

**Jessica Murdoch**

This August I had the privilege of traveling to Edinburgh to take part in and enjoy the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I was one of five performers in a devised comedy sketch show called 'Speechless', which ran for the full month (2nd-26th August) at the one of the fringe's most renowned venues, the Underbelly, and involved a week of intensive rehearsals in Cambridge during July.

'Speechless' is an experimental multimedia sketch show set in a world where all comedic speech is banned; the performers start an illicit underground club where they must use physicality, projections, sound and the audience themselves to make the audience laugh. We first performed the show in the ADC theatre in Cambridge during Lent term 2018, then represented the Footlights at the Durham ComedyFest (a night which showcases work from the Durham Revue, Oxford Revue, and Cambridge Footlights) and, after that, took the show to Baron's Court theatre in London in Easter. It has been amazing to be able to share our work with so many varied audiences, and we were so delighted to continue doing so in Scotland.

The rehearsal process started in December 2017, when we decided to create an exciting, unusual comedy show that could be accessible to everyone; with these aims in mind, we began brainstorming ideas, playing around with improvisations, and working with the Relaxed Theatre Company to adapt the production for relaxed performances. We were hugely proud of what we had created, the level of praise which we received following our first run in Cambridge was overwhelming, with one 10/10 review from TCS calling it 'profoundly original... inventive, usual, ambitious and consistently funny'. With every performance we challenged ourselves to refresh and improve our material and continued to receive rave reviews from audiences at every venue.

We were absolutely delighted to be offered a prime-time slot at the Underbelly, a venue which hosts some of the biggest names in comedy. In order to make the most of this wonderful opportunity, we flyer'd along the 'royal mile' and around the city for at least 4 hours everyday then met up an hour before each show to go over notes, set up and get warmed up. The show was a great success, with audiences of over 100 on some days. As well as brilliant audience reviews, we got 5 stars from Varsity, as well as two 4 star professional reviews.

As well as working hard, we certainly played hard and lapped up all the other wonderful theatre and events that Edinburgh had to offer. I would see 4 shows in a single day, some of which are the most effecting pieces I have seen to date. I was particularly impressed with a couple of shows which involved audience interaction, so much so that I have decided to focus my upcoming dissertation on breaking the fourth wall. It was lovely to be surrounded by others who share a love for theatre and the atmosphere was just incredible.

I can truly say it was one of the most fun and inspiring months of my life, and I would like to say a massive thank you to the Peter Cook fund for the financial support. The festival is notoriously expensive, and I would not have been able to gain the wonderful experience and memories without such generosity.