

**Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘fringe’ experience**

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## Abstract

In this thesis I document a Practice as Research project that explores the creation of the inaugural Colchester Fringe Festival in 2021. I use a constellation of field-research, case-studies and autoethnographic experiences to create an original methodological framework, which I define as ‘artist-centred creative producing’, to explore my journey in designing and delivering the Colchester Fringe from 2019 to 2021. The methodology is guided by my first-hand experiences as a ‘fringe artist’, observation visits and original interviews conducted with fringe festival leaders and makers, which in-turn has allowed the creation of future practice within this PhD. The thesis is supported by video documentation which consists of a series of festival recordings and filmed diary entries from 2019 to 2021 and highlight the key events and decisions that took place in creating the festival including the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Through a series of case-studies, I analyse the main Fringe models used by fringe festival leaders and will outline the differences and benefits of each individual model, gesturing towards their hybrid futures. I utilise Bakhtinian theory, in particular the exploration of ‘carnival’ and the extra licence this space grants to alternative and transgressive modes of social behaviour as explored in *Rabelais and his World* (1965). Bringing queer theory alongside Bakhtin, this thesis will ask if Fringes are a potential ‘queertopia’ for its participating communities and will unpick the unique nature of the ‘fringe experience’ for artists. In this thesis I explore the conditions needed to design and deliver a fringe festival for Colchester, the key principles of Fringe, the relationship between a fringe festival and its community and the benefits artists can gain through performing their work at a fringe festival. These research questions allow me to apply knowledge and insight to my practice in producing the Colchester Fringe Festival, making recommendations for future artist-centred creative producing. I determine that the conditions needed to design and deliver a new fringe festival are *Place*, *Space* and *Artists* as well as the importance of creating a ‘fringe atmosphere’. Finally, I will conclude that if a festival can execute an artist-centered perspective through its modelling, then artists are more likely to have a positive experience, leading to a more productive festival environment.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>PROLOGUE</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>11</b>
‘FRINGE’ IS FIMBRIA.....	11
“WHY I HATE THE FRINGE”.....	16
<b>RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>AUTOETHNOGRAPHY</b> .....	23
<b>FRINGE: A QUEER EXPERIENCE</b> .....	26
<b>BAKHTIN</b> .....	28
<b>OUTLINE</b> .....	30
<b>FRINGE MODELS</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	32
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	33
<b>MODELS</b> .....	34
<b>ADELAIDE FRINGE, AUSTRALIA</b> .....	37
THE FESTIVAL CITY.....	37
<i>Introduction</i> .....	37
<i>Environmental Context</i> .....	38
<i>Fringe as a ‘little sister’ to Edinburgh? Or Fringe as an ethos</i> .....	41
<i>The Honey Pot</i> .....	43
<b>FRINGE THEATRE FEST, UNITED KINGDOM</b> .....	45
SERVING FRINGE MAPLE SYRUP IN NORTH DEVON.....	45
<i>The Canadian Approach</i> .....	48
<i>Open-Access for a Price</i> .....	50
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	54
<b>PRAGUE FRINGE, CZECH REPUBLIC</b> .....	56
VOLUNTEERING AT A FRINGE.....	56
<i>Introduction</i> .....	56
<i>Environmental Context</i> .....	58
<i>Motivations</i> .....	62
<i>The Profile</i> .....	64
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	65
<b>MAKING THE FRINGE</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	67
<b>MODELLING: A SISTER FESTIVAL?</b> .....	69
<b>CONDITIONS FOR A FRINGE</b> .....	74
<i>Place</i> .....	75
<i>Space</i> .....	76
<i>Artists</i> .....	80

PREPARING FOR A PANDEMIC .....	81
THE SHOP WINDOW TAKEOVER.....	83
<b>LIVING IN THE FRINGE.....</b>	<b>91</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	91
AN ALTERNATIVE TO EVERYDAY LIFE .....	93
THE FRINGE COMMUNITY .....	98
CONCLUSION .....	103
<b>EVALUATING THE FRINGE.....</b>	<b>105</b>
MODES OF EVALUATION .....	106
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN <i>ARTISTS, AUDIENCES AND PLACE</i> .....	107
<i>Artists</i> .....	108
<i>Audiences</i> .....	110
<i>Atmosphere</i> .....	111
<b>ACCP FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>APPENDICES 1 .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>APPENDICES 2 .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>243</b>

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I also would like to show gratitude to the artists, volunteers, venues, sponsors, and audience members, all of which played a significant role in creating the first ever Colchester Fringe Festival. Without you, my practice would not have been possible. You are the true founders of the Colchester Fringe. Equally, to all the interviewees I thank you for providing rich and honest accounts of your practice which has guided my methodology throughout.

Which leads me to Steve, at the start of this process I originally thought I would be completing this journey alone. But after meeting you unexpectedly, I realised that the task was just too great. Along the way we have learnt from each other, which has led to an amazing partnership and friendship.

Lastly, to all the fringe festivals that have invited me as an artist, volunteer, critic, director and researcher. Your festivals have inspired me, and my love of 'fringe' is down to your hard work. I hope that you all can visit Colchester Fringe one day and see that your festivals have led to the creation of my own.

## Instruction to the Reader

Accompanying this thesis is a piece of video documentation provided on an external hard drive and by a web link:

**<https://youtu.be/dj3ob49XcGE>**

I ask the reader to view this video documentation in two separate ways. Firstly, in full before reading this thesis. Secondly, significant moments highlighted within the video are referenced within footnotes by a time stamp throughout this thesis. These moments within the video documentation are key in supporting the written documentation of this thesis and should be referred to when directed by the text.

## Glossary

It should be noted that there are multiple examples of presenting the word ‘fringe’ within any form of writing. Due to the sheer number of variations of this word throughout this thesis, I establish my own specific use of the nomenclature. Below are the basic working definitions from this nomenclature to help guide the reader:

**Fringe (s) or fringe festival (s)** - A general term to define an array of fringe festivals.

**‘fringe’**- To characterize the type/genre of ‘art’ produced.

**Fringer**- To describe this term loosely, it would be a person who actively performs at, or attends a fringe festival. However, a ‘Fringer’ can be much more than that. They have the potential to play a much bigger role in the makeup and future of anything and everything that is ‘fringe’. ‘Fringe’ is a state of mind and one that sits outside the conventional theatrical sphere. It is a protest and artistic invention. ‘Fringers’ have come to terms with the fact that things go wrong, and rules are meant to be broken from the moment they step into the coffee shop, which has been converted into a make-shift auditorium. They understand that a stage can be anywhere, and lights/sound and velvet cushioned seats are just luxuries that artists and audiences have become used to and indulged in.

## Prologue

My first experience as an artist at a fringe festival would prove to be my most memorable. In 2015, my newly formed physical theatre company *Royal Kung Foolery* (RKF) embarked on a 6-week tour of the United States of America. High travel costs for a company of four from Twickenham (London) and a lack of funding should have proved to be major stumbling blocks. However, we were young and hungry to succeed as theatre-makers and believed that ‘fringe theatre’ would be the most forgiving environment for us during the early stages of our career. With that in mind, we endured a 23-hour bus journey (via Chicago) to the mid-western city of Indianapolis (Indiana), but even that couldn’t dent our euphoric spirits. We arrived smelling worse than the cramped toilets that had been overused on our dingy, dark Greyhound bus. From the outset Indianapolis wasn’t what we expected. Although, it would be fair to say we didn’t know what to expect at all. IndyFringe was based in the secluded ‘gay neighbourhood’ (Mass Avenue) on the outskirts of the city. It was situated far away from the world-famous NASCAR racetrack and bustling ‘suits’ from the financial district. It seemed like a community within a community. Dog walkers would stop and speak about the weather and there wasn’t a single tourist clutching onto their digital camera within sight. Life was slow here, but people seemed to prefer it that way and there was a constant sense of calm.

The only knowledge I had of fringe festivals before this time was the newspaper images of Edinburgh streets plastered with posters and thousands of theatregoers populating every inch of concrete. Although this picturesque, clean, and friendly Indiana suburb had lots going for it, there weren’t mountains of advertisement and marketing material promoting the IndyFringe. Everyone seemed to be a ‘local’ and had no knowledge of the Fringe. I started to question the integrity of the organisers and asked myself if this was the same IndyFringe that was pitched to me through the email correspondence that I had with the festival. Was it possible that we had arrived in the wrong place? The feeling of low-ticket sales and eventual failure started to sink in. However, as RKF’s leader, it was my job to lift our spirits. Feeling glum about the prospect ahead, we found the nearest bar and started talking to the locals, as it seemed someone had to promote The Fringe.

This was my first time performing outside of Essex or London and the first real moment that RKF had been tested. This was to be our first stop on a multiple list of tour dates over a seven-week period and our first ever performance at a fringe festival. We were programmed to perform our show six times at IndyFringe. But we still hadn’t seen our venue; our flyers

had mysteriously disappeared, and we discovered we would only be given an hour's tech rehearsal before our first performance the next night. However, before that, we had a chance to show our American audience who exactly we were. It is customary at this Fringe (and many others within Canada and the United States of America) to do a three-minute preview of your show. This gives potential stakeholders a chance to 'try before they buy' and could prove to be a real asset in selling tickets for our foreign show.

On Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2015 I walked onto the grand stage at The Athenaeum in Indianapolis and looked out to the packed auditorium. The bright lights pierced my eyes, but I could see there wasn't a spare seat to be had. Where had these people come from? They surely couldn't have been the same dog walkers and cappuccino sippers that I had seen earlier that morning? My mouth dried up and sweat made my period costume stick to my skin. Growing up in East Anglia, I think it's fair to say that I wasn't used to the kind of heat that the mid-western American summer provides. But there was no time for mistakes now. All the hard work that had begun the previous year, had led to this moment and I had to make sure I seized the opportunity. The first line would be imperative, and I managed to squeeze enough pressure from my vocal folds to produce a sound. And then came the first laugh. We had them... They were with us. After our preview, it was decided that we would say a few words. Although audiences had been attending IndyFringe since its formation in 2001, they weren't accustomed to international companies attending. So, this was a perfect opportunity to reiterate that we were 'outsiders', who had made a very long journey to be at their festival. Now it was my turn to speak. "We have come all the way from London in England, and we are so very happy to be here" .... before I could even finish my first sentence the mid-western audience were on their feet, clapping and hooting for us. It was an amazing feeling and one that put a smile on each of our faces. It was clear that this audience loved the fact we had travelled so far to be with them. Now it was up to us to show them why we had made the effort.



