

LET'S DO LAUNCH

AN INVITATION KEITH BARKER-MAIN COULDN'T RESIST

Today: Celebrating Pete Burns Night

Don't you mean Robbie Burns?

Oops! I'm still a bit fixated on Celebrity Big Brother's best ever housemate. Much as acid-tongued Scouse cross-dresser Pete deserves to have a public holiday declared in his honour, we're at City whisky bar/restaurant Boisdale's press launch for a series of suppers to celebrate the 248th birthday of Scots wordsmith Rabbie B: a poet whose whisky-fuelled benders might be described as bardcore.

So ye'll tak' a wee dram? Burns supper etiquette dictates you down a distillery's worth of Scotch. What happens next depends on location: in Edinburgh you'll discuss the arts with other guests; in Glasgow your polite conversation will likely be misconstrued as an attempt to get off with a fellow diner's bird... cue murderous ruck that makes Taggart seem like Jackanory.

Sounds grim. No such unseemly behaviour tonight: my host, Boisdale owner Ranaid Macdonald, is frightfully civilised; a bon viveur, wit, raconteur and colourful eccentric; a cigar-smoking, tweed-wearing rocker manqué with a penchant for Elvis.

Does he subject you to a drunken rendition of Hound Dog? The musical entertainment at such



soirées is provided by a kiltie in full Highland regalia. To the stirring skirl of the bagpipes, the haggis is presented on a silver salver, addressed with Burns's famous ode to the Scottish national dish, then given a Glasgow Kiss with a ceremonial sgian dubh...that's a dagger to you.

Doesn't Burns refer to the haggis as 'great chieftain o' the puddin' race?' He does. But I'm the biggest puddin' tonight: fit to burst after a banquet of wild smoked salmon, haggis and neeps, braised pork belly with langoustines and bread and butter pudding with orange and apricot gelati. No need for a deep-fried Mars bar for the bus home.

Burns Suppers, Jan 22 to 27 at Boisdale Belgravia SW1 (Tel: 020 7730 6922), and Jan 22 to 26 at Bishopsgate EC2 (Tel: 020 7283 1763).