

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Fiftieth Annual General Meeting of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Ltd
Company Number: SC046605
Scottish Charity Number: SC002995

Date: Tuesday 21 August 2019 at 12:30pm

Venue: Playfair Hall, Royal College of Surgeons, Nicolson Street, Edinburgh

Present

Tim O' Shea (Chair)
Anthony Alderson
Colin Adams
Stephen Allison
Gillian Harkness
Judith Doherty
Luke Meredith
Toby Mitchell
Matt Panesh
Kate Smurthwaite
Richard Wiseman

Membership

Allan Wilson
Allan Wolfe
Andy Quinn
Christopher Richardson
Darren Neale
David Graham
Ged Welch
Isabel Schmier
Iven Nefedev
James Seabright
Margaret McKay
Marlene Zwickler
Martin Powell
Miroslava Bronnikova
Morgan Tooth
Pete Forman
Richard Lloyd
Sally Lloyd
Simon Jay
Tara Stapleton

Public

Annie Forman
Bob Slayer
Brian Ferguson
Charlotte Bence
Elaine Pritchard
Hazel Anderson
Herbie Treehead
Iain Georgeson
Katey Warren
Kerry Santo
Mike Wilson
Annabel Sing
Muriel Cassie
Patricia Wood
Patty Dohle
Richard House
Silver
Steve Duncan Rice
Stewart Reid
Vera Shehenbina
Xela Batchelder

In addition, the signature of one member of the Fringe Society was illegible.

In attendance

Shona McCarthy (Chief Executive)
Lyndsey Jackson (Deputy Chief Executive)
Rachel Sanger (Head of Participant Services)
Oliver Davies (Head of Marketing and Development)
Anne Diack (Head of External Affairs)
Andy Meldrum (Street Events Manager)
Brigid Kennedy (Marketing Manager)
Elaine Keil (Marketing and Development Officer)
Fiona Carr (Development Manager)

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Fiona Payne (Designer)
Helen Darling (EA to Chief Executive) (Minutes)
Jane Colton (Box Office Manager)
John Pettie (Technical Project Manager)
Julie Laerkholm (Community Engagement Officer)
Kevin Kimber (Venues and Companies Manager)
Michelle Mangan (Senior PR and Marketing Manager)
Niki Boyle (Marketing Content Officer)
Nina Nicholl (Marketing Administration Assistant)
Polly Anderson (Operations Assistant)
Stephanie Ritchie (Development Assistant)
Claire Hill (Transcriptionist) (Invited)
Willy Barr (Guest Speaker) (Invited)

Preamble

The Chair welcomed Fringe Society members and members of the public to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and explained that formal proceedings would be covered first from the agenda, followed by an introduction and a brief review of the year by the Chief Executive, Shona McCarthy, followed by guest speaker Willy Barr from Citadel Youth Centre and then an informal question and discussion session after the conclusion of formal business.

The Board of Directors introduced themselves.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from Board members Fiona Davis, Tari Lang and Susan Morrison.

Notice

The Notice convening the meeting was taken as read. The Chair reminded any Members who had yet to vote in the election to do so immediately and allowed two minutes for final voting to be concluded.

Minutes of the 2018 Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 2018 Annual General Meeting were taken as read and approved subject to the following alterations:

- Luke Meredith (Board member) was mentioned twice in the Present section of the minutes.

Decision: The minutes of the 2018 AGM were unanimously approved. Proposed by Martin Powell and seconded by Anthony Alderson.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Accounts

Copies of the Report and Financial Statements year ended 30 November 2018 had been made available.

The Chair invited Lyndsey Jackson, Deputy Chief Executive to present the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society 2018 accounts. Lyndsey noted that the Fringe Society had an income of £4.44M and an expenditure of £4.47M, the deficit was the Society's investment in Fringe Days Out and Access Fringe, the designated reserve for which had now ended, but the Society was committed to funding that work going forward.