The next two weeks would prove to be a real lesson in furthering my stage training. We had to become adaptable (to a new type of space), smart enough to slow our text down (as regional English accents could have been problematic) and we had to be playful and improvise large chunks of our show when things went wrong within the unique ‘fringe environment’. We worked hard but enjoyed the pressure. The aches, fatigue, and sore heads from trips to the Fringe Club the night before were overpowered by a sense of a joyous artistic celebration that this fringe had produced. Everyone knew about The Fringe. Now the dog walkers were talking about shows they had seen the previous night and every handbag or back-pocket had an official IndyFringe programme within it. The coffee shops were filled with posters and flyers, and we had made a new bunch of friends every night. Fellow artists would come and see our work and we would repay the favour, whilst offering a friendly critique and a list of recommendations of each other’s shows at the end of the night.



*Figure 1. Members of the RKF Creative Team with IndyFringe Volunteers during the closing night of the festival in 2015 (Photo by author).*

When it was eventually time to leave IndyFringe, I knew I had just experienced something special. From the moment we arrived, we were shown kindness and gratitude from just about anyone and everyone we encountered. Although at first The Fringe didn’t seem to be a major event within this community, it proved us all wrong and it turned out to be the most fantastic

stage for us to present ourselves and our work. In fact, when it was time to leave, I felt sad as I believed it would be hard to reinvent these pure feelings of happiness and artistic freedom that I had felt during my time there. However, I was determined to do just that. Over the next 7 years I would perform, attend, and volunteer multiple times at 12 fringe festivals across the world. My love for 'fringe' was born in the summer of 2015 in Indianapolis, although it has grown ever since. A fringe festival has the power to change the way we look at theatre, the arts, our communities, and identities. The model has faults, as I shall explore. Nonetheless, my time at IndyFringe was a fantastic education for myself and my theatre company. It also left many questions regarding my own community that I wanted to answer. The prominent one being, why doesn't Colchester have a Fringe?

## Introduction

The premise of my study was to determine the best possible model of a fringe festival in the town of Colchester. Through a Practice as Research (PaR) project, I co-created the first ever Colchester Fringe Festival (CFF). The new Fringe was a four-day event taking place in October 2021. Guided by original interviews, my personal experiences, and a set of case-studies of diverse international fringe festivals – and a global pandemic – the CFF adapted the pre-existing ‘fringe model’. This allowed it to evolve to suit Colchester’s unique environment, whilst deliberately embedding curation and production policies designed to benefit artists. The creative output of this PAR project is the material generation of a fringe festival that iteratively experiments in the installation of artist-centred production.

My thesis explores the following research questions. Firstly, I will examine the conditions needed to design and deliver a fringe festival for Colchester. Secondly, I will determine the key principles of Fringe and how it is ‘other’ to a mainstream festival/model. Furthermore, through my own practice whilst making and delivering the CFF, I will examine the relationship between a fringe festival and its community. Lastly, I will look to outline the benefits artists gain through performing their work at a fringe festival. All of which, will lead me to develop an original and exportable framework within fringe festival producing which benefits artists and their careers within ‘fringe’.

In this thesis, I question the current state of new work being produced within the regional arts scene and the role of fringe festivals as alternative access points to the ‘arts industry’ for artists not from conservatoire drama training. I argue that Fringe can be a training ground, due to its offer of an informal education for aspiring or newly graduated actors. Furthermore, Fringes are environments for performers to understand producing for themselves; managing their own budgets, marketing plans, networking with industry professionals and the multiple other duties bestowed upon them within a fringe festival.

### **‘Fringe’ is Fimbria**

Any history of ‘fringe’ begins with the Edinburgh International Festival (EIF). In *The Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-war Britain* (2013), Angela Bartie describes Rudolph Bing’s establishment of the EIF in 1947, as a festival that “emphasised

‘high culture’ and successfully attracted many of the best artists Europe had to offer to the city, at a time when austerity measures were still in force and European nations were emerging from the upheaval of the Second World War”.<sup>1</sup> During its early years, journalists such as David Pollock stated that the festival, “presented a world-class array of what might have been considered the more highbrow arts”.<sup>2</sup> However, Sarah Thomasson highlights in *The Festival Cities of Edinburgh and Adelaide* (2022), that although the EIF was formed to help aid the post-war recovery of the Scottish economy and European culture in Scotland, “there were no Scottish theatre productions included within the Festival’s inaugural 1947 programme”.<sup>3</sup> In the same work, Bartie also reflects on this significant moment in ‘fringe history’ and adds that eight uninvited theatre companies arrived eager to perform only to be turned away, as the EIF organisers deemed they “were simply not high enough to sit alongside the best that Europe had to offer.”<sup>4</sup> Undeterred, they decided to group together and stage their own festival.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (EFF), and a new premise for an artistic event and creative ecology, was born. The EFF got its more common name, ‘The Fringe’ when in 1948, journalist Robert Kemp writes, “round the fringe of official Festival drama, there seems to be more private enterprise than before ... I am afraid some of us are not going to be at home during the evenings”.<sup>6 7</sup>

In “Contemporary Festival: Polyphony of Voices and Some New Agents” (2007), cultural theorist Lennart Fjell states that “in the last 50-60 years the number of festivals in Europe has escalated from about 400 to approx. 30,000, and since the early 1990s, an entire global industry of festivals and events has evolved and developed”.<sup>8</sup> With the first fringe festival being held in 1947, ‘fringe’ must be understood as a relatively new addition to arts festival history, with roots in the theatre and performance festivals of the Ancient Greeks. Although, what began in Edinburgh as a post-war experimental creative protest has seen a rise in

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Bartie, *Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-War Britain* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).42

<sup>2</sup>David Pollock, "Edinburgh Fringe 2018: How the Legendary Comedy and Drama Festival Was Founded," *Independent* 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Thomasson, "Introduction: The Festival Cities of Edinburgh and Adelaide," in *The Festival Cities of Edinburgh and Adelaide* (Springer, 2022). 19.

<sup>4</sup> Bartie, *Edinburgh Festivals: Culture and Society in Post-War Britain*. 43

<sup>5</sup> Edinburgh Festival Fringe, "About the Fringe," <https://www.edfringe.com/learn/about>.

<sup>6</sup> Lindsey Johnstone, "The Edinburgh Fringe through the Years," *The Scotsman*.

<sup>7</sup> \* **The fundamental difference in the early years of both festivals, was that the EIF was formed to cater for “world-class” artists, whereas this new “fringe” around the “official” was arguably to serve all artists, who may not have been deemed worthy by its predecessor to perform on its stages.**

<sup>8</sup> Lennart Fjell, "Contemporary Festival: Polyphony of Voices and Some New Agents," *Studia Ethnologica Croatica* 19, no. 1 (2007).

popularity every year for audiences, artists and producers. There are now an estimated 50,000 artists who participate in fringe festivals annually in the U.K. Globally there are over 300 fringe festivals commencing every year which are attracting over 19 million audience members.<sup>9</sup> With the rise in number of festivals in recent years, there have been some negative effects to the local host communities. Rick Rollins et, al. detail in their study on Parksville Sand Castle Festival (Vancouver, Canada) in “Community Festivals: Measuring Community Support and Opposition” (1999), festivals can create anti-social behaviour and negative environmental impacts.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Andrea Collins and Crispin Cooper’s (2015) study on festivals’ problematic contribution to the ecological footprint is a useful study.<sup>11</sup> Throughout my thesis, I will highlight some of these issues around the deleterious impacts within the context of ‘fringe’ and will point towards solutions for future fringe festival makers.

Despite fringe festivals continuing to grow in popularity with artists, stakeholders, and communities, many (including those involved in the industry) still struggle to define it. For example, the World Fringe Network (WFN), an organisation set up to promote and support fringe festivals provide a brief description of ‘fringe’ in their organisational description. They state, “‘Fringe’ comes from a ‘Fringe of another Festival’ or ‘Fringe Arts’.”<sup>12</sup> Evidently, there is slippage in the WFN definitions of the word ‘fringe’. This could mean that an already endorsed arts event needs to be present within a geographical location, or that there is a mainstream theatre scene for the fringe to juxtapose. However, on the same website they also state that fringes are, “born from passion and hard work; a passion for development, for creating a platform and for seeing and realising new ideas and initiatives”. I argue that by “creating a platform” for artists, Fringes may be viewed and experienced as an act of a rebellion against the lack of opportunities presented for artists.

The word ‘fringe’ or in Latin ‘Fimbria’, originates from Late Latin meaning ‘threads’, and later ‘border’ or ‘edge’. As per Kemp’s usage above, the ‘Fringe’ takes place on the outskirts or the ‘edge’ of the officially sanctioned activity. However, I argue throughout this thesis that the additional complexity is that although Fringes share common characteristics in their

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<sup>9</sup> World Fringe Network, "Fringe a-Z Calendar," <http://www.worldfringe.com/fringes-around-the-world>.

<sup>10</sup> Rick Rollins, Tom Delamere, and B Sepos, "Community Festivals: Measuring Community Support and Opposition" (paper presented at the Ninth Canadian Congress on Leisure Research, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Collins and Crispin Cooper, "Measuring and Managing the Environmental Impact of Festivals: The Contribution of the Ecological Footprint," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 25, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>12</sup> World Fringe Network, "What's Fringe," <http://www.worldfringe.com/about-world-fringe-association>.

origin and programming, they are in fact unique to their location and geography. This view is supported by the WFN who state that “fringe festivals come in all different shapes and sizes; some are open-access (anyone can take part by registering), first come-first-served, created by lottery, juried, part programmed or a mix of them all”.<sup>13</sup> In *International Theatre Festivals and Twenty-First Century Interculturalism* (2021), Ric Knowles states that most Fringes are non-juried, although “the world’s fringes vary in size, character, and geographical setting”.<sup>14</sup> This thesis takes as its starting point that fringe festivals vary in “size and character” as Knowles describes, because physical and cultural geography directly impacts the composition of any given event. Each Fringe (knowingly or unknowingly) adopts its own unique model, and the mechanisms that determine Fringe ‘architecture’ have a linked effect on the configuration of the artistic curation, content, and critically for this thesis, the artists experience. The model is determined by many factors; such as selection process, artist fees, the pricing of tickets and environment (local and global). Building on the attributes identified by WFN, I have classified through my research three common models currently used by fringe festival organisers. I refer to them throughout this thesis as: the ‘Edinburgh Model’,<sup>15</sup> the ‘CAFF Model’<sup>16</sup> and the ‘European Model’.<sup>17</sup><sup>18</sup> In the next chapter, I look in greater detail at these models and their benefits and disadvantages.

