

IATL Performance Festival Bursary

Robyn Leigh

Strawberry Sauce

Written Report of Project

Monday 6th August

After arriving in Edinburgh on the Sunday night, we spent all of Monday morning in our technical rehearsal, which ran from 9am – 1pm. I had planned a vague timetable for the four hours which included two hours for setting the lighting states and practising the sound cues, and two hours in which to do two runs of the play plus notes. As it happened, setting the lighting states took much longer than I anticipated – as well as refocusing some of the lights for specific scenes and programming these states into the desk, each blackout cue also had to be inserted in the correct place. I gave the cast a break while I wrote up a cue sheet for our technical operator and we then ran the show. We had time to go through a few moments in certain scenes involving use of sound (such as the shooting for the Life ending), but did not have a chance to work extensively on the play. Problems had arisen with the new set – in the original version of the play we made a police ‘cell’ by drawing strawberry sauce on the floor, but for Edinburgh our designer made us giant Lego blocks which, when put together, created both the cell and the witness box. When we combined the blocks with the sauce the stage picture became too busy – later on, in our flat, we rehearsed scenes with the cell again using only the blocks, removing a block rather than wiping up some of the sauce when the cell was to be ‘unlocked’.

Tuesday 7th August

The first performance of the play went fairly well. I personally felt that it could have been tighter and ran much quicker through the first four scenes, but the cast felt very happy with the response from the audience. I was happy with this too; the audience seemed to enjoy the play and to find it funny, although several were relatives of cast members which may have been part of the reason they found it so enjoyable. However, overall I was happy with the performance, and apart from the note about keeping the pace up, we only rehearsed one scene of the play on that day. This was Scene Two, between Charlotte (a young girl) and Joe (her babysitter) – the scene

where Joe realises Charlotte is orchestrating his arrest and trial. The actors were playing this scene for its few comic moments, which I felt was detracting from its more sinister overall feel. We tried the scene with the actors playing straight, and at that point it seemed that that in itself would cause more of a comic reaction: the straight delivery of ridiculous-sounding lines.

Wednesday 8th August

This was our weakest performance of the week, and unfortunately also the day we had our first reviewer (Broadway Baby) in to watch. A few line mix-ups early on in the play put the cast on edge, and caused the pace to drop through the first scene. In Scene Two, the audience appeared not to know whether or not they were supposed to laugh, and playing the ridiculous lines straight as we had rehearsed the previous night ended up not working. The cast seemed disheartened with the performance and I did no further rehearsal that day, although some of the cast members split themselves into groups and line ran particular scenes.

Thursday 9th August

All the cast and crew were very nervous before the start of the show, as we knew we had The Scotsman in to review. After two days of practising we had got our get-in down to approximately five minutes, and so used our other five to do a quick warm up. I briefed the cast to keep the pace up and sat in the audience to watch.

The show turned out to be perhaps the best we did in the entire run. We had more than one reviewer turn up to see the show: one of the cast had given a flyer to a man from Stage Won that morning, and he seemed to find the play very enjoyable. Nobody could spot the reviewer from The Scotsman, but when the review came out we were all very happy with our rating and what was said (see below).

During this performance the cast, in particular the actors playing Charlotte and Joe, seemed to gauge the reactions of the audience well and alter their performances accordingly. Scene Two was played as a mixture of straight and comic moments – mainly straight from Joe, with Charlotte playing her lines for moments of humour. This gave a nice tension between characters through the first three scenes, and led very well into the first out-and-out comic scene of the play. This trajectory – from semi-serious to comic – was one the cast maintained in all further performances.

Friday 10th August

The show went well again on the Friday. We had a smaller audience than the day before, but they seemed to find the play enjoyable. The cast, by this point, were performing their own ad-libbed additions to the more comic scenes, which were working very well, especially when it allowed for moments of shared feeling with the audience. Scene Four of the play, for example, features three simultaneous interview scenes, and shifts the play from semi-serious into the out-and-out farcical. At one point, the Inspector asks for an accent from an audience member, and proceeds to conduct the rest of the interview in this accent. This gave an interesting effect on the Friday, as the selected audience member said “pirate”, to which the actor playing the Inspector replied “really?”

Saturday 11th August

This was our best day of advertising – we sold out except for one seat due to quoting our Scotsman review whilst handing out flyers on the Royal Mile. The review had come out that morning, and it really helped to get everybody enthusiastic about the play and the fact that it was our final performance, which definitely came across when attempting to sell the show. I include the Scotsman review below:

Theatre review: Strawberry Sauce, C Aquila (Venue 21), Edinburgh

By HANNAH CLARK

Published on Saturday 11 August 2012 18:47

JOE has committed a murder, and though admittedly there is no victim, and it was done with a plastic gun, his fate still lies in the hands of the jury – and very eclectic group of misfits they are, too. This is a children’s story gone very astray.

Led by a precocious child desperate for the attention of her uncle, no matter what the cost, Joe is forced to explain his reasons for such a heinous, non-existent crime. And for the next 40 minutes, things become even odder with lawyers dressed as clowns, police cells made out of toy building bricks, and drinking games in court.

The production is at its strongest when fully embracing its farcical side, as its overactive imagination grows increasingly weird. It's original and genuinely baffling but that does not detract from the skill of a very harmonised cast who each bring a different eccentricity to proceedings.

Maintaining a breakneck pace and an enviable amount of energy means that the show gets a little carried away with its own whimsy and employs a few cheap laughs along the way, but that can be forgiven. Strawberry Sauce is gloriously silly, and although the production is slightly too crowded, it provides a solid dose of mad chaos.

Sunday 12th August

This was the final day we were in Edinburgh – we had no performance on this day, but we sorted out our props and removed all our things from the dressing room of C Aquila. We also went for a group breakfast and read the review from Stage Won, which came out that morning:

ED FRINGE REVIEW: Strawberry Sauce (C aquila)

Jack Gogarty reviews Freshblood Theatre's Strawberry Sauce at C aquila.

This piece is originally written and so I went in without a clue of what was to come next. At first, I was completely thrown by the sheer stupidity of the plot, but as soon as I allowed myself to believe that people could be that daft, I enjoyed this piece thoroughly. For a large cast with a small stage, they used it to perfection. The jokes directed to the audience and to each other were perfectly balanced, and the characters that some people had created were just genius.

The whole piece is based around the pretend murder of a ten year old girl, who everyone believes has been killed with a plastic gun, simply because she tells them that she is dead. This may sound ridiculous, but they start as they mean to go on. Culminating in a drinking game court scene, in which the audience are asked to join them in a 'drink' whenever certain words are mentioned before being asked to decide the fate of the main character.

This piece is great fun and perfect for an afternoon giggle. I must, however, give particular mention to Charlotte's mother, who was so dry with her humour, that I shed a tear or two.

Overall we are all very happy with the run of performances. Most of our audiences seemed to enjoy the show, and although we had one disappointing review, we feel that the massive improvement achieved in the final few days of the run means we can consider the project to be a success. In addition to this, the entire cast and crew thoroughly enjoyed Edinburgh as a whole – both the experience of touring the show, and the chance to see so many other amazing shows in a single week.