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## **Final Report on “Takin’ It Easy, 1916”**

### **Abstract:**

Smirk Theatre is a newly founded theatre company, which had the pleasure of taking the new comedy “Takin’ It Easy, 1916” written by Adam Oliver to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The following report recounts the process and challenges of taking a show to the Fringe and the outcome for the team as a whole.

### **Introduction:**

“Takin It Easy, 1916” was originally written as part of the ‘Writing for Theatre and Performance’ module, in conjunction with the Theatre and Performance Studies dept. at Warwick University. It has since been realised as a performance in the IATL-managed space of the Humanities Studio. This was made possible following a successful application and panel process to receive Freshblood society funding and endorsement. Over its short two-night run the show garnered tremendous enthusiasm from theatre-goers, resulting in a necessary last-minute seating capacity adjustment to account for oversubscription. Following the final performance, the show received swathes of positive feedback from students. In particular, individuals commented on the success of the new student script, on the basis both that it was technically well written but moreover that it provided a fresh entry to the University of Warwick theatre scene which had recently been saturated with shows of a notably grittier, darker and hyper-realistic tone.

Following its debut success, the team involved was enthusiastic to take the show to the Edinburgh Fringe festival, under the guise of a Smirk Theatre production. The objective for this was to showcase the new writing, acting and production talent that Warwick has to offer on the public stage. The success of our Freshblood application can be partly attributed to the socio-political relevance of the play’s thematic underpinnings, which question the morality and foresight of pro-leave pre-Brexit public attitudes. However, the levity with which the script is imbued allows for a show that is both more approachable for a wider audience and subtler in its approach to challenging discourse.

This experience provided a brilliant opportunity for all involved to fulfil their roles in a new setting which was open to a much wider audience demographic. It also delivered the conditions for valuable inter-creative and inter-institutional networking, with the potential for mutually beneficial future collaboration. On a more personal level, we believe the endeavour offered the opportunity for Smirk Theatre to establish itself as a competent member of the independent theatre community, and has provided the conditions for potential professional spring-boarding as the core of Smirk Theatre (all final-year students) look towards a career in creative production.

## **Methodology:**

-Finding a venue:

It was pivotal to find a suitable venue for the show early on in the process to make sure the show would have a home for its stay in Edinburgh. The team decided to contact theSpace UK to book one of their venues. Contacting them early allowed the possibility of securing a slot from 8pm till 9:05pm which was practical in terms of organisation. The chosen venue was called the Perth Theatre and could hold up to fifty people in its thrust layout. The location of the theatre was very important as it was located on North Bridge which is a very central area in Edinburgh.

-Getting new cast members:

As three members of the original cast of six were not able to take part in the Fringe run, the team were required to cast three new actors. Auditions were opened at the end of the second term of university. The auditions were advertised on social media and various students who the crew believed would be interested were also messaged. Each audition took fifteen minutes and would involve an initial introduction to the project and the members of the team, a performance of a selected extract for the character chosen by the auditionee and finally either a second performance of the text re-directed by the director and writer or a performance of another extract for another character.

-Adding new crew members:

Whilst the team already included a marketing manager and a marketing assistant, the crew felt the need to find an additional two members, especially as they no longer had an assistant producer. After some discussion, the crew decided that stage management, tech and social media/digital marketing were the most important roles to fill. Following an announcement made on the Smirk Theatre Facebook page, two candidates quickly expressed their interest in taking part in the production and after sitting down with the producer for a confirmation meeting, a stage manager and tech/social media manager became a part of the team.

-New marketing design:

Preceding the first run of the show, the producer and director designed the banner for the show with limited knowledge on graphic design and basic tools to execute their ideas. With the objective of the Fringe in mind, the crew saw it fit to redesign the banner for the show and create a logo to represent the theatre company. These new designs were kindly created by two students from Warwick. The banner would be used for social media purposes but was also used for the flyers, posters and t-shirts.