The accounts in the directors' report detailed both financial and strategic targets. The Fringe Society's income was largely from Festival activities, registration fees, box office, and therefore the Society's expenditure was largely associated to the delivery of those services. Lyndsey stated that the Fringe Society had a good cash reserve position but was minded of the continued economic and social uncertainty, and much of the value of the Society's reserves were tied into assets. 2018 saw the removal of regular funding from Creative Scotland and a further reduction in the funding from the City of Edinburgh Council. Not reflected in the accounts was the Place funding for £500,000 for three years (2019-21). Lyndsey invited questions of a financial nature from the audience.

Decision: The accounts were unanimously adopted. Proposed by Simon Jay and seconded by Martin Powell.

The Chair informed those attending that the AGM would be recorded solely for the purpose of the minutes and would not be stored by EFFF.

Chief Executive's Report

Shona McCarthy provided a brief review of the Fringe Society's activities over the last twelve months. In 2017, the Fringe Society undertook an extensive consultation across the Fringe Society constituency, inviting people to contribute their ideas on the future of the Fringe. Out of that, the Society developed a five year strategic plan, and articulated eight big commitments: The Fringe Blueprint. Shona provided an update on the eight commitments.

The Open Fringe emerged from the commitment to the founding principle of the Fringe Festival to be an open access Festival, and a platform for anyone who wanted to perform at the Fringe. In 2018, the Society supported 32,697 artists to put on 3,548 shows across 317 venues.

Part of the mechanism for providing that support was through the year-round participant services support, and through Fringe Central which serves as the support centre for artists during the Festival. The Fringe Central opening address in 2018 was given by Deborah Frances-White, star and co-founder of the Guilty Feminist, and was an inspirational talk on both her

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

experience of the Fringe and her experience as an artist. The Society worked with 65 different partners to put together 125 professional development events in Fringe Central, including providing creche facilities for artists with Parents In Performing Arts. The Society received positive feedback for the access customer services procedure (working with Neatebox), efforts through BSL, captioning, magic carpet spaces, autism backpacks and other work. The Society made a public commitment at the 2019 Edinburgh launch that all wheelchair users would be able to book tickets online by 2021.

The Fringe Society worked in partnership with COMMON, the organisation who support working class arts professionals. Because it was the year of young people, 2018 saw the initiation of a young people's programming team in Fringe Central which was a tremendous success and provided an opportunity for a group of diverse young people from across the city. This success resulted in the decision to continue that as a permanent feature of Fringe Central.

The Fringe Society has continued to develop roots and connections into Edinburgh as a city, not just the 600,000 people who have already come to the Festival every year from Edinburgh, but also in identifying those communities who were not engaged with the Festival. The Society has worked with over 30 community groups across Edinburgh on the Fringe Days Out scheme where £50,000 was used from the reserves of the Fringe Society to create free passes, £60 for families and £12 for individuals, to choose any shows that they would like to watch.

In 2018, the Fringe had over 900 shows from Scotland, and the biggest growth in the Fringe audiences had been from Edinburgh and across Scotland. The Fringe's international audience figures is steady at 8% for the last three years, indicating growth in audiences was from local and UK based audiences.

Made in Scotland was ten years old in 2018. Funded through Scottish Government Expo funds, to support a platform for the best of Scottish work in music, dance and theatre across the Fringe. Made in Scotland has supported over 200 shows, 140 companies, and from that programme alone, 87 Scottish productions have toured to 38 countries. It had been a hugely successful initiative and put Scotland and Scottish artists on the map. Shona was delighted to add that that fund would continue in the future years.

In a time when walls were being put up, and doors were being closed to internationalism, the Fringe Society were very proud that 55 countries were represented on the stages of the Edinburgh Fringe in 2018. Global Fringe is also part of the blueprint commitment. 1,420 arts industry programmers and curators, came from around the world to look at emerging talent, to find work to tour and to find work to take back to their own theatres and festivals in 2018.

Another big commitment from the Blueprint was to make the Fringe as affordable as possible, and at this point Shona reminded everyone that the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society was not the entirety of the Fringe, and that the Society was the small charitable organisation at the centre of it, that underpins and upholds the values of the Fringe. Work on affordable Fringe continued to be a work in progress. Registration fees had been frozen 12 years in a row, and

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

the Society had committed to freeze them until 2022. The Society has offered the opportunity for any artist who found it difficult to pay the registration fee to be able to pay it in instalments.

