

CRACKING THE FRINGE

YOUR BALLS-OUT GUIDE TO TAKING ON THE EDINBURGH FRINGE



JON GRACEY AND VIV EGAN

Jon Gracey and Viv Egan

© Jon Gracey and Vivienne Egan 2014

CRACKING THE FRINGE

YOUR BALLS-OUT GUIDE TO TAKING ON THE EDINBURGH FRINGE

PRESENTS...

Your free sample chapter

1: WHY GO TO THE FRINGE?

"As long as you know why you're doing Edinburgh then it's fine – you don't need to justify to anyone else, even by being good... and if it's shit, even though you've tried really hard, at least you tried really hard... and at least you'll learn from it."

Nick Helm, comedian and actor, Foster's Edinburgh Comedy Awards Best Comedy Show nominee 2011, 2013

Chances are if you've picked up this book, you want to go the Fringe. Great! You are resolutely in the right place. But before you make the decision to spend a month of your life in Edinburgh, (and lots more months in the run up to it) here are a few questions to ask yourself.

What do you want out of the Fringe?

Money? Fame? Fun? Set realistic targets: you certainly won't make much money, for example. Will the Fringe making you famous? Maybe, but it won't happen overnight. The Fringe is an ongoing, annual trade show for the arts - the longer you do it, the more chance you have of being noticed (within reason. If you've done twenty Fringes and no one cares, you may be getting it wrong).

Have you got a year to spare?

If you're writing it yourself, preparing for a worthwhile Edinburgh show will take up the best part of a year. We'll say that once more: the best part of a year. This involves testing out the material you've written, getting together everyone you need, rehearsing, as well all the logistical admin required in doing a show: organising accommodation, venues, advertising. You can do it with a full-time job - many do - but it will consume your free time. Also, don't forget it will physically take all of August.

Do you have enough money?

You won't be able to work August (unless you get a job at the Fringe – see **WORKING AT THE FRINGE** [p. 37] if you're impatient), you may struggle to get the whole month off, and you'll most likely be paying double rent (at home and in Edinburgh). There are plenty of tips for offsetting costs later on (**COVERING YOUR RENT AT HOME** [p. 46], for example) but start thinking about budgets. Putting on a show is not cheap.

Are you ready?

If you're doing a show just for fun, have at it. But if this is the start of your performing career, think long and hard before taking a full show to the Fringe. Consider sharing an hour with other performers if you're a beginner, or even go as a punter to check out the lie of the land. Edinburgh can be brutal, and if you go in wide-eyed, it may take all your money and chew you up with little to show for it. Also, as you may expect, you're only eligible for certain newcomer awards the first time you take an hour-long show up, so make sure you're ready.

This all sounds rather bleak, but fear not! The book you hold in your very hands is here to help with your Edinburgh concerns. We're going to guide you step-by-step through the process, but it's important to be very sure before you begin that this is something you want to do, because it's not easy. So think about it. We'll wait.

...

You in?

Then we'll begin. With chapter 2. Obviously.

2: BOOKING A VENUE

“This year [2013] there was a ventriloquist who was playing in a room that had pillars in it, and some seats couldn't see the stage...people argue it's not *that* important to see a ventriloquist's act, and some would argue it's *the* most important thing about it...so yeah, it's finding the right room...”

Benny Davis, musical comedian, The Axis of Awesome

One of the first things you'll need to do is to secure a venue. There are hundreds of options, each suited to different stages in your career and the requirements of your show. It's one of the most important decisions you'll make, so don't rush it.

There's a pretty solid list of Edinburgh venues on our website crackingthefringe.com that took us ages to compile, so go check that out. It'll give you an idea of what there is to offer, and an overview of what the main names are; there's going to be lots of talk of Underbellies and Assemblies over the next hundred-odd pages, so you're best off getting a basic understanding of what's out there.

When?

Ideally, you'll have your venue confirmed before the early bird Fringe registration deadline - usually mid-late March. This gets you a discount on your listing in the Fringe Guide, (one of the main ways of advertising your show in Edinburgh - more on this in the chapter **NAILING YOUR FRINGE LISTING** [p. 28]) which is well worth it – in 2014 this discount netted you a saving of almost £100. So start your hunt the October/November before the Fringe you're looking to perform in, in order to find an appropriate venue and have a better chance of getting the one you want.