By examining the relationship between ‘fringe model’ and ‘artist experience’, I posit that artists performing at Fringes are directly impacted by the specific model implemented by producers. The unique constellation of features making up each model influences the professional, creative, financial and emotional experience of the artist experience. Moreover, I argue that any decision about programming, costs or application process, which from the outside looks to be neutral or minor, can in fact have a significant effect on its artists and audiences. The makeup of a Fringe is undoubtedly ideological. In “Emotions, Performance and Entrepreneurship in the Context of Fringe Theatre” (2013), Simpson et al., provide a detailed analysis of an application process within ‘fringe theatre’. They highlight the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ric Knowles, *International Theatre Festivals and Twenty-First-Century Interculturalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).158

<sup>15</sup> Edinburgh Fringe, "Take Part," <https://www.edfringe.com/take-part>.

<sup>16</sup> CAFF, "For Artists," <https://fringefestivals.com>.

<sup>17</sup> Prague Fringe, "Prague Fringe Festival," <https://www.praguefringe.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> \* **However, recently there have been a few alternative and hybridised models offered from fringe festival producers that incorporate different attributes from each model.**

“emotional dynamics of passion in founders ‘pitch’ for support”<sup>19</sup>. displayed through textual analysis of 80 applications made by artists to theatre company producers in their position for backing. They determine “that fringe is a common route for early career theatre makers”.<sup>20</sup> Simpson and colleagues’ study synthesizes methodologies from cultural and theatre studies whilst offering a new practice-based alternative to the academy. Extending the work of Simpson, my practice research examines whether artists are looking at fringe festival participation in terms of audience development, a training opportunity, establishing networks, or as a chance to trial and develop new work.

Colchester was a fertile ground for analysing the repercussions of adding a layer of ‘fringe’ or ‘informal’ practice into an established arts ecosystem. Colchester is Britain’s oldest recorded town and was the Roman capital of England. There is a rich history on display throughout its landscape, including ancient theatre sites and the remains of the only known Roman Circus in Britain.<sup>21</sup> A bronze statue of Boudicca stands outside the main railway station and, the remains of Roman walls still shape Colchester’s town centre. There is also a well-documented account from local historians such as Nicholas Butler (1981) of the fight made by ‘Colcestrians’ for a permanent and suitable home for its theatre.<sup>22</sup> Colchester Borough Council forecast that the towns “population is estimated to grow to approximately 211,000 people in 2027, an increase of 20,902 people over a ten-year period. This is the highest population growth in Essex County”.<sup>23</sup><sup>24</sup> This signifies that Colchester, and the surrounding area, is growing into a cultural and creative environment, and a new local fringe festival might find the support of audiences, participants, and residents.

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<sup>19</sup> Ruth Simpson et al., "Emotions, Performance and Entrepreneurship in the Context of Fringe Theatre," *Organization* 22, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Visit Colchester, "Colchester Roman Circus," <https://www.visitcolchester.com/thedms.aspx?dms=3&venue=01529771>

<sup>22</sup> \* **This is in addition to the support made towards the town by Arts Council England (ACE) providing financial backing for three of its sizeable arts hubs (The Mercury Theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Firstsite Gallery).**

<sup>23</sup> Colchester Borough Council, "Population Estimates Colchester," <http://cbcgoss.colchester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=24303&p=0>

<sup>24</sup> \* **Furthermore, the town’s garrison currently holds around 3,500 military personal and 912 homes were built between 2016-2017.**

## “Why I hate The Fringe”

In the last few years, ‘fringe’ has split the opinion amongst critics and researchers. In 2018, Michael Billington wrote an article in *The Guardian* entitled ‘Why I hate The Fringe’. Here, Billington expressed unease about the voracious consumerist appetite of ‘fringe’ and the ‘dishonesty’ in the alternative promise, as he argues that “the practical consequence is that innovative shows in the international festival are often disregarded because they are branded ‘high-brow’”.<sup>25</sup> Jen Harvie in *Staging the UK* (2005), raises more nuanced concerns over the consumerist nature of the EFF:

For some, the Fringe operates a benign capitalism, offering a welter of choice at relatively affordable prices, especially when compared with the EIF (Edinburgh International Festival). For others, the Fringe offers only a spectre of choice because it is a ‘hypermarket’, where production values and audience choice are undemocratically determined and standardised by neo-liberal market forces rather than artistic ones. Thus, relative to the EIF, the Fringe may be democratically accessible; worryingly, however, the Fringe’s democracy risks being colonised by neo-liberal market values.<sup>26</sup>

Harvie states that the EFF is operating a “benign capitalism” and there is evidence to suggest that she is right. In 2017 alone, the EFF had a staggering 53,232 performances<sup>27</sup> compared to Edinburgh International Festival’s 284,<sup>28</sup> whilst in the same year, 2,696,884 tickets were sold at the EFF alone.<sup>29</sup> These statistics support the claim of the appetite, ubiquity and hegemony of the EFF, and is also data that can be applied to fringe festivals more widely. Harvie highlights the “neo-liberal” drift of the EFF and due to the rise in ticket prices, artist fees and “hypermarket” commercialisation, what was started in Edinburgh as a rebellion against the mainstream, is arguably now more “standardised” today. However, it would be unfair to place all Fringes within this same category. A Fringe can be presented in a range of shapes and sizes due to their unique models. Some are founded for communal benefits, be that through boosting a local economy or bidding to engage members of the public with ‘art’. Others are self-defined as being ‘artist friendly’, which exist to provide space for performers

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Billington, "Why I Hate the Fringe," *The Guardian*, 25 July 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>27</sup> Edinburgh Fringe Festival, "Annual Review," (2017).

<sup>28</sup> Edinburgh International Festival, "Annual Review," (2017).

<sup>29</sup> BBC News, "Record Numbers Attend Edinburgh Fringe and International Festival," <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-41075286>.



to present their work in the best conditions allowing for success and experience. Through my Practice as Research project and my own personal experiences I look to define 'success' and 'experience' and ask what are artists are looking to gain through fringe festival participation.

The large variety of fringe festivals established across the world and the considerable number of artists performing at them has called for partnerships to be formed between organisations and fringe festivals. Also, with each model playing such a significant role in the ethos, experience and environment of each Fringe, the rationale and makeup of a fringe festival are of constant discussion within the artistic community, and at a bi-yearly congress hosted by the WFN (where programming, marketing, mental health, environmental sustainability, diversity, audience development and finance are discussed).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> World Fringe Congress, "Programme," <https://www.fringeworldcongress.co.uk/programme/fringe-world-congress-2018>.

## Research Context and Methodology

I chose a practice research model as the overarching research approach of my PhD to develop the theoretical knowledge in this field, which involved inaugurating a 4-day fringe festival in the town of Colchester. In *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (2013), Robin Nelson writes:

PaR involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and Introduction where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/ performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry.<sup>31</sup>

Although, similarly to the concept of a fringe festival, PaR also lacks a definitive definition, presenting both challenges and generative complexity in the design, delivery and presentation of my practice and research. In “Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology, Media Practice and Education” (2018), Lyle Skains claims that “Practice-related research can be hard to define, as the notion of ‘practice’ encompasses many potential activities from artistic to analytical”.<sup>32</sup> She concludes that there is not one manual that researchers can follow when applying practice-based research to an academic study. In *Inquiry Through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies* (1996), Carole Gray defines practice research as “research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners”.<sup>33</sup> In the following section, I outline elements of practice research, or PaR for brevity – with the *as* sometimes eliding *into through, into with* and *within*—that I included and how I began to approach these challenges. However, my research embraced the “questions, problems and challenges” highlighted by Gray as they allowed for more reflective and theoretical insights into the world of ‘fringe’.

My PaR methodology was supported by qualitative research in the form of first-hand experiences and autoethnographic studies made when I attended fringe festivals, integrated with original interviews conducted over a three-month period in 2019, which in turn shaped

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<sup>31</sup> Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts : Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). 8-9.

<sup>32</sup>R. Lyle Skains, "Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology," *Media Practice and Education* 19, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>33</sup> Carole Gray, "Inquiry through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies No Guru, No Method," in *International Conference on Art and Design Research (Helsinki, Finland 1996)*. 3

my research questions and practice-focus. The interviewees were either current directors or programmers at U.K and international fringe festivals. For these interviews, I chose to use a semi-structured approach. In “The Qualitative Research Interview” (2006), Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin F Crabtree define a semi-structured interview as a “set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s”.<sup>34</sup> The questions focused on how their journey in ‘fringe’ began, their approaches to organising their respective Fringes and their reasons for their policies.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, by asking “open-ended questions” I was able to get personal perspectives from the interviewees, which in turn allowed for a greater insight into the inner workings of their festivals.

In *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (2011), Baz Kershaw provides commentary on the first “collaborative theatre/ doctoral project to be successfully completed in the UK”<sup>36</sup> titled *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain* (2010). This project brought an object-based theatre experience into a coffee shop on a motorway, engaging with the many people that passed through it daily, whilst questioning the “relationship between space and place on motorways”.<sup>37</sup> Kershaw reflects that “the most vital starting point of this remarkable example of PaR was the chance observation of a bottle of urine on the thin strip of its hard shoulder”.<sup>38</sup> Fundamentally, it examines the reaction to ‘art’ in unlikely places. This example correlates with ‘fringe’ ideals of unexpected art in non-conventional places which aligns with the principles of the CFF. The town of Colchester had never had an event of this description before. Its streets, pubs, cafes, and the various types of other venues would be turned into make-shift performance spaces in a bid to provoke and challenge audiences and to unsettle their environment. Therefore, works such as *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain* (2010), inform the research-design for the CFF.

There were numerous ‘starting points’ for my practice; my first experiences of fringe as a performer in Indyfringe in 2015<sup>39</sup> or even my first day as a PhD student. I posited that my

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara DiCicco-Bloom and Benjamin F Crabtree, "The Qualitative Research Interview," *Medical Education* 40, no. 4 (2006).

<sup>35</sup> **See Appendices 2**

<sup>36</sup> Baz Kershaw, *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 73-74.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> \* **This experience at Indyfringe, Indianapolis, in 2015 is detailed in the prologue and included for the reader to have a rich description of the experiences of both performing at, and being a member of, a fringe festival. These personal experiences meant I had a pre-established network within the industry, which I**

‘starting point’ should be the embryonic conversations I had been having with local arts leaders about the prospect of the CFF. It was these (sometimes) informal discussions that ignited the CFF and began an informed and formalised enquiry between the artistic community within Colchester about ‘fringe theatre’. Similarly, my study employs a ‘doing-thinking’ - ‘thinking-doing’ approach and I aim to make these processes inseparable through a praxis paradigm. There will be features of other PaR studies that are necessarily left behind in my research, instead leaning into Skains’ identification of the multiple possible pathways of practice research.<sup>40</sup>

Through this study, I have designed and formed a mixed-method research methodology which in-turn, allowed the creation of practice within this PhD. The nomenclature I coin for the purposes of this research is ‘artist-centred creative producing’ (ACCP) and is formed out of my own journey in creating an artist friendly fringe festival through the CFF.