Accommodation had been identified continually as a major barrier to being able to come to the Fringe. Although it was still a work in progress, the Society had made some real breakthroughs, such as Queen Margaret's University provided over 200 ensuite rooms at an affordable rate of £180 per week with rehearsal facilities and free access to the gym. Napier University provided 210 rooms. The Fringe Society partnered with Theatre Digs Booker, an online platform specifically for artists, and invited Edinburgh residents to sign up with that platform to provide affordable accommodation for artists. The Society continued to lobby for additional support in the city to provide affordable accommodation.

The Fringe Society received the first investment from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DDCMS) in the UK. In the 70-year history of the Festival, it was the first time this Festival had been recognised as a global performing arts market.

Conversations are ongoing with the Fair Fringe campaign. The Society met with all the venues individually and invited the Fair Fringe Campaign to present to venue managers. The Society worked closely with both the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (BECTU) and Equity to create new Codes of Practice for best employment practice, and best volunteering practice on the Fringe, and partnered with Volunteer Edinburgh. The Fringe website indicated clearly which venues had signed up to those Codes of Practice. The website also provided a channel for anyone had difficulties or who was not having a valuable experience, to be able to contact the Society directly. Posters were put up in all the venues, advising staff of all channels for comment on poor practice. The Society formed a sub-group of the board to look at this issue, and in 2020, another survey will be carried out again enabling the Society to have a real evidence-based measure of change and improvement around working practices at the Fringe.

The Fringe Society negotiated a partnership with the crowdfunding agency Kickstarter who for the first time in their history agreed to re-invest the 5% commission that they would normally take for any company coming to the Edinburgh Fringe who wanted to go through that platform for their crowdfunding.

2018 was the 20th anniversary of the Fringe Society managing street performers, which the City of Edinburgh Council requested for 20 years ago. The Society took the opportunity to renegotiate the sponsorship of the street space and Virgin Money came back on board for another three years, which enabled to Society to do a refresh of the street, put new stages and furniture in place, and experimented with tap to tip for the first time ever.

The street had also been the focal point for some of the major work around access. 40 sensory backpacks were introduced in 2018 to support people suffering from autism to come to the Fringe. The number was doubled in 2019. Magic carpet spaces were created on the Royal Mile, so that anyone who was a wheelchair user would have a safe space to be able to watch the

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

street performances. The Society introduced BSL interpretation every Saturday of the Fringe to the West Parliament Square stage and hired a mobile Changing Places toilet for people in the city.

The Fringe Society had to deal with some challenges around the public realm, as the Mound was being redeveloped in 2019, and an open dialogue with the street performers had been maintained to ensure that any changes that were made were done in consultation with them.

One of the most prominent issues of current times has been the environmental issue. One of the major promises in the Fringe Blueprint was the Green Fringe. The Fringe Society have made substantive changes and efforts to be as green as possible, and to reduce carbon footprint. In the wider Fringe footprint there is evidence of growing awareness and appetite for change; for example, many venues and bars have been using the "I am not a plastic cup" replacements for plastics, programme print was reduced by 45,000, digital flyering was introduced and supported by Staging Change. The Society reduced their carbon footprint, creating Fringecasts where the team can deliver video content, removing the need to travel. The Fringecasts have proved enormously popular, and the last one had 50 different countries from around the world tuning in to talk about the Fringe all at one time. The annual swap shop and food bank have become permanent features.

For the third time, Euan's Guide awarded the Fringe Society on its efforts around accessibility, and the hello and warmth of welcome for people with disabilities when they visited the Fringe Society offices. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe were also awarded the best experience in the UK by Lonely Planet.

Several events were held in Fringe Central in 2019 that were looking at key issues around the Fringe landscape and how this Festival was accessible or in some cases not accessible enough to working class artists and to artists of colour. The Society also had a major session this year with representatives from the deaf community to look at the potential of having a festival within the Fringe that was specifically for people from the deaf community.

