

first time at the fringe

Ever thought about taking your own work to the Edinburgh Fringe? Writer **Alexis Clements** did just that this year. Here she shares her diary of what she terms "one lady's attempt at something crazy".

It wasn't something I had any experience doing, nor did I know anyone who had done it before, but that's the whole point of the Fringe, right? This summer I mounted a production of my play, *The Interview*, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. What follows is a condensed, but true, diary of what that experience was like.

11 November 2005

It's official, I'm now subscribed to the Fringe office for the 2006 Festival. Had to make up a group name since I don't actually have a group yet - decided on the actio/reactio theatre company. We'll see if all that talk for the past few months turns into any action.

23 December 2005

Wrote a couple of days ago to Independent Theatre Council (ITC) to ask if I could post a notice looking for directors somewhere on their site. Got no response. Did get the first Fringe Bulletin, which reminded me that I need to start doing more than just sending out one email a month.

9 January 2006

Got my housemate to post a flyer looking for actors and a director at LAMDA. I've decided I definitely don't want to be one of those writer/producer/actor/director/technician/press agent/promoter types—I can barely handle one title, let alone seven.

24 January 2006

The LAMDA flyers didn't find much success. Meanwhile, the people at writernet suggested trying the Young Vic's Young Director's Programme.

25 January 2006

I've received just over 30 replies to my notice to the Young Director's Programme! I'm sending the script by email to about half of them, hoping that at least a few will reply with serious interest.

2 February 2006

Met with two different directors and have

exchanged emails with others. I've decided to make it easy and go with the lady with the most experience - she's been to the Fringe four times and done loads of other stuff. Glad I interviewed the other though, as it turns out we may try to work together on a different project later in the year.

12 February 2006

Sarah Norman, the director I'll be working with, gave me a list of venues that might be good for the project. Thank goodness one of us has experience! Sarah's also got a few designers that she's going to send the script to. I started sending enquiries for accommodation - the prices are even higher than I expected. Not really sure if I should try to run the show through the entire festival, but I can't see why not at this point. Do I need to think about a technician too? I should probably just teach myself to do it.

"I've decided I definitely don't want to be one of those writer/producer/actor/director/technician/press agent/promoter types - I can barely handle one title, let alone seven."

19 February 2006

Went to the Fringe's London Roadshow yesterday. The panel was good, but it was very general and only talked about the positives - no specifics, no sense of a budget, no sense of the downsides - no one is talking about the information I really need. And from what I'm hearing, there seems little hope of monetary sponsorship, it seems that in-kind sponsorship is really the only way it gets done these days. At the meet-and-greet afterwards some guy was saying that a group could take in up to 10,000, which seems crazy. Somehow I think it's probably safer to assume that I'm going to lose all my money on this one. I shook hands with someone from C Venues, Underbelly and Pleasance - our three top choices right now. There was some guy ahead of me talking to the guy from the Pleasance with all kinds of glossy bits. All these people are so professional - I need to start pretending to be a lot more professional.

2 March 2006

Sent out the venue applications today on the new letterhead I designed and with the our newly cre-

first time at the fringe

ated, by me, yesterday, website listed: www.actioreactio.org. Sent applications to five venues: Pleasance, Smirnoff Underbelly, C Venues, Sweet Venues, and Gilded Balloon.

4 March 2006

Went to the Press and Marketing Roadshow this afternoon - lots of great advice at that one, very useful. I definitely need to be doing a lot of things that I'm not already.... and I need a freaking venue! I'm also a bit worried that I couldn't even answer the one question they said was the most important - what is your main goal in going up to the Fringe? I have no idea, yet.

5 March 2006

Watched Annie Griffin's film, Festival, hoping to get some sense of the madness that is the Fringe. Not sure what to think.

7 March 2006

Got an email from the people at the Underbelly and they said they're going to make us an offer. That's a relief.

27 March 2006

Since I last wrote, we had offers from C Venues, the Pleasance, the Underbelly, and Sweet Venues. Many calls were made, many fingernails were bitten and many details were fretted over, but after a conversation with the Pleasance about get-in/get-out times and trimming the play to an hour, we decided - 3pm at the Pleasance it is. Meanwhile this means I'm going to be spending a hell of a lot more money than the couple of thousand I thought that Fringe productions were supposed to cost. I had no idea how much of a business this Fringe thing is. I really need to get on the sponsorship wagon - need to start brainstorming.

17 May 2006

Since last writing I signed the contract with the Pleasance and sent them their deposit. Luckily no one is working for cash on this production and train tickets are cheap! I sent our Fringe Programme copy form off a week or so ago - choosing that 40 words was a certain sort of hell. We somehow got a graphic designer who is going to be working for free. We're getting ready for auditions now - went through a couple hundred headshots last Friday and I've organized the audition space. I've had no luck so far with sponsor-

ships, but keep trying anyway. Over the weekend I had a barbecue to help raise a little bit of cash and brought in around £150—every little helps. Most of that will go toward buying the required insurance policy. Plus an old friend from back in the States chipped in with £250, so that will cover train tickets and a few other things.

22 May 2006

Had the auditions today—there were a number of

“with all the stress I freaked out and tried rewriting the entire play, which resulted in Sarah freaking out and short-term chaos....The actors are being very gracious about it so far.”

men who could be perfect for the part, but not as much luck with the women. We're having callbacks on Friday night. Sarah has an idea of a lady we might be able to bring in to read.