Fundamentally, ACCP looks to create optimal conditions for artists by using a set of curation and producing criteria at fringe festivals and positions their needs at the forefront of decision-making within festival making by the organisers. The list of criteria detailed within my ACCP visual framework includes, reliable communication, understanding accessibility needs, the level of financial return for artists and social/networking opportunities offered within the festival environment.<sup>41</sup>

For the purpose of my thesis, I define a producer as one that focuses on the financial and/or logistical aspects of arts production. This is contrary to a creative producer that would centre the creative output as their key focus. ACCP combines both roles, but instead focuses on the outcomes and experience for artists as its focus. It is hoped that ACCP becomes both a useful tool and approach in the development and delivery of future fringe festivals. The video documentation supporting this thesis will highlight the flexibility and responsiveness required in live and unfolding situations, and how the methodology – informing and developing from this work – has to bend around external factors such as environment and cultural attitudes in seeking to deliver advantageous outcomes and experience for artists.

At the time of writing, there is limited attention within academia on how festival organisation and structure effects participating artists and theatre companies. Of the existing research on

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**could develop through interviews and further field work and allow for different perspectives and methods on ‘fringe’ to transpire through my research.**

<sup>40</sup> Skains, "Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology."

<sup>41</sup> See Appendices 1

fringe festivals, most of these studies focus on economic impacts to local businesses, or questions of resource allocation or cultural-inhabitation, rather than practice based/led and autoethnographic-inflected research such as mine. In this study I draw upon foundational studies such as Sarah Thomasson's (2015) comparative research on two of the biggest 'Fringes' in the world (Edinburgh and Adelaide), Clare J.A Mitchell's (1993) analysis of the economic impact a theatre festival has on a less-populated community and Bruce Willems-Braun's (1991) thesis on subjectivity and "social formations"<sup>42</sup> within Canadian Fringe Festivals. I developed my research by using these pre-existing interdisciplinary studies to provide the foundations for my own PaR project. This process was an evolving cycle that compelled many questions, which in return inspired practice that eventually compelled more questions. Through it, I investigated the role of a festival and how it directly affects its participating artists and the wider cultural and creative experience.

I also engaged with *Producing on the Fringe: How Festival Structure Impacts Participant Experience* (2015) by Monica A. Miklas. Her thesis focuses on the specific business models and selection processes used by fringe festivals in the United States of America. Her work outlines that there are specifically three models used by American Fringes. Through a series of interviews with 'fringe artists' and producers, it looks to determine and suggest the best model for future participants. Miklas uses grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1999) to conduct her research.<sup>43</sup> Miklas's thesis is interested in "social processes" and determining how artists react to dynamic conditions. Miklas presents a 'Scaffolding Constraint' framework (that includes fringe festival characteristics within every model) and in a bid to develop a new fringe festival framework, she takes an oppositional stance against curated fringe festivals, declaring them "controversial". Miklas specifically highlights the New York International Fringe Festival and their outright refusal to the Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals (CAFF) to drop the word 'fringe' from their name. This opposes the view that a better standard of artistic content leads to a more positive all-round experience for performers. However, whilst designing my own 'fringe model' for the CFF, I consciously looked to build upon the work of Miklas and more specifically her development of a new 'Fringe framework' and acknowledged her view that "there is no such thing as a perfect fringe".

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<sup>42</sup> Bruce Willems-Braun, "Fringe Festivals, Cultural Politics, and the Negotiation of Subjectivity" (Text, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> Monica A Miklas, *Producing on the Fringe: How Fringe Festival Structure Impacts Participant Experience* (Long Beach: California State University, 2015).

My research synthesised extant studies and academic work in this area, with reflections from festival stakeholders, artists, and measurement on the impact of the festival on artists and companies performing at the CFF. To achieve this, I used a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. These ranged from using metrics from the CFF application forms/online box office system to conducting more expansive interviews with fringe leaders and CFF artists. My study has two parts: *research and practice*. Both of which informed the other and provided valuable and necessary insights into the next steps. The context for developing the ACCP framework and protocols is formed from three diverse case-studies on pre-existing fringe festivals and the original interviews with fringe festival organisers, artists and stakeholders. It will also utilise critical perspectives from theatre and performance studies' research and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks from the work of Harvie and Thomasson, and overlay these with queer theory, sociological discourse, human geography, and event-management studies. Using a responsive and evolving methodological approach to augment the unique practice research nature of my study, I provide new knowledge to the field and new approaches to the evolution of the fringe festival and creative industries.

I draw on knowledge of existing practice and methodologies of established Fringes, whilst examining the impact of local conditions to design and deliver a fringe festival in the town Colchester. The purpose of my study was not to evaluate the artistic quality of the work performed at the CFF. It instead looked to investigate the 'optimal' and advantageous conditions needed for an artist to prosper within a fringe festival setting. My study does not centre space/ place theory or reception-based theory as its main catalyst (although, it cannot discount the impact of local conditions in Colchester). Instead, I looked to provide original research and an evaluative thesis to investigate the methods used in creative practice and to suggest a future framework beneficial to participating artists, and the existing artistic community where the CFF resides.

Through this study, I have designed and created an original framework which informed the practice element of this PhD; ACCP is formed out of my own journey in creating an artist friendly fringe festival through the CFF. Attending, performing and volunteering at a variety of Fringes in 2019 and 2020 was central to my approach and development of the ACCP framework.

ACCP requires festival organisers to centre artists needs and experiences at the forefront of their festival modelling. In practice, ACCP requires organisers to keep financial costs low for

artists to allow them to maximise their profits. It creates both social and professional environments for artists, which allows relationships to be built. This in turn, can lead to positive opportunities for their careers, which otherwise may not have previously been presented to them. ACCP is concerned with the levels of diversity and accessibility within the industry and looks to combat this within its own modelling. As an experienced ‘fringe artist’ I’ve had the opportunity to perform in front of audiences at fringe festivals across the world, winning five awards in the process. Therefore, the use of my past/present first-hand experiences as a theatre-maker and artist within a ‘fringe theatre’ setting, guides my case-studies and interviews with fellow artists, enabling my own situated knowledge to guide this research through my PaR research methodology to the establishment of the ACCP framework.

## **Autoethnography**

In this thesis, I use autoethnography as a methodological tool to support my ACCP framework and to document the journey of designing and delivering the CFF from 2019 to 2021. Throughout the thesis, key moments from my own personal journey of living within the ‘fringe’ are conveyed and then analysed next to my own practice as an arts festival producer. Additionally, I have kept a video diary from the very beginnings of the CFF in 2019 and using transcripts from this source, I present the crucial decisions and moments that took place in creating the festival and then through reflection, evaluate the choice of action.

In the *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2021), Tony E. Adams et al. outline some of the benefits of autoethnography for researchers. They write:

Autoethnographers treat personal experience as vital and valid “data” to provide particular insights that might be inaccessible to detached observers. In doing so, we learn deeply about lived, day-to-day moments related to a research topic or issue, such as the complexity, messiness, and serendipity of social life; the personal, often-hidden nuances of challenging, thrilling, traumatic, joyful, and taboo encounters; patterns of experience that shift and change with time; the ways a past occurrence informs present and future acts; and the emotional, sensory, and material effects of experience that escape observation or even conscious awareness<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2021). 4.

Autoethnography showcases my “personal” highs and lows in the process that Adams describes and is an indispensable mode for detailing the “messiness” and “serendipity” that characterise not only the CFF, but arguably are key personality traits of all fringe festivals. The autoethnographic methodology in my research also enables me to name and explore some of the sensate and affective qualities of the CFF, to describe events of profound significance that might otherwise fall outside of “conscious awareness”. The practice research nature of creating the CFF was a necessarily fluid and flexible process and my decision-making as a festival director would be at the forefront of my research. Autoethnography is a strong research tool to capture these sometimes dynamic and alternating movements that creatives undertake when building work.

In *Autoethnography, Ethnographic Representation* (2020), Reed-Danahay states that “both professional ethnographers and everyday people can be autoethnographers” and it “places the self within a social and cultural context”.<sup>45</sup> Reed-Danahay presents four main genres of autoethnography currently being used by researchers. They are: ‘indigenous ethnography’, ‘autoethnographic memoir’, ‘field- work autoethnography’ and ‘autoethnography at home’. I chose to adopt a ‘fieldwork autoethnography’, which Reed-Danahay defines as accounts that “pay close attention to the experiences of fieldwork in the lives of the researchers as well as the doing of the research”.<sup>46</sup> This approach allowed me to centre my own experiences within the ‘fringe industry’ and my personal journey in creating the CFF to be at the forefront of my research. Although, due to the research taking place in my hometown, I conclude that my study has also incorporated some aspects from Reed-Danahay’s definition of ‘autoethnography at home’, which she describes as “ethnography conducted in a group or setting in which the professional ethnographer presents themselves as native or insider”.<sup>47</sup>

Writing as an autoethnographer has presented me with challenges about what to include and omit from my thesis. Kristina Medford explores these difficulties in *Caught with a Fake ID: Ethical Questions About Slippage in Autoethnography* (2006).<sup>48</sup> Medford refers to the left-out accounts by researchers as “research slippage”.<sup>49</sup> Medford also argues that “good auto-

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<sup>45</sup> Deborah Reed-Danahay et al., *Autoethnography, Ethnographic Representation* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2020). 1-3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Kristina Medford, "Caught with a Fake Id: Ethical Questions About Slippage in Autoethnography," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 5 (2006).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



ethnographers are ethical, critical, reflexive, and thoughtful when making decisions in their writing". To support a "reflexive and thoughtful" account of my practice and to help guide my decision-making on content inclusion as Medford suggests, my study is guided by a form of mixed-method research. Shorten and Smith define mixed-method research as "approach whereby researchers collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study".<sup>50</sup> One aspect of my mixed-method research takes form in video diaries, documenting the key moments during my time at the festivals. In *Research as storytelling: the use of video for mixed methods research* (2018), Walker and Boyer review the benefits and disadvantages of the using video as mix-method research. They determine that there are three modes in which a camera can be used: *Responsive*, *Interactive*, and *Constructive*:

Responsive mode is reactive. In this mode, the researcher captures and shows the viewer what is going on in front of the lens but does not directly interfere with the participants or events. Interactive mode puts the filmmaker into the storyline as a participant and allows the viewer to observe the interactions between the researcher and participant... In Constructive mode, the researcher reprocesses the recorded events to create an explicitly interpretive final product through the process of editing the video (MacDougall, 2011). All of these modes, in some way, frame or constrain what is captured and consequently shared with the audience.<sup>51</sup>

They conclude that "video can be a powerful way to share research findings with a broad audience especially when combining the traditions of ethnography for collecting data."<sup>52</sup>

Although, in the same article Walker highlights limitations for disseminating results with rigour. I use all three of the modes presented by Walker and Boyer, retaining a 'responsive' and 'interactive' mode to help guide the written commentary.