Shona added that four of the arts agencies around the UK now had initiatives to support artists to come to the Fringe. The latest was the Arts Council of England, who recently announced a £2.25 million programme (three year) to be able to support artists from England coming to the Edinburgh Fringe. That was mirrored by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Arts Council of Wales and Creative Scotland and that was one of the things that the Fringe team had been particularly pleased about.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive, her senior management team and all the staff at the Fringe for doing an effective and extraordinary job. The Chair thanked the members of the public and suggested they join as members of the Society next year. The Chair also offered his warm thanks to the Board who donated their time. The Chair announced that the results of the Board elections would be declared on Thursday 22 August 2019.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Guest speaker

The Chair introduced the guest speaker Willy Barr, Manager, Citadel Youth Centre. Willy thanked the Fringe Society for inviting him to speak. The Citadel Youth Centre and the Fringe Society jointly hosted Fringe at the Citadel, a free family fun day on 20 July 2019. The event was an enormous success with local families able to experience a taste of the Fringe that included circus and music workshops, face-painting, a raffle, badge-making, a street performance and delicious street food. The event was programmed with the help of the Citadel Parent Group, and 120 people attended. Willy thanked the Fringe Society's tremendous support to the partnership and for providing the families with the opportunity to watch a Fringe show and create lasting memories.

The Chair thanked Willy and assured him that the partnership was really valued and an important model for further work.

The Chair opened the meeting to an informal question and answer session.

Open Session

Question: Annabel Sings introduced herself as someone who had been involved with performing, producing and activism on the Fringe for the last 25 years. She thanked Simon Jay for telling her about the AGM as she was not a member of the Fringe Society. She asked a question on behalf of Andrea Baker, who could not attend the AGM. Andrea, a mezzo soprano and a woman of colour was attending a show. Her question was "Would the Fringe establish a subsidised ticket scheme to people of colour and local kids from disadvantaged backgrounds at the cost of promoters". Annabel's second question was why were all venues not paying the living wage? Anabel performed at the George street assembly rooms in 2018.

Response: The Chair asked the Chief Executive to respond. The Chief Executive asked Lyndsey Jackson (Deputy Chief Executive) to provide an update on the partnership that the Society had with the Fringe of Colour. Lyndsey confirmed that the Fringe Society had initiated several different schemes, supporting audiences of colour and finding work by artists of colour. The Society had been supporting them financially through access to vouchers, alongside some of the venues, promoters and performers giving their tickets in kind.

Question: Simon Jay, a member of the public followed up on Andrea's comment. He worked for a charity called Artlink and they had received vouchers, which was wonderful, but part of the problem was that there was no support for people to get to the venues, especially those with disabilities.

Response: Lyndsey responded that the Fringe Days Out was not just tickets, people were provided with vouchers for buses and the Fringe Society also had an additional discretionary budget that supported charities working with people with access requirements. Lyndsey pointed out although the Fringe took place in a medieval city, 61% of the programme was in a

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

wheelchair accessible venue. She added the Society had been working on support and information and met at least twice a year with the Fringe Days Out partners. Tickets were only one part of it, but what was more important was to help people understand how to navigate the Fringe and find work and become part of the community. Lyndsey was not sure if Artlink had been able to attend those and suggested Simon and Andrea speak to Julie Laerkholm, Community Engagement Officer with the Fringe Society.

The Chair opened the floor to the next question.

Question: Christopher Richardson, Fringe Society member, said he had been coming to the Fringe for about 40 years and been a member for most of those years. It used to be quite easy to join the Society, but in 2019, it seemed to be hard to do that. The website was not easy to navigate even though this was the age of openness and fluidity. Christopher suggested a simpler process be put in place. Christopher queried why it took a day and half to wait for results? He also asked if the Fringe Society could find a venue with easy access to restrooms.

Response: The Chair thanked Christopher and accepted the criticism of the Fringe website and the procedures and assured him the Fringe Society would do its best to improve them. The Chair apologised for the toilets and suggested it could be the side effect of the ongoing building works. He thanked Christopher and assured him that careful attention would be paid to the venue in future.