Things to think about:

- Free or paid? There are several “free” programmes that you can be part of, which means that you don't pay for your space and audiences don't pay for a ticket (covered in the next chapter – **FREE SHOWS** [p.14]). Paid shows are more formal and audiences pay for their tickets upfront. You can always do a free show *and* a paid show – they may well feed each other in terms of audience, and the free show will give you some cash to live on, but consider the physical and logistical constraints and remember that you'll have to advertise and pay for registration on both.
- What time of day is your show suited to? Some shows are built around specific meal times, others are sexy late-night cabarets, some are for children; make sure choose the slot that suits your desired audience. Evening shows (generally between 6 - 10pm) are prime-time, so be prepared to pay more for hiring your space than for a daytime or a late night show (after 11pm).
- What are the tech requirements of your show? Do you require storage for props, set or costumes? Arriving for your tech rehearsal and discovering you're too big for your

venue can be a nightmare way to start your Fringe. Think about your lighting and sound needs - free venues often have minimal tech available, so you have to be prepared to do your show without full blackout capabilities (or often without a lighting rig at all), fairly primitive sound set-up and likely noise-bleed.

- What kind of shows does your ideal venue put on? Some venues have specialties: some are mostly theatre, others focus on comedy, some are anything-goes. Read the venue's website, look at previous shows or send an email to get a feel for the kind of company you'll be keeping: some audiences will go to specific venues because they know what they're getting. Your venue plays a role in your marketing so in picking the right venue you'll start selling your show to the right people.
- Where is the venue situated? Look at the map. Be wary of booking a venue too far from The Royal Mile (officially known as the High Street – The Royal Mile strictly speaking is the whole length from the Castle to Holyrood Palace, even though everyone uses it to mean the section between the Hub and North Bridge). The Mile is a good (though by no means the only) place to sell your show; you don't want to have to sell a half hour walk to your venue along with it.

Other Fringe hubs are Bristo Square (where the Gilded Balloon, Pleasance Dome and Underbelly are) and the Half-Price Hut (on Princes St at the other end of town) - so they're also productive places to flyer and persuade people to come to your show, if your venue is close by. There are lots of venues on Leith Walk, but it can be a struggle to entice punters in that direction.

- Are they organised? Find a few people who have done shows in the venue in the previous year and send them an email to find out whether it's well-run or a shambles. If the venue is not returning your calls and emails early on, it's probably not a great sign.
- What kind of support and facilities do they offer? Do they have a press office to help with marketing your show? Do they produce their own brochure? What kind of run and distribution does it have? Do they have technical staff, a cafe, a bar? Will they accept deliveries of posters and flyers on your behalf before you arrive in Edinburgh?
- Be aware that under the Scottish Executive regulations, onstage smoking is not permitted in any venue.
- What's your budget? Don't pick a big venue if you don't feel confident you can sell it out at least once. It's much better to sell out a 20-seat venue than to half-fill a 40-seat venue.
- Do they charge any additional costs? These might include a pricey technician fee during your tech rehearsal, a fee to be listed in the venue brochure or other hidden extras. Make sure you ask the question.
- Is disabled access important to you? Many Fringe venues aren't well-equipped to deal with wheelchair access.

- It's not unheard of that bargains take place. For instance, you might get a consideration/discount for performing a show in a morning slot as well as an evening slot. You might get a big space for a small price if the venue hasn't filled it, etc - most venues are quite flexible and would prefer all slots to be taken than to have gaps in the programme.

How?

Once you've decided what venue you want, you need to apply. This process depends entirely on the venue you choose. Generally, the venue's website will provide the requisite forms. Some of the larger venues may wish to see you before signing you up, or at the very least see evidence of your quality – be it a script or filmed performance.

Extra resource: The Edinburgh Fringe Roadshow - It's a series of seminars the official Fringe organisation takes to London, Brighton and various places overseas. Worth dropping by if one happens to be in town.

PRO TIP:

“It's important to realistically estimate how well you're going to sell. Picking an overlarge venue which you'll never sell out is just going to waste you a lot of money. Check the tech specs as well and the venue's rules on re-gelling and refocusing [lights], you'll hit problems when you arrive if you want to change the whole rig and find that you can't. This is the same with wings and stage space.”

Rachael Finney, Pleasance Venue Staff

Been sufficiently teased? Want to read more? Buy the whole thing (with 39 more chapters, including flyering technique, free shows vs. paid shows, designing your poster, nailing your Fringe listing and LOADS more) at <http://www.crackingthefringe.com/buy-our-book.html>

Thanks for reading!

Jon & Viv