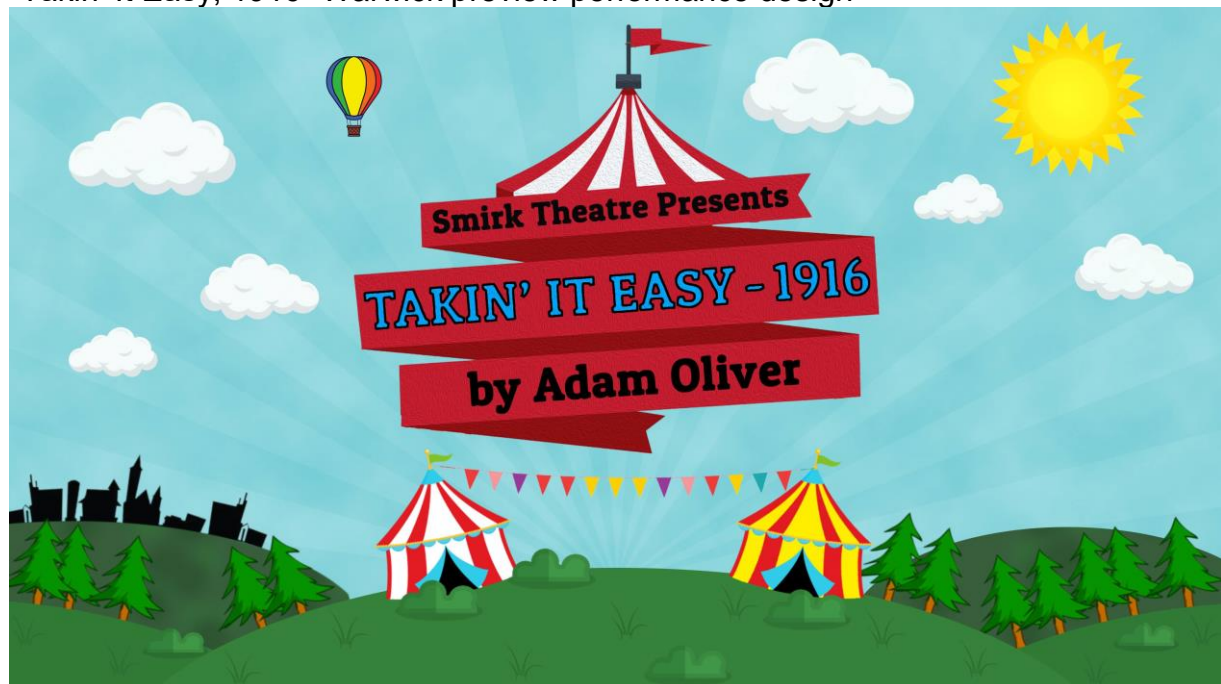
Smirk Theatre logo:



"Takin' It Easy, 1916" first banner design



"Takin' It Easy, 1916" Warwick preview performance design



"Takin' It Easy, 1916" final banner design



**-Marketing for term 3 previews:**

Before the start of rehearsals for the Warwick University previews, the team met to discuss the marketing strategies for the upcoming preview performances. It was vital to get audiences in to watch the previews to give the actors a sense of what performing the show to a live audience would be like as well as test their comedic timing and adapt to the audience's laughter or lack thereof. Up until that point the only marketing method employed was through the official Smirk Theatre Facebook page. An Instagram account was opened to broaden the range of viewers and social media presence. Short clips of rehearsals were shared to the Instagram page as well as official rehearsal pictures and a cast release. Long-sleeve t-shirts were designed for the cast and crew to wear as a form of constant advertising.

**-Transport and accommodation:**

One of the most vital aspects of preparing to take a show to the Edinburgh Fringe is arranging the accommodation for the team to reside in during their stay. After referring to the fringe website, the producer used a booking agency named Edlet to book the accommodation. The apartment that was settled on was situated only twenty minutes from The Mile and could host up to twelve people. As far as travel was concerned, due to the fact that everyone within the team were based in different areas within the UK, it was left up to each individual to book their own transport. The railway was the most common way of getting to Edinburgh and was employed by most of our team apart from our director who travelled by coach, a cheaper alternative albeit more time consuming.

**-New production costs:**

Having performed the show once, the team had a number of props and set that were ready to be used. However, the crew wanted to embellish the set and improve the

costumes to enhance the immersive aspect of the production. With new actors being involved, it was necessary to buy new costumes as the ones for the previous actors would not fit. All of the props and costume pieces were purchased at various charity shops in Leamington Spa such as British Heart Foundation, Age UK or Barnardo's.