Question: Herbert Treehead introduced himself as a street performer at the Edinburgh Festival for the last 20 years. He thanked the people of Scotland, the people of Edinburgh and the staff at the Fringe for allowing access to perform for people who did not go to the venues, and some of them that do. He and his friends were proud of what they did because they were an accessible point for art form and for live performances. Street performers were not just people that took a space but were well organised, worked with the police, organisations like the Fringe Society and the public. He requested the Society to keep working with street performers because it was important and it helped the audiences of tomorrow. He thanked everybody again to resounding applause.

Response: The Chair thanked Herbert and assured him that the Fringe valued street performers enormously as they were an essential part of the mix. The Chair asked Oliver Davies (Olly) to comment on some of the detail.

Olly introduced himself as the Head of Marketing and Development for the Fringe Society and confirmed that street events sat within his remit. Firstly, he thanked Herbert for his feedback and reminded members of the Fringe and the public that the Society accredit about 1,000 street performers over the course of August, and managed two spaces, the High Street and the Mound. He reassured him that he and his team would discuss the challenge of the public realm and making spaces as accessible as possible. His team had been in discussions with other areas of the city such as the new St James development through to Waverley mall to ensure there was enough space and it is was in the best interests of residents, visitors and indeed street performers.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Question: Simon Jay affirmed he had been coming to the Fringe for about eight years, sometimes as a performer and sometimes as an audience member. He thanked the Fringe Society for the work they did, especially around areas such as disability, for example Fringe Central with special rooms provided to people with extrasensory needs. Given the Fringe Society's commitment to educate, support, advise and encourage everyone participating in the Fringe, he asked what was being done about those that were ill-treated or harassed, given low pay or overworked. He gave the example of the case of Shira who was quoted in the Sunday Mail (in 2018) as saying that the conditions working in Cambodia were better than living in the Fringe, living off slave wages, sharing with three other people, with no food in the whole month and just three days off. He asked why the Fringe Society had not supported these people. He offered to have a conversation with Society staff and share his own experience. He noted that the Fringe Society was a place where chief executives and participants listened to each other and respected each other as equals, and this was something to be applauded and championed.

Response: The Chair thanked Simon for the important question. He said the Society was strongly committed to improve the circumstances of all participants, whether as performers or otherwise. He requested Rachel Sanger to comment on Simon's question and invited Richard Wiseman, Chair of the Fringe Employment and Volunteering sub committee to comment.

Rachel introduced herself as the Head of Participant Services at the Fringe Society. She thanked Simon for his question and comment and apologised for his perception that the Society was not open enough. Simon clarified that he meant showing empathy publicly. Rachel replied that the Society had been very open, and the Chief Executive had made statements to that effect, both on the website and in the news. She added the Fringe Society would not condone or accept illegal working practices on the Fringe. The Society's website has clear signposts to participants to relevant support services and the relevant authorities who can make the decision regarding a practice being illegal or not. The Society had done a lot of work about appropriate working practices, volunteering practices and working with venues on the Fringe since Simon's example was highlighted in the 2018 Fringe. The survey undertaken in 2017 would be repeated in 2020, to make sure that there was greater clarity across the Fringe landscape about what was and what was not acceptable in terms of practice. The Society had worked relentlessly with the relevant organisations like BECTU, Equity and Volunteer Edinburgh.

The Chair commented that the Fringe Employment and Volunteering sub committee was established as evidence of the Board's commitment. Richard Wiseman responded to Simon's comment on the public display of empathy. He verified that there was a section on the website where people could directly report problems which were taken seriously. The site had been well visited and no problems had been reported to date. He encouraged Simon to have that conversation with the Society to remove any misunderstanding, and talk about what the Society could do better.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Question: Morgan Tooth, Fringe Society member wanted to know what the Society had done to ensure that the companies that had signed up to the Codes of Practice were abiding by them. She added that several companies did not fulfil the standards sought by the Society.