In *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (2016), Sarah Pink also argues that "digital ethnography research methods should be non-digital centric", allowing digital methods to be born out of a study's research questions.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the use of the video diary serves to support my autoethnographic accounts and underpin my exploration of my research questions rather than lead them. Pink's, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015) was a useful guide on the principles of inclusion, asserting the value of affect-rich reflections from lived experiences.<sup>54</sup> By using Pinks work on sensory ethnography through the form of my video diary entries, I

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<sup>50</sup> Allison Shorten and Joanna Smith, "Mixed Methods Research: Expanding the Evidence Base," *Evidence Based Nursing* 20, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>51</sup> Erica B. Walker and D. Matthew Boyer, "Research as Storytelling: The Use of Video for Mixed Methods Research," *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 3, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>52</sup> Erica Walker and Matthew Boyer, *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (London: SAGE, 2016), 10.

<sup>54</sup> \* **In the same work, Pink outlines the strength of using ethnographic filmmaking as a research tool.**

was able to textualize the sometimes-fecund and telling moments within the process which Pink describes as “unspoken, embodied and not easily or even possibly expressed in spoken or written words”.<sup>55</sup>

Autoethnographic studies on festival production, is a new methodological approach to both this topic and to the academy. However, James Macpherson’s (2021) autoethnographic study on how British audiences engage with outdoor arts and how they may contribute to the construction of public space is a useful reference point. The rationale for using autoethnography within my study was due to my existing observations of the “messy”, sensory, and elusive nature of ‘fringe’ and my pursuit of getting closer to a more granular identification of the qualities of ‘fringe’. It has allowed me to document my attempt of recreating the ‘fringe atmosphere’ which I have previously experienced as an artist, in my hometown of Colchester. Elspeth Frew and Jane Ali-Knight’s study “Independent Theatres and the Creation of a Fringe Atmosphere” (2009) concludes that marketing from fringe festival venues and “atmosphere in the streets”<sup>56</sup> is key to creating an “atmosphere” at a fringe festival. Although, as I argue throughout this thesis “atmosphere”, or a fringe environment, or a fringe paradigm is a complex, multi-layered pursuit. Therefore, by using autoethnography I will be able to present the ‘fringe atmosphere’ of the CFF, which will ultimately highlight the overall experiences of the artists and will provide key answers to some of my research questions.

### **Fringe: A Queer Experience**

Through my study I look to the work of queer theorists Christopher Reed, Peter Drucker, Gordon Brent Ingram and Ether Peeran. The word ‘queer’ and the use of queer theory within research has presented different interpretations around the terminology. Jeremy W. Webster in his study *Queering the Seventeenth Century: Historicism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Literature* (2008) traces the term back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the word is suggested as something ‘strange’ or out-of-place.<sup>57</sup> In *Queer Theories, Transitions* (2003),

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<sup>55</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Sage, 2015).3.

<sup>56</sup> Elspeth Frew and Jane Ali-Knight, "Independent Theatres and the Creation of a Fringe Atmosphere," *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 3, no. 3 (2009). 214.

<sup>57</sup> \* **However, in 1895 during the trial of Oscar Wilde a letter is sent by the father of the man who Wilde had been accused of having an affair with. In this letter, he refers to Wilde and other men like him as “snob**

Donald Hall writes: “there is no ‘queer theory’ in the singular, only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called queer theories”.<sup>58</sup> Sociologist Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo outlines it as a “contested term between scholars and activists”, with the latter fighting purely for its use within sexual politics as a definition of sexuality that “rejects normative definitions of appropriate feminine and masculine sexual behaviour”.<sup>59</sup> Hidalgo states that “much queer theory suggests it is completely “un-queer” to even begin to define queer”. This view is shared by Annamarie Jagose in her work, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1996), arguing that rather than a progressive or reactionary term, queer theory strives to not have “any fixed value”.<sup>60</sup> This thesis aims to playfully utilise the notion of no “fixed value” as Jagose suggests, whilst also drawing upon the radicality, otherness and marginality of queerness – all values that productively align with fringe. Barber states that “queer is understood as something that is outside the “normal,” something fluid and unfixed.”<sup>61</sup> I argue the very nature of ‘fringe’ positions itself “outside the normal” as Barber describes, its identity founded on an alternative ‘unfixed’ offer to artists and audiences. Due to the non-curated process of programming deployed by Fringes, the content and style of work seen at fringe festivals is unpredictable and sometimes indefinable. This in turn, fits into Barber’s description of queer as “something not definable by society”.

In my study, queer is deployed both to illuminate aspects of the practice that were created by artists who define themselves as queer in relation to sexuality and identity, as well as in relation to the wider idea of ‘fringe’ being outside of the normative. In “Queer Theory and Heteronormativity” (2021), queer theorists Page Valentine Regan and Elizabeth J. Meyer state that “queer theory seeks to disrupt dominant and normalizing binaries that structure our

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queers”.<sup>57</sup> The inclusion of the word ‘snob’ in the letter suggests in this man’s opinion that those affiliated with homophobic tendencies in late Victorian England were primarily upper-class or wealthy men. Therefore, this could be considered as a key shift in the connotation of queerness from being ‘that which is strange’, to operating as a term to describe male homosexuality. In the same work Jagose highlights that in the 1980s, the word would be used as an offensive colloquial term for “homophobic abuse”. However, in “How Has Queer Theory Influenced the Ways We Think about Gender?” (2016), G. Piantato argues it now refers to “to individuals that were attracted to others of the same sex, but also to individuals’ sexuality and bodies that did not conform with the societal dominant norms”. The historic account of the transformation of the word ‘queer’ does present difficulties when applying queer theory to research which sits outside of sexual and/or identity studies.

<sup>58</sup> Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories, Transitions*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). 5.

<sup>59</sup> K. and Hidalgo Barber, Danielle Antoinette, "Queer," *Queer: Britannica* (2017).

<sup>60</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: nyu Press, 1996).1.

<sup>61</sup> K. and Hidalgo Barber, Danielle Antoinette, "Queer," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2017).

understandings of gender and sexuality”.<sup>62</sup> Another angle on why the ‘world of fringe’ is a queer place, is its directional push away from dominant heteronormativity as Regan and Mayer suggest. The programmes at fringe festivals are diverse, multi-gendered and look to celebrate LGBTQIA+ culture, striving to encourage audiences to position themselves in a fluid world which considers multiple identities, sexualities and genders which are “impossible to catalogue”.<sup>63</sup>

Jagose states, historically “the term queer was, at best slang for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse”. I am a straight, white man, who grew up on a council estate in Essex. Previously, I looked at the word ‘queer’ as a term that defined one’s sexuality, and asked why would I place myself in a queer environment if I am ‘straight’? It wasn’t until I left Essex and went to university in London where I first started to encounter a different way of living and thinking. I began to encounter queer people in queer-friendly places. Piantato states that “queer does not concern any particular identity category, but it is an umbrella term that, refuses labels and rejects stereotypes”.<sup>64</sup> As I started to perform my work at Fringes, I encountered people who lived as Piantato describes. The people I may have previously considered strange or eccentric, were now ones I considered bold and courageous. All the fringe festivals I visited seemed to attract and celebrate ‘queer life’. So, when the idea of starting my own Fringe back home in Essex first crystallised in my mind, I did start to wonder how the local community of Colchester would react to an event with such a panoply and diversity of identities. In reaching for an ACCP framework, the risk of a hostile reaction to openly queer people certainly worried me, but the benefits of promoting a queer-friendly event for the LGTBQIA+ community within the town outweighed these concerns.

## **Bakhtin**

Fringes can be an ‘artistic revolution’ and a rebellion against the mainstream, ideas embedded within the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Author Simon Dentith positions Bakhtin as a writer and thinker who “provides a powerfully charged account of the transition to modernity in the

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<sup>62</sup> Page Valentine Regan and Elizabeth J. Meyer, "Queer Theory and Heteronormativity," (Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>63</sup> G. Piantato, "How Has Queer Theory Influenced the Ways We Think About Gender?," *Working Paper of Public Health* 5 (2016). 4.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

culture of the Continent".<sup>65</sup> Here I am particularly interested in his exploration of 'carnival' in *Rabelais and his World* (1965) and the additional licence this space grants to alternative and transgressive modes of social behaviour as explored. This book examines the work of François Rabelais, whilst focusing on the novels *Gargantua* (1534) and *Pantagruel* (1532), and Bakhtin provides a reappraisal of social tensions and traditions upended in a free-flowing epic-story space. Bakhtin argues that Rabelais's work is either misunderstood as simply vulgar, or suppressed as sectarian, and addresses this by re-examining the expurgated and censored text and identifying a celebration of the corporeal. First written in the 1930s during Stalin's reign in Russia,<sup>66</sup> this theoretical literature asserts the purpose of the symbolic destruction of the authoritative figure in society and its dissection and exploration of iconoclasm, and of human behaviours in spaces outside the official sanction, offers productive opportunities for the analysis of Fringe.

I argue throughout this thesis that Fringes and Bakhtin's carnival possess the same spirit and present an alternative to everyday life to its community members. Bakhtin explains carnival as a community occurrence, reconfiguring a multitude to whole, organised in a manner that defies the usual understandings of socioeconomic and ideopolitical organisation.

Additionally, during the time of the carnival everything (except violent acts) are allowed, and alongside a temporary shift in social permissions, Bakhtin declares that those who take-part in the carnival exist in an transient alternative reality, stating that "while carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it".<sup>67</sup> I argue that Bakhtin's view that carnival is a rebellion against a higher authority is also linked to 'fringe' and can be seen since its birth in 1947 in Edinburgh. In *Introducing Bakhtin* (1997) Sue Vice states that:

Bakhtin describes the literary genre, originally medieval of 'grotesque realism' as one opposed to all forms of high art and literature. It includes parody and any other form of discourse which 'bring (s) down to earth' anything ineffable or authoritarian, a task achieved principally through mockery.<sup>68</sup>

Of course, not all 'fringe shows' fit into this description of "parody" described by Vice. She identifies Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism' as one that is "opposed to all forms of "high art" and

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<sup>65</sup> Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: Intro Read* (London: Routledge, 2003). 66.

<sup>66</sup> \* **Bakhtin submitted his thesis in 1940. However, due to the outbreak of war and exile from his Soviet nation (due to the questioning of his loyalty), he didn't actually receive his degree until 1951.**

<sup>67</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin and Helene Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World," in *The Applied Theatre Reader* (Routledge, 2020). 7.