-Rehearsals for Warwick previews at Humanities Studio:

Rehearsals began at the start of the third term of university with the newly casted actors and the previews planned for the end of the term. With the Edinburgh Fringe in mind, the blocking had to be adapted to the new stage the actors would be performing in. The transition from university show to fringe show was translated by an increase in professionalism. There were two to three rehearsals every week, one of those being a character workshop during the weekend to help the new and old actors adapt and build on each other's characterisations.

-Reading audience feedback + review from The Boar:

For the two preview shows at Warwick University, feedback forms for the audience were prepared which the producer invited people to fill out at the end of the performance. The team also invited the student outlet of The Boar to come review the show. One of their writers spectated on the first night and provided the team with a very positive review.

-Developing a marketing plan for the Fringe:

In the month leading up to the Fringe, the marketing team discussed strategies for Edinburgh. A Twitter account was opened to broaden social media presence, give quick alerts and to contact other theatre companies or reviewers. The official trailer was also completed with footage from the process up until the previews and was released on all social media to build up hype for the show.

-Tech and dress rehearsals:

When the team arrived in Edinburgh on the 10<sup>th</sup>, there was little time before the first performance on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The dress rehearsal took place at 9:30am on the 11<sup>th</sup> in the Fringe Central in a room booked by the producer for two hours. The dress rehearsal was vital as it was a reminder for the actors of the blocking, lines and their characters. The tech rehearsal was in the evening at 7:55pm at the venue itself. The lighting design was applied and the team practiced transitions between scenes in performance conditions. Once the tech rehearsal ended, the team put all of the set and props in an allocated storage space and left ready for the first performance the following day.

-Breakdown of a day at the Fringe:

A day at the fringe would mostly revolve around flyering and performing. The day would start at 10:30am or 1:30pm depending on the individual allocated flyering slots for the day. Each flyering slot would last a total of 3 hours which meant that the morning groups would flyer from 10:30am-1:30pm and the afternoon groups would

flyer from 1:30pm-4:30pm. Flyering consisted of handing out flyers to passers-by on The Mile or other crowded areas and either pitching the show to them or attempting to sell the show. Flyering is very competitive in Edinburgh so it was always important to stand out and adapt to one's surroundings and the people to approach. The actors would be required to be ready and meet in the kitchen by 7pm. Everyone would be at the venue for the get in which began at 8pm. The team had five minutes every night to get everything ready to perform. The show would then last 50min and the space would be cleared by 9pm. All time outside of flyering and performing was free time for the team to rest, explore Edinburgh or watch shows.

-Attracting reviewers:

During free time, an emphasis was put on constant communication with other fringe goers and theatre companies as well as theatre professionals. To get the show reviewed by professionals, the initial step taken before arriving to the fringe was to send emails off to various reviewing outlets with a press release attached. Once arrived at the Fringe, theSpace had an organised event which was attended by numerous reviewers and photographers which was a very useful way for our team to network. Once on the Mile it wasn't unlikely to run into reviewers who would often be wearing an orange lanyard and it was always worth attempting to pitch the show to them. In the end, our team managed to attract two unofficial reviewers and two professional reviewers to write about the show.

## **Conclusion and outcome:**

The results of showcasing the acting, directing, writing and production talent from Warwick University at the Edinburgh Fringe festival has been very positive with this production.

Many links were created between Smirk Theatre and various other theatre companies at the fringe who will be keeping in contact via social media.

The show has been reviewed by blogs, professionals (EdFringeReview) and 225 audience members throughout its Fringe run leading to a variety of acclaim and criticism.

The team has worked very hard to improve on their knowledge and skills regarding their respective roles and what it takes to bring a show to the Fringe and make it a success.

The team has gained a lot of creative inspiration and motivation for future Smirk Theatre productions.

To conclude, the entirety of Smirk Theatre recommends the IATL performance grant scheme as it is an exceptional opportunity for creatives to immerse themselves in the professional environment of performance and has granted them unique and authentic knowledge and skills to bring into future projects.