Response: The Chair invited Rachel to respond. Rachel replied that setting up those codes of conduct with BECTU, Equity and Volunteer Edinburgh enabled them to have conversations with those companies that did not adhere to the code. No incident had been brought to Rachel's notice; she welcomed a conversation with the Fair Fringe Campaign around where people were not living up to those codes of conduct. Discussions were held with BECTU in 2019, where BECTU had constructive conversations with venues to work towards improving standards and the venues had been utterly responsive to that. BECTU reported back that they were happy that changes had been made. Rachel welcomed a constructive dialogue and encouraged everyone to contact the Society in person, via telephone or through e-mail.

Question: The Chair invited more questions from the floor. Mike Wilson, a full-time resident asked how the Society could better link up with residents. He raised the issue of accommodation. Even though Mike attended the local community council, there was no Fringe Society member to provide an update. He suggested having improved links either through board representation or members of the board feeding into local community groups.

Response: The Chair stated that the Fringe Society was very keen to work closely with residents and invited Olly to respond.

Olly thanked Mike and agreed that there was more the Society could do. A community consultation event was held just before the Fringe, which was attended by the Edinburgh Old Town Association. Olly agreed that he and his team needed to understand more about the various residents and different groupings in Edinburgh and assured Mike he would be added to the list. A similar event was being planned late September/early October, and Olly asked Mike to invite others as well. In addition, these forums were also an opportunity for linking in with people like the original Edinburgh (Business Improvement District (BID) to make sure local businesses and residents got involved too. The Fringe Society staff share the plans for the Street Events each year but also more practically what the Fringe would be doing in general. Olly also offered to have a separate conversation with Mike if that would be helpful.

Question: James Seabright, producer and member of the Fringe Society congratulated the Fringe team on another great festival. He thanked the team for the support and level of response he received not only during the Festival but year-round. James followed up on his question at the last AGM in 2018 about reducing box office commissions which was also proposed in the Blueprint.

Response: The Chair asked Shona to respond. Shona agreed that was one of the Blueprint commitments towards 2022. She confirmed that the senior management team were still working through this and invited James's contributions.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Question: Alan Wilson, Fringe supporter and member of the Fringe Society stated that his organisation donated roughly 40% of the annual income to support artists. He referenced to Shona's statement that the Arts Council of England (ACE) had a new scheme for artists coming to the Fringe. Alan quoted from a tweet he received from a friend regarding ACE's support. "You think it's progress, and then you read the details and realise it's for already-established companies of course. Bravo ACE, bravo". His friend quoted from the guidelines which stated, "the organisation must be underpinned by strong national and international partnerships involving organisations with both experience of international touring at the relevant scale and of organising similar events". Alan speculated that the funding would probably go to people who already found it relatively easy to get funding, and not go to small-scale artists at the bottom, who lack international touring experience.

Secondly, Alan spoke about his visual impairment with functional vision in only one eye. He could not find the steps or seats in darkened venues. He requested for a fuller appreciation of people with a full range of different sorts of disabilities.

Response: Shona responded to Alan's second point first. Shona empathised with Alan as she had a similar visual challenge. She assured Alan that this was another area that the Society was keen to improve. Lyndsey added that the Society was working with some of the agencies that represented disabled people around "hidden" disabilities and how we can work with venues to offer positive customer experiences. Customer care for people with a very visible disability was generally straightforward, and the next step in the journey would be to address hidden disabilities.

Shona replied to his first query regarding funding support from ACE. ACE had recently announced very broad criteria for support and the focus would probably be on programmes such as the Made in Scotland programme. It would be for artists who had - or companies who had tour-ready work, or who had work that had a serious likelihood of having a lifespan beyond the Fringe, and a lifespan that involved being picked up by other theatres and festivals around the world. She agreed with Alan that the scheme was probably going to be particularly for companies that were already producing work that was ready to go elsewhere. Shona pledged to continue the conversation with both Arts Council England, the other arts councils, and the DDCMS about initiatives to support artists who were at the beginning of their career.

Rachel added that at the moment ACE were looking for an arm's length body to manage the showcase, so that might refer to the person or organisation who they were putting the process out to tender to, and that would be the organisation who managed the actual distribution of the funds. Rachel confirmed that the Society were having a conversation with ACE about the potential of emerging artists, for example the Arts Council in Wales who had a great model in 2019 whereby they supported people through their national showcase.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Question: Christopher Richardson, Fringe Society member, raised the subject of saving plastic and paper. He asked if any research had been done on displays other than flyers?