<sup>68</sup> Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). 155.

a means to rebel against authority. I argue that this is a direct correlation with the ideology that ‘fringe theatre’ is a rebellion against mainstream theatre (the “authority”) and the customs and conventional rituals that come with it. ‘Fringe models’ usually adopt a programme that has not been vetted for appropriate content and quality, that champions shorter shows, that are cheaper to attend and have unconventional staging in sometimes non-traditional theatrical spaces, which produce a certain level of informality for its ‘fringe audience’. I also claim that a Fringe breaks down ‘social barriers’ between artists and audiences (pre-show and post-show) that are usually in place within a more conventional theatre setting, aligning to Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival instigating the ‘whole’, over and above the crowd.

## **Outline**

In the first chapter *Fringe Models*, I will present three original case-studies of international fringe festivals each representing one of the three most common ‘fringe’ models used today. The fringe festivals chosen for case-studies are Fringe Theatre Fest (U.K), Prague Fringe (Czech Republic) and Adelaide Fringe (Australia). I conducted original interviews with each of these fringe festival organisers and experienced the festivals first-hand as an artist, volunteer, and audience member over a two-year period. Using the work of queer theorists Reed and Drucker this chapter will identify whether queer spaces are accessible within ‘CAFF Model’ Fringes. Additionally, I build on the work of Robert G. Hollands, who through a quantitative survey on Prague Fringe in 2007, mapped possible motivations and profiles of audiences, artists and volunteers attending. Finally, by combining Bakhtin and queer theorists Brent Ingram and Peeran I highlight some of the political issues of Fringes inhabiting spaces. Through these case-studies, I highlight the differences within the models and present why some models may not be best suited for particular geographical environments or fit within the ACCP framework. I will then outline how I applied this knowledge of extant practice and methodologies to my own practice in the formation of the Colchester Fringe Festival and my formulation of the ACCP framework.

The second chapter *Making the Fringe* will document my process in creating the CFF. It will highlight the key decisions made and the relationships built in my pursuit of creating a new fringe festival. It will also exhibit how the COVID-19 pandemic and the existential threat to

gatherings and groups of people nearly ended CFF. This chapter highlights the numerous postponements caused by social distancing requirements and lockdowns led to brief change of direction in my own definition and curation of ‘fringe’. This chapter draws on the evaluation of the practices and methods used by other Fringes in the previous chapter, and documents my own deployment of this data in my decision-making in the modelling of the CFF whilst trying to embed the values of the ACCP framework. It will build upon the work of *Producing on the Fringe* (2015) by Miklas and uses a combination of Bakhtin and queer theory to question the relationship between a fringe festival and its community, presenting the three conditions which allow a Fringe to be established.

In the third chapter *Living in the Fringe*, I use autoethnography and the work of Pink to outline my lived experience during the delivery of the CFF. Here I argue that Fringes *inhabit* spaces, which in turn can produce a queer environment for its community members. I draw upon the work of queer theorists Sara Ahmed, Jagose and Halberstam to explore the key principles of ‘fringe’ and determine the relationship between a fringe festival and its expanding and sometimes unknowing ‘community’.

The fourth chapter *Evaluating the Fringe* analyses the way in which my exploration of other Fringes allowed me to deliver my own and asks whether the CFF was designed and curated in a successful deployment of the ACCP framework. It will draw upon evaluation theory of Donald Getz to evaluate the relationships that were built at the CFF, and the atmosphere created. Chapter Four discusses the productivity and the downsides of permissibility, through a lens of a culture which encourages the excessive drinking of alcohol. I evaluate where the CFF encouraged these social interactions and use Bakhtin, and particularly his evocation of the ‘feast of the fools’, to get to an understanding of the context of this activity.

This thesis finally concludes that *Place. Space* and *Artists* were the key factors in successfully establishing the CFF which embodied the characteristics found within the ACCP framework. Also, it will alight on the benefits and challenges of delivering the optimal model of determine that specific ‘Fringe Models’ are suited to individual environments, due to the pre-existing relationship a community has with ‘the arts’. It concludes that the definition of ‘fringe’ is a genre of an art form, which moves away from more conventional and artistic customs. It will highlight that the incentives for artists performing at Fringes will vary, but the particular ‘fringe model’ and its policies will dictate what is offered to artists.

## Fringe Models

### **Introduction**

In this section, I explore the three most common ‘Fringe Models’ currently used by Fringes at the time of writing. Using ACCP, I employ data from transcripts of original interviews and autoethnographic reflection on specific fringe festivals to produce three original case-studies. Each case-study will represent one of the three common models. The three models explored by my study will be known as: Edinburgh, CAFF (Canadian), and the European. The three international fringe festivals representing these models as case-studies are Adelaide Fringe (Australia), Fringe Theatre Fest (United Kingdom) and Prague Fringe (Czech Republic).

I enumerated below the rationale for using these specific fringe festivals to represent the models within the case-studies. At the time of writing, Adelaide Fringe is the second biggest fringe festival in the world and one of the longest running Fringes currently active.

Furthermore, this provided fertile research ground and allowed me in-depth insight into the atmosphere and inner workings of Adelaide Fringe as I would be attending the World Fringe Congress (WFC), which would be running alongside the festival in 2020. Similarly, Prague Fringe offered me an opportunity to understand the logistical and operational functions within a Fringe through multi-layered participation. This proximity to a major European cultural event, provided me with insights into features that advantaged and disadvantaged artists, and was intrinsic to my conceptualisation of the CFF. To represent the CAFF model, I chose Fringe Theatre Fest (Barnstaple) as it allowed me to explore the trans-geographical composition of ‘fringe’ structures, with its organisers establishing a fringe festival by using a pre-existing foreign model. Although, Barnstaple is a lot smaller in terms of its population compared to Colchester, there are similarities productive for this research in comparing in the size and identity and character of place. It should be noted that these are Western and ‘white’ examples of ‘Fringe Models’, and this is representative of the distribution of locations of fringes around the world.

I will use this data produced from the case-studies to argue that ‘Fringe Models’ are adapted to their environment and although they all share similar principles of ‘fringe’, the unique characteristics of their models make them more favourable for contrasting stakeholders. In the following chapter, I demonstrate how I used this original data within my ACCP framework to determine the best model for the CFF.



The WFN state that there are now over 300 fringe festivals commencing globally each year.<sup>69</sup> These figures suggest artists wanting to participate at fringe festivals aren't suffering from a lack of choice or opportunity to perform their work. However, there isn't one ultimate approach adopted by each 'fringe model' and because of this, opportunities, costs and benefits presented to artists by Fringes vary significantly from one fringe festival to another. This creates issues for artists who are expected to navigate through different expectations and visible and invisible costs presented to them by each fringe festival. Which undoubtedly, creates financial and/or social barriers for those wishing to present their performance work.

In this chapter, I begin to answer three key research questions for my study. Firstly, I unpick the benefits artists gain through performing their work at a fringe festival. Secondly, by examining three contrasting models and determining what characteristics they share, I begin to analyse the key principles of 'fringe'. Finally, as there is currently very little comparable research in the field, I provide a broad purview of the practices and methodologies of Fringes and demonstrate the application of this combined knowledge into the design and delivery of a fringe festival for Colchester.

## Methodology

The methodology used for these case-studies was collected from qualitative research in the form of first-hand experiences and autoethnographic entries made when I attended these festivals, which in turn guided my future practice. The qualitative data gathered for these case-studies was also generated out of original interviews conducted over a three-month period in 2019. The interviewees were either current directors or programmers at U.K and international fringe festivals. The list of interviewees and their represented fringe festivals are as follows: Steve Gove, Founder/ Director of Prague Fringe. Andrew Silverwood, Venue Manager at Wandsworth Arts Fringe. Bill Buffery and Gill Nathanson, Founders / Directors of Fringe Theatre Fest in North Devon. Kevin Charles Patterson, Founder/ CEO of San Diego International Fringe Festival. Heather Croall, Director/ CEO of Adelaide Fringe and Jill Roszell, Administrator of CAFF and former Executive Director of Edmonton Fringe.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Network, "Fringe a-Z Calendar."

<sup>70</sup> \* **It should be known that before conducting the interviews, I had an existing relationship with four out of these five Fringes. This had mostly been as an artist, although I had visited Prague Fringe as a tourist and**

As stated in the previous chapter, in these interviews, I used a semi-structured format. By asking open-ended questions to the interviewees, I received more personal and specific reflections about their own journeys within ‘fringe’, and data on the evolution of their practice as producers and creative-producers. Thus, in this chapter I highlight Fringe leaders and stakeholders’ personal affection to ‘fringe’ and their rationale for positioning themselves in this ‘alternative world’ within the arts industry.

## Models

I evidence throughout this thesis that there are three models typically deployed by fringe organisers which are on offer to participating artists. I present the view that the characteristics of a fringe festival, define its model. I have also determined that there are three main characteristics which fall into these models. The first being if a Fringe is open access or juried, which I define as the following:

**Open Access:** Artists can participate at a Fringe if they can either find a venue willing to host their work or they are randomly selected by a fringe festival.

**Juried:** Fringes adopting this approach, select their programme judged on an application process. I present throughout this thesis the view that Fringes are multi-art formed and are not curated.

In a case-study on Fringe Theatre Fest, I contest the term ‘open access’ used by fringe festivals. Fundamentally, it can be used as a political and ideological confidence-trick to artists as it implies that anyone can take part. In the context of my research, the word *access* means anyone can apply, therefore there is a degree of *openness* to the application process. However, what typically isn’t announced to artists who are accepted is there are still other financial and/or logistical barriers that may prevent participation.

The second characteristic is whether the Fringes manage the venues or whether they look to connect artists and spaces as a third-party. Lastly, the models are determined by the financial

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then as a volunteer in 2018 and 2019 respectively. The only interviewee I had not previously met were Heather Croall of Adelaide Fringe.

structure of the costs and payments for artists. Using these three characteristics, I define the models as the following:

**The CAFF (Canadian Model):** The only legally recognised ‘fringe model’, which all Fringes taking place in Canada have adopted. It’s an open-access model, where artists are either selected on a first-come-first-served basis or drawn out of a hat in a lottery format. The Fringe manage their own venues, with selected artists paying a registration fee to cover the costs. Artists are paid 100% of their ticket-sale income.

**The European Model:** This is a juried model. Artists apply to take-part and are judged and selected on their proposal. The Fringe manage their own venues and selected artists are placed in suitable spaces from the information they provide on their application. The costs and payment structure for artists varies, but typically artists will earn money from a ticket-split.

