear that for kids, man's best friend is a funny creature.

Despite his audience's natural fidgeting and ever-shrinking attention spans, Campbell proved quite adept at keeping the children focused on him. His act is more like a chat in which he constantly asks questions, creating the impression that the audience is a big part of the show. Freed from the silence demanded of straight theatre, children were quite vocal and energized.

Campbell, meanwhile, strolled the stage outfitted in a casual shirt and frayed blue jeans, mixing his accented Seinfeldian observations with Monty Pythonish physical humour.

His menagerie of subjects was topped by animals, especially dogs. For an encore, Campbell even sang a re-written version of The Monkees' 1966 hit *I'm a Believer*, with the lyrics, "Then I saw that stick/Now I'm a retriever/Not a trace of doubt in my mind." The tune's origins, of course, escaped the audience of grade-schoolers, as did other references that appeared to be tailored for a more adult sense of humour.

For example, Campbell noted that since there were seeing-eye dogs for the blind and hearing-aid dogs for the deaf, why weren't there thinking dogs for stupid people? "You could ask the dog, 'Should I invade Iraq?'" Again, the comment missed the mark with the youngsters.

Recommended for six- to 12-year-olds, *Comedy 4 Kids* stays away from bathroom humour except for the occasional use of the pooh word, which always drew a guilty guffaw.

Campbell included a short question-and-answer session with the kids and was left momentarily tongue-tied when a young girl boldly asked him if he was single. It generated the biggest laugh among the few adults in attendance.

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