Response: Olly agreed that this was a good point. He confirmed that the Society was looking at a range of options including an initiative created two years ago, called quick flyer, between 12.00 and 2.00 every Friday. The Society connected artists and audiences through social media channels, and around 1,500-2,000 took part. The Society also worked with a range of organisations across the Fringe, one of whom was Staging Change, an artist-led co-operative who brought together hundreds of artists in several venues and they were doing various initiatives, including taking a photo, thereby providing a visual for people's flyers. A recycling scheme had been put in place through Out of Hand for unused flyers and the Society proffered advice reducing the amount of flyering through the website.

Question: Silver, a member of the public stated he had performed in Edinburgh for over 30 years. He pointed out that two people had raised the issue of excessive cost of tickets. Silver enquired about the offer of discounted tickets to people with an EH postcode and asked if the Society would consider pushing this further through publicity.

Response: The Chair invited Olly to respond. Olly replied that various venues did offer EH discounts. The Society were keen to get all 323 venues in the programme to agree. The last Edinburgh people's survey run by the council suggested that 72% of Edinburgh residents felt that the Festivals collectively made Edinburgh a better place to live and work.

Question: Patty Dohle introduced herself as a member of the public and had been coming to the Fringe for the last six years. She loved Edinburgh, the mood and the vibe and everything else. But she noticed the articles relating to exploitation at the Fringe, and bad practices, and expressed her concern about the treatment of artists and venue workers and whether they had the support they needed to report any misuse or harassment. A lot of people did not know whether there was anything in place, so the Society needed to increase its efforts and be more transparent. Some artists and venue workers were reluctant to come forward for fear of some sort of backlash on their career. It was well and good that the Society had a code of conduct but it needed to be enforced as well. She thanked the Society and appreciated the efforts made to improve.

Response: The Chair thanked Patty for the important question assuring her that the Society was working very hard on this and invited Rachel to make a further comment. Rachel thanked Patty and said that in the interest of transparency and impartiality, the Society would arrange another venue workers survey through an arm's length organisation in 2020. The results of the survey would be published.

Paper F Minutes

Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM

Rachel added that artists were able to make an informed decision in 2019 as the Fringe programme reflects which venues have signed up to the best practice guides. Audience members will be empowered to choose where they want to spend their money. Regarding the enforcement of the codes of conduct, the Fringe Society works closely with organisations such as BECTU who are also on the Fair Employment and Volunteering Committee.

Question: The Chair invited the last question from the members of the Fringe and the public. Charlotte Bence, Equity's independent theatre and low pay organiser with UK responsibility for Fringe and low and unpaid work, commented that as Equity had been mentioned a few times at the AGM, she thought it was appropriate to speak up. She said Rachel's point was key, that the Fringe Society's Code of Practice and Code of Conduct was brilliant and had the support of Equity and BECTU. As a trade union, Equity were very proud to have developed that working relationship with the Fringe Society, to fight for better standards across the Festival and beyond. But ultimately it was the responsibility of the venues over the people they employed and engaged for the Festival. Equity ran regular drop-ins for people and were available at the Festival for any issues raised in terms of their employment or engagement, as indeed were the Fair Fringe Campaign. This was a process, not an event and not just the Fringe Society's responsibility but also that of the venues, Equity, BECTU and the Fair Fringe Campaign.

Response: The Chair thanked Charlotte and said the Fringe Society really valued the relationship with Equity and wanted to work exactly on the trajectory Charlotte indicated.

Any other business

There was no further business to discuss.

The Chair expressed his appreciation at the demanding and important set of questions. He welcomed members of the Fringe Society and the public to engage directly with senior officers of the Fringe, or board members, and invited them to coffee and tea. In conclusion, he asked everyone to join him in applauding Shona and all the staff of the Fringe for their tremendous work.

The Chair declared the 2019 Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society AGM closed.