

Robert Eyers - EDINBURGH FRINGE 2015

The Edinburgh Fringe is an astonishing place to be, whether as a performer, writer or audience member. I managed to pull off all three during my stay in the summer, performing in the CUADC production *'Picasso Stole the Mona Lisa'*, writing and performing comedy for the daily Free Footlights show, and viewing a large handful of assorted productions (some excellent, some good, some oh-my-goodness-I'm-glad-this-is-free poor).

Picasso Stole the Mona Lisa was one of the more successful Fringe shows which started life in Cambridge (I believe the collective societies of the University were responsible for 20 entirely different productions). Over our 16-night run, we broke even on our budget (to the delight of CUADC), and sold out on several nights. Our reviews were, on the whole, very flattering – in a couple of them, I was singled out for praise –

EdFringe Review: “a show- stealer...from his varied imitations of his parents to his extraordinary hairstyle that required lots of attention, Eyers' comic timing is impossible to flaw”

Edinburgh Guide: “performed with energy, wit and intelligence”.

Performing with the Free Footlights was a pleasure – in Cambridge it is rare to play to a largely adult audience. This was a glorious opportunity to work out what kind of material goes down better in the outside world. Some Footlights graduates came along to the shows too – so it was a treat to perform alongside some rising (and some risen) stars.

The Fringe's influence on the quality of my comedy and drama in Cambridge has been very noticeable. As referenced above, a Fringe show has a much more varied audience, their tastes changing night-on-night. This is in stark contrast to the largely homogenous student audience back in Cambridge, and forces performers to adapt on the fly. This is an essential skill – and also incredible fun. Without the chance to go to Edinburgh (thanks to the Peter Cook fund), I wouldn't have had this crash course. I'm now in a much better position to start preparing for my first hour of solo material.

Similarly, the brilliant shows I attended inspired my debut as a writer-director. My first play is opening in the Corpus Playroom mid-February; rehearsals are just getting under way. And back in November, the sketch show I started writing while performing at the 2015 Fringe received excellent reviews during its New Cellars run, and we are now preparing it for Edinburgh Fringe 2016.