31 May 2006

We've cast the show, we've got our man and woman - the woman who Sarah called at the last minute, Katharine Peachey, was perfect for the part and a great actress besides. Meanwhile I'm chasing down a bevy of deadlines. For paid promotion/advertising, I've decided to go with EAE's budget distribution pack, and also to get a web button on the Edfringe website, and that's about all I can afford, so we've got to be creative.

1 June 2006

Rewrote the press release one more time after getting an email this morning from the lady at the Fringe's Press Office. Had a couple of bites on the sponsorship front but no follow-throughs yet.

27 Jun 2006

Everything has been happening. Rehearsals started in the midst of my Masters exams and with all the stress I freaked out and tried rewriting the entire play, which resulted in Sarah freaking out and short-term chaos. I called an old friend and got some sage advice - i.e. chill out and go back to the old script. The actors are being very gracious about it so far. We finally have a designer and it looks like it will work even though she's coming in late in the game. We've got a rehearsal tonight and Sarah's boyfriend is coming along to do the pro-

first time at the fringe



The tech run of *The Interview* at the Pleasance

duction shots - another thing off the list. Also the flyer and poster are coming along - Matt was up till 3am last night working on changes. We should still be able to make the deadline of this Friday for EAE.

12 July 2006

Rehearsals are chugging along but there's some personality conflict a-brewing. What have I gotten myself into?? Went to a couple of networking parties for Fringe groups and still managed to finish my dissertation. What the hell am I thinking doing a Masters and the Fringe? I can't forget to stay on top of all the press packs - I've still got a few more to send. Thank goodness for the How to Sell a Show guide from the Fringe Office - that thing has become my bible.

17 July 2006

They're outside now, rehearsing in my back garden, with the set and props, minus the parachute. We're over budget on the set but the designer made me a deal, so hopefully it will all work out. I bought some cake and had tea to lighten the mood after the blow-out at the last rehearsal. Nerves are a little raw, and there's too much to do...

25 July 2006

I leave for Edinburgh in less than a week. We were brainstorming things to promote the show and came up with running our own little dating agency while we're at the Fringe - could be crazy, but I think it will get us some free publicity.

30 July 2006

Here I am in Edinburgh. One day on my own before the madness begins. To my relief the flat is just as promised and in decent shape. Most importantly, it's only a ten minute walk to our venue and from the Royal Mile. Free publicity plan has already started working - we were mentioned in an article on the Fringe website.

31 July 2006

Went to pick up our excess posters and flyers from the Courtyard and check-in today. It's madness over there, but the city still feels really quiet.

1 August 2006

Everybody is here now - the director, the designer, the actors. We've got to load in at 8:00 tomorrow

first time at the fringe

morning for a tech run and then do our first show at 3pm. I'm not sleeping at all anymore.

2 August 2006

Tech run went fine - crew seems really great and my poor tech skills aren't showing too badly. We open in two hours. I wonder if anyone will show up? According to the Fringe office we've sold something like fifty tickets for the run already. That's a relief. Only a few hundred more to go!

3-28 August 2006

Daily routine: wake-up at some point mid-morning; wonder what day it is; get up; deal with latest crisis (torn costume, personality conflicts, friends visiting, friends leaving, no food left in the cupboard, etc.); staple reviews to flyers; paste ticket offers to flyers when necessary; eat something; walk up to the Royal Mile; flyer there; walk to other spots and flyer more; tape and staple posters to just about anything; arrive at venue; make sure actors are there (they almost missed it once); wait for the show ahead of us to get out; chat with the crew; get our show in; get the music and lights ready; do the show; rehash it afterwards; go have tea and cake with Katharine if needed; go back to the flat for a nap or a meal if needed; go sit in the park when possible; go for a drink, always; go to another show; go to another three shows; try to chase down more important people, more radio interviews or press contacts or reviews; make changes to the website; try to shake appropriate hands; try to spend time with friends; have 'important' meetings; watch television if possible; read - yeah right; sleep; start again. Every day like that for 26 days straight, except one. Madness, absolute madness.

29 August 2006

Actors are gone. Fringe is over. Venue is already being taken apart. Feels spooky. We didn't make a profit but we made more than our guarantee, so at least I'll get some of my money back. I've got six days up here all to myself - do I ever need it!

4 September 2006

Decided not to go with any of the London transfers. There were offers from a few venues but they all wanted me to pay for the whole thing all over again and that's just crazy-talk. I'll think of something else. Right now I just want to sleep some more.

15 October 2006

Sent the final settlement to the Pleasance. It's all over now, completely. Now I know what the Fringe is. No idea if I'll ever try to do that again! We shall see...

alexis clements

Alexis Clements, now based in Brooklyn, New York, was recently awarded a Dramatists Guild of America Fellowship for 2006/2007. Her play 'Causality' will receive its world premiere in January 2007 at the Towngate Theatre in West Virginia (US) after winning the Oglebay Institute's National Playwriting Contest. She has also received recognition for her short stories, two of which have recently been published in the UK--one in the collection 'Ideas Above Our Station,' published by Route Publishing, and another in forthcoming collection by Leaf Books. Read more about her work here: www.alexiscllements.com.

The next **Edinburgh Festival Fringe** takes place between 5th and 27th August 2007. If you're tempted to follow in Alexis' footsteps, the best place to start is the official website of the Fringe Office: www.edfringe.com which offers support to everyone wishing to perform at the festival.