**The Edinburgh Model:** An open-access model, in which artists pay a fee to the Fringe to be part of the festival programme. The Fringe doesn’t manage venues, instead the artist must source their own performance space by picking or being selected from a set of businesses that have established themselves as ‘official venues’ at a Fringe. This creates a deal between venue and artist, in which the venue may contract the artist to hire the performance space, or alternatively an agreement could be made on a ticket percentage split.<sup>71</sup>

As of 2022, there are currently 283 fringe festivals registered by the World Fringe Network (WFN).<sup>72</sup> However, there are other established Fringes which have not registered and/or become WFN member festivals making this number greater.<sup>73</sup> Out of the 283 festivals registered with WFN, I found that only 163 of them were active in 2021/ 2022. This signifies that the WFN database is not a wholly authoritative source, as inevitably the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the termination of many fringe festivals.

As seen in *Chart 1*<sup>74</sup> the most common fringe models from the data collected were the CAFF and ‘European’ models. I argue this demonstrates a directional push away from the older and larger ‘Edinburgh Model’ Fringes, which are commonly found in the United Kingdom and

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<sup>71</sup> **Examples of these models can be found in Table 2**

<sup>72</sup> Network, "Fringe a-Z Calendar."

<sup>73</sup> \* **An example of this would be the Cambridge Fringe Comedy Festival in the U.K.**

<sup>74</sup> \* **See Appendix 1**

Australia. Although, with ‘Edinburgh Model’ festivals needing a large cohort of venues, partners and sponsors, it could also be due to smaller towns which host Fringes not having the space or facilities, as well as the levels of financial backing from businesses in commercialising their respected festivals to adopt this model. Moreover, 7% of the Fringes fit into a hybrid category, as they possessed characteristics from all three models.<sup>75</sup>

CAFF is an organisation that connects fringe festivals which share the same principles in their festival model and design. It was established in 1982 and currently has 32 member festivals, including 11 members from the United States of America.<sup>76</sup> If a fringe festival wants to acquire membership of CAFF, then it must follow five principles. The work presented must be completely uncensored, artists must receive 100% of their ticket income, and shows must only be selected either at random, or on a first-come-first-served basis. Fringes must be easily accessible for audiences and artists, and they must promote inclusivity, diversity and multiculturalism. This aligns to the Canadian political and sociological thinking, with the Canadian state declaring the problem of diversity in Canada “has been solved”.<sup>77</sup> CAFF describes these principles as a way of putting “artists and audiences in direct contact”.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, I suggest within the case-study on Fringe Theatre Fest, that not censoring shows and selecting artists completely at random can reduce ‘quality’ in a programme. Fringes no doubt celebrate chaos and randomness, which is evidenced in fringe festival programmes and reviewer’s publications at many Fringes across the world each year. However, CAFF’s principles may prove to be detrimental to the reputation of ‘fringe’ in the long term. Each year, Fringes look to attract new Fringers to buy tickets for shows in their programmes and if the first show they see lacks quality, they could be less inclined to see another.

All three case-studies represent one of the three models I have outlined in this chapter. They will demonstrate the different methodologies used by fringe festivals and their own unique

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<sup>75</sup> \* An example of a ‘Hybrid Fringe’ would be the Minnesota Fringe Festival. In this Fringe, artists are selected from a lottery and are placed into Fringe-Managed Venues. At first glance, fringe festival presents itself as a CAFF model Fringe. However, I determine this as a hybrid model Fringe as artists are paid 70% of their ticket-sales, rather than the 100% guaranteed by all member CAFF member festivals. I was unable to collect data for 22% of the 163 WFN member festivals. This was due to information on application processes, venue management and the financial structure not being available or potentially up to date.

<sup>76</sup> The Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals, "About Caff," <https://fringefestivals.com/about-caff/>.

<sup>77</sup> Richard J. F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>78</sup> Festivals, "About Caff."

polices. It will reveal the specific conditions needed for a Fringe to be created and begin to allow me to determine the motives for Fringers participating at the respected festivals.

## **Adelaide Fringe, Australia**

The Festival City

### **Introduction**

Whilst focusing primarily on Adelaide Fringe, through this case-study I will highlight the ‘Edinburgh Model’ and its strengths and flaws. I also explore two of my stated research questions. Firstly, this section will look to provide a definition of the word ‘fringe’. Also, it will consider whether a Fringe should be considered as a ‘little sister’ to other arts events or become its own entity. Equally, I will determine if fringe festivals can move away from, or even outgrow, its ‘parent’. Secondly, by highlighting some of the training and networking opportunities offered to artists by Adelaide Fringe’s international marketplace known as ‘The Honeypot’, I determine some of the benefits that artists can gain from performing their work at a Fringe.

This case-study focuses on the Adelaide Fringe, one of the largest and oldest fringe festivals which is currently active today. This account has been guided by my first-hand experiences from the World Fringe Congress (WFC) in 2020, which was hosted by Adelaide Fringe.<sup>79</sup> In the previous year I had interviewed its Director and CEO Heather Croall.<sup>80</sup> Through this interview, I was able to gain insight into their core-values and festival structure. Using queer theory and specifically the work of Ingram, I will unpick the financial implications of this open access model for artists.

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<sup>79</sup> \* The WFC is a bi-yearly event coincides at the same time as its host Fringe. Fringe festivals bid for the right to hold the event and World Fringe members are then asked to vote for their preferred choice. In previous years, the WFC has been held in both Edinburgh and Montréal at their respected fringe festivals. The 2020 edition of the WFC would be held in Southwestern Australia and hosted by the Adelaide Fringe, which at the time of writing is the second largest fringe festival in the world and has been running for over 60 years.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 2

## Environmental Context

Established in 1960, the Adelaide Fringe is at the time of writing the largest arts festival in the southern hemisphere and the second biggest fringe festival in the world. The city of Adelaide is known in Australia as the ‘festival city’, as it hosts a wide range of arts, sport and culinary events throughout the year. In fact, the month of March is particularly busy in the city’s festival calendar, and it is this month that it has given Adelaide its nationally recognised term in the media as ‘March Madness’.<sup>81</sup> In addition to this, it is during this time that the Adelaide Fringe traditionally closes.

The Adelaide Fringe has adopted the ‘Edinburgh Model’. Furthermore, in her interview Croall highlighted that these Fringes have had a relationship for the last 15 years, where they both share knowledge and resources with each other. However, some evidence highlighted in my interview with Croall suggests a few minor differences between the Adelaide Fringe and EFF. For example, Croall stated that the “models are very similar”. But the services they provide “might be a little bit different”.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, Croall stated that another difference between the two fringe festivals is their respected Fringe Clubs. She said:

The Adelaide Fringe runs the club and it’s for the artists, as well as everyone else participating. So, venues, sponsors and so on. Everyone who is participating in the Fringe. So, that is something that we probably have that’s different because in Edinburgh the ‘artist bars’ are connected to the venues.

Adelaide Fringe, like EFF, is dominated by established and well-branded venues, which take form in Spiegel tents in city parks. However, there has been criticism on its programme size, scope and focus. For example, journalist Malcolm Sutton highlights that there are those that believe it has become “too large or too packed with stand-up comedy to still be considered a true fringe”.<sup>83</sup> However, Croall clearly measures their success by the number of tickets sold each year. She said, “our ticket growth is the focus of our life. People always say do you want more shows? We don’t mind, it’s open access. We don’t dictate how many shows, because we wait and see who registers”.<sup>84</sup> In theory, the Adelaide Fringe doesn’t “dictate” the

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<sup>81</sup> Amanda Smith, "This Is Why Adelaide Is Known as the Festival City," *The Upsider*, <https://theupsider.com.au/adelaide-festival-city/4633>.

<sup>82</sup> Heather Croall, interview by Cameron Abbott-Betts, 30 September, 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Malcolm Sutton, "Adelaide Fringe: World's Second Largest Arts Festival 'Still a Fringe', as Attention Turns to Interstate," <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-24/adelaide-fringe-still-a-fringe-as-attention-turns-interstate/8296886>.

<sup>84</sup> Croall.

number, nor the type of shows that are part of their programme every year. However, as I have previously suggested, although ‘Edinburgh Model’ Fringes publicise themselves as being completely open access to artists, what isn’t highlighted is the amount of curatorial power that the partner venues hold over the application process. I argue that this makes it another version of a juried fringe festival, which is devolved to the specific strategies and commercial interests of individual venues.

Unlike the CAFF Model, the term the ‘Edinburgh Model’ has no definitive rules or regulations for festivals to follow. Instead, like the ‘European Model’ fringe festivals, those that fall into this model share similar characteristics and/or policies. Typically, there is no application process for artists implemented by the fringe festivals. Instead, artists pay a direct fee to the Fringe which enables them to be part of the programme. However, it will usually be the artists’ responsibility to find their own venue to showcase their work. This gives a lot of power to the venues in choosing the ‘best work’ befitting their artistic and commercial brand, and in-turn creates a separate application process for artists to go through before being able to take-part at a Fringe. Also, this means the financial structure for artists varies significantly.<sup>85</sup> In “Edinburgh Fringe Sustainable Practice Award Provocation” (2018), Harry Giles writes:

Artists struggle to make money, most pay to perform and many lose money... very few venues make money and that trickles up to the top; the only real profit is in owning a pub, or a hotel, or an AirBnB room – or a University. On top of that, the gravitational pull of the Fringe means there’s three months of the year where performing artists can’t really find paying work... This is a completely unworkable economic, financial and cultural model: it cannot keep going.<sup>86</sup>

Giles clearly takes a strong view against the economic sustainability and “struggle” for artists performing at the EFF and highlights that the location of Edinburgh is the main beneficiary of the Fringe instead of the artists. Additionally, the view that artists are having to “pay to perform” with many not regaining their financial input extends the argument that artists may be looking to ‘Edinburgh Model’ Fringes as a form of a training or professional development, exposure, working alongside profiled names in the industry or a networking opportunity rather than a sustainable way of earning income for their artistic craft.

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<sup>85</sup> \* **Examples of this could be artists required to rent the theatre outright for the duration of their run, paying a flat fee or agreeing a percentage split from ticket sales.**

<sup>86</sup> Harry Giles, "Edinburgh Fringe Sustainable Practice Award Provocation," *CSPA Quarterly*, no. 20 (2018).

Examples of Fringes that fall into this model can be found in large parts of the U.K in Edinburgh, London and Brighton and across Australia. As the Fringes that have adopted this model don't manage their venues, the size of the programmes and the duration of these festivals is usually much larger and longer. In theory, any number of venues and artists can be involved if they can find space for each other. I argue that this 'fringe model' is extremely beneficial for the location of these festivals, encouraging cultural tourism. However, the large commercial nature of these Fringes can mean that a large selection of artists struggle to sell tickets.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, 'Edinburgh Model' Fringes financial motivations form from a commercial approach and in turn could reject a queer space to ever be created for their communities.



Figure 2. Fringe Leaders and Makers at the WFC in 2020 (Photo by author).

During my video documentation, I reflect on my time in Adelaide at the WFC in 2020 alongside the Fringe itself,<sup>88</sup> Some of the specific highlights of the programme for me were Adelaide Fringe artist Matt Tarrant sharing his personal 'fringe' success story. This reiterated my personal belief that Fringes can be an extremely beneficial experience for artists at the start of their careers. Also, Lucy Eveleigh's (Executive Director of Toronto Fringe) panel on how Fringes can support artists highlighted the complexities of balancing artist experience verses the financial input through artist fees needed to run a Fringe. The final day open-space

<sup>87</sup> Dan Barker, "Fringe-Goers and Acts Being 'Priced out' of Edinburgh, Venues Warn," *The Independent*, 28 August 2022.

<sup>88</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the 'Fringe' Experience." 00:52:57.



session, saw all delegates discuss how we can better connect as festivals with the prospect of growing partnerships, which could be beneficial to all. <sup>89</sup>

### Fringe as a 'little sister' to Edinburgh? Or Fringe as an ethos...

The EFF has been described by Billington as a “cultural hyper-market” <sup>90</sup> due to its ever-increasing size before the pandemic in 2020, which could in turn encourage “neo-liberal” behaviour as Quinn describes. The EFF’s size and commercial presence promotes free-market capitalism within its programming. However, the smaller Fringes currently active at the time of writing, typically do not have the same relationship with outside commercial and funding bodies. Additionally, with the EFF programming well-established celebrity comedy acts, journalists such as Mat McCabe have stated that the EFF has become too “exclusive and mainstream”. <sup>91</sup> This could in fact position the EFF away from both the ethos of ‘fringe’ and from being a queer event. Furthermore, like the word ‘queer’, the ideology of Fringe has arguably changed over history. The birth of ‘fringe’ occurred in Edinburgh as an offspring of another festival. Yet, many smaller Fringes currently active today position themselves away from the ‘sister festival’ ideology. Instead, they are looking to ‘fringe’ as a concept or type of art form. This in turn can make them independent of authority gained by financial injection from local, national or organisational bodies. Undoubtedly, this leads to fewer funding opportunities for these smaller festivals, but the ethos of ‘fringe’ and the aspiration of providing a ‘queer environment’ can remain alive.

In reaching towards a definition of ‘fringe’, I am also working through the central principles, characteristics, and codes to conceptualise it as an ethos. The task of providing a coherent definition of the word ‘fringe’ was experienced as difficult for all the interviewees. From the outset, it appears a simple question for a seasoned fringe director to answer. However, it became clear there were numerous definitions, which were personal, ideological and led by

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<sup>89</sup> \* **The WFC demonstrated to me that all Fringes are different in their size, ethos and business models, although there was a clear love shared by its leaders for the art they produced. My daytimes at the WFC were filled with conversation and debate and evenings with the delights of the Fringe itself. It seemed for that week the delegates lived inside a little bubble, pushing aside any anxieties we had of the news and the potential pandemic.**

<sup>90</sup> Billington, "Why I Hate the Fringe."

<sup>91</sup> Matt McCabe, "Edinburgh Fringe Is in on the Brink of a Revolt Because It's Becoming Too Exclusive and Mainstream," News Anyway, <https://www.newsanyway.com/2017/08/25/edinburgh-fringe-brink-revolt-becoming-exclusive-mainstream/>.

philosophical experiences rather than precisely phrased terminology. When asked for his definition of ‘fringe’ during his interview Gove said, “it’s incredibly difficult. I think the ultimate definition of ‘fringe’ has to go back to Edinburgh, to the roots of it starting, to it becoming very grass roots and literally outside of the main festival programme”.<sup>92</sup> As seen from this transcript, there is a sense of romance for the EFF for some fringe directors and how through artistic protest it radically opposed the EIF’s initial programming policies.<sup>93</sup> The qualitative data my study has produced so far suggests that for many, the first point of reference to the word ‘fringe’ is indeed the EFF. However, if for Gove any definition of ‘fringe’ has to begin with Edinburgh, this points towards a definition of an art-form that has evolved and changed, just as the EFF has in its 73-year-old history. This theory is supported by interviewee and experienced ‘fringe artist’ Silverwood, “what the actual definition of ‘fringe’ is and what it actually is now are very different things. It’s meant to be boundary-breaking and an original performance that you wouldn’t be able to get anywhere else. But it’s no longer that”!<sup>94</sup> Silverwood proceeded to say through its expanding programme, ‘big-name’ comedy acts selling out packed auditoriums, that the EFF has become too ‘mainstream’ and has moved away from its core ideals of being a stage for ‘all’. Silverwood’s view can be supported in a report on the 2009 edition of the EFF by academic Sam Friedman who states the “creeping commercialism seeping into the comedy programme”.<sup>95</sup> However, one of the key principles of ‘fringe’ born in Edinburgh was to be a place which looked to embrace ‘all’ artists.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, it could be argued that it would go against many fundamental principles of ‘fringe’ to exclude even the ‘big name’ comedians that Silverwood describes. Instead, Silverwood uses the term “boundary-breaking” when stating his definition, this is another example of personal and subjective terminology in defining the word ‘fringe’, which ultimately escapes a firm and precise definition.

I have determined that a fringe festival doesn’t have to be related to a pre-existing event. I will now ask if the ‘sister festival’ ideology means that all Fringes are the offspring of the EFF. In the case of the Adelaide Fringe, at first glance, much could be seen to be shared with the EFF; two of the largest festivals in the world and the also the oldest Fringes. I argue that

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<sup>92</sup> Steve Gove, interview by Cameron Abbott-Betts, 01 July, 2019. 2.

<sup>93</sup> \* **Although scholar Rebecca Finkel points out that British arts festivals began in 1945 at Gloucester Festival, and not at the Edinburgh Festivals which occurred two years later.**

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Silverwood, interview by Cameron Abbott-Betts, 17 July, 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Sam Friedman, "Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2009: The Year of the Anti-Comedian," *Comedy Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>96</sup> Edinburgh Festival Fringe, "The Fringe Story," <https://www.edfringe.com/about/about-us/the-fringe-story>.

Adelaide Fringe initially adopted the EFF model as an available blueprint, although, there are signs that Adelaide is moving away from this model and might even outgrow their ‘big sister’. During her interview Croall was evasive when asked if the Adelaide Fringe model differed to the ‘Edinburgh Model’. She told me that although the models were very “similar”, it would be something that I would have to hear from artists.<sup>97</sup> Based on my personal experiences at both festivals, I argue that their models are very alike. However, Croall adopts an interesting attitude in which she centres the artist viewpoint above her own. Therefore, I put the same question to interviewee Silverwood, who has performed at Adelaide Fringe and the EFF numerous times. He saluted the Australian system with an attitude of, “why don’t we make the audience members pay for everything”? They charge decent rates for tickets, you split it between your venue, you split it between the festival, you split it between yourself, and everyone makes money. That’s a great structure for a business”.<sup>98</sup> Silverwood’s analysis on the differences between the two festivals is very much from his own personal experiences and successes. He evinces a markedly commercial and financial prioritisation, with a mercenary outlook that leads to a difference in ethical configuration in the relationships with the audience, but could mean a better artist experience for those performing at Adelaide Fringe. In her interview Croall supported this by telling me that Adelaide Fringe doesn’t view growth as increased programme size. Instead, their growth targets are “purely selling more tickets, so artists earn more money”.<sup>99</sup> But as the next section will consider, Croall believes that one of the key similarities between the between Adelaide Fringe and the EFF festivals is their commitment to providing artists with training and post-festival opportunities through their respected marketplace programmes.

### **The Honey Pot**

This section will begin to answer what artists are looking from fringe festival participation. For example, are artists looking at fringe festival participation as means of training opportunities, audience development, or establishing networks. Additionally, I will highlight some of the benefits artists can gain through performing their work at a fringe festival such as the Adelaide Fringe.

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<sup>97</sup> Croall. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Silverwood.3.

<sup>99</sup> Croall. 2.

The Honey Pot is an Adelaide Fringe initiative which encourages invited industry delegates and artists to connect at free curated discussions, panels and networking sessions. It runs over the whole four-week duration of the Adelaide Fringe. Industry delegates are typically venue programmers, festival directors, producers and event planners.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, delegates can request complimentary tickets to a selection of the shows taking place at the festival, with the view that this is a ‘scouting’ opportunity and may book the artist(s) for future work.

Adelaide Fringe describe the Honey Pot as “a match-making service between passionate industry leaders and motivated artists who are looking to take their events to the next level”.

<sup>101</sup> By stating that artists can take their work to the “next level”, Adelaide Fringe are stating that artists can use their fringe festival as a stepping-stone to greater opportunities within the industry. In her interview Croall told me, “millions of dollars of deals are signed” each year.

<sup>102</sup> It is not a requirement for artists to sign-up for the Honey Pot; in the Adelaide Fringe 2020 Annual Review, it states that out of the 1203 shows in the Adelaide Fringe programme, only 406 (34%) were registered for Honey Pot.<sup>103</sup> This would suggest that a large majority of artists performing that year either didn’t know about the Honey Pot or they didn’t value it. Additionally, I question the subjective nature of what the ‘next level’ is for the large cohort of international artists that makeup the Adelaide Fringe programme each year.

Of the 406 shows that registered, Adelaide Fringe state that 284 deals were in discussion with industry delegates, with a projected collected worth of \$4million (AUS). This data supports Croall’s view that the Honey Pot can lead to other paid opportunities for artists. In *Queers in Space* (1997) Ingram writes, “in every queerscape, no matter how egalitarian, there are environmental and political forces that enforce some inequalities”<sup>104</sup> With that in mind, the data presented from the Honey Pot presents some clear “inequalities” as Ingram suggests. For example, 88% of the deals were for non-South Australian artists, which is certainly beneficial for international artists considering Croall told me that 40% of their programme is from South Australia. However, the data suggests that opportunities arising from the Honey Pot are much more likely for non-local Adelaide Fringe artists. Therefore, this presents me with a difficult judgement on the ethics of the scheme. With large parts of the Adelaide Fringe programme

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<sup>100</sup> Adelaide Fringe, "Delegates," <https://adelaidefringe.com.au/delegates>

<sup>101</sup> "Arts Industry," <https://adelaidefringe.com.au/as-arts-industry>

<sup>102</sup> Croall.3.

<sup>103</sup> Adelaide Fringe, "Annual Review 2020," (2020).

<sup>104</sup> Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, *Queers in Space : Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997). 37.

being made up of artists from South Australia, it seems they are not receiving the same opportunities compared to the rest. This could be seen as a commercial strategy from Adelaide Fringe to present their programme and successes through an international scope. Therefore, I conclude that through the