

Citation for Mr Eric Idle

Thursday 22 November 2018 at 6.30pm

Officiator: Professor David Lloyd, Vice Chancellor and President
Award being conferred: Doctor of the University (DUniv)
Citation delivered by: Professor David Lloyd, Vice Chancellor and President

Tonight we're about to do something that very few people outside our graduating classes get to see.

Though Eric Idle has spent a good deal of time in his career dressed in women's clothing, and has a performance wardrobe full of cardigans, we're going to add to his academic dress collection tonight.

We are about to present Eric Idle - a man who has mercilessly lampooned Yorkshiremen, Scots, Australians, Canadians, Germans, French, Judeans, Pharisees and Romans - though fortunately not Irish people, with an Honorary Doctorate of the University of South Australia.

And I thought you might like to share the moment with him.

The University of South Australia awards the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University to a person of eminence who has made a distinguished contribution to public service, or a field of academic endeavour or artistic pursuit.

Eric Idle is a comedian, singer-songwriter, musician and comedic composer. But first and foremost he is a writer. He was a member of the British comedy group, Monty Python's Flying Circus which – between 1969 and 1974 – became a huge influence on comedy, inspiring comedians for the next 50 years. This is a multi-talented man who has had an enormous impact on the entertainment industry across the world. Even Elvis was a huge fan, referring to his friends as Squire, a wink and a nudge to the Nudge Nudge Wink Wink skit, and reprising Monty Python skits in bed late at night with his girlfriend.

Since the Python years there have been films, plays, radio programs and a band, the Rutles, a Beatles parody which gave birth to the world's first mockumentary, All You Need Is Cash. He describes himself as the nicest of the Monty Python group, the 3rd tallest and proof that you could make a living as a cross-dresser on British TV.

His new book, a Sortabiography called Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life is the tale of a man who, in his own words, is an optimist by day and a pessimist by night time. He says he can't stand talking to people before lunch, that nobody civilized does, and that might be the clue to look for in a quest to understand the man.

We used to be babe magnets, he says. Now we're fridge magnets. I thought it was time to tell my tale before I suffer from Hamnesia, which is what happens to elderly actors. This particular fridge magnet came of age as a writer and comedian during the Sixties and Seventies and stumbled into the crossroads of the cultural revolution. He captured a time of tremendous creative output with hilarity and heart and millions of people around the world responded. Monty Python's Flying Circus opened the American market for British comedy and Pythonesque became an actual word. It is used to describe something bizarre and surreal.

Eric Idle, on behalf of the University of South Australia, I am pleased to present you with the honorary degree of Doctor of the University, in recognition of your distinguished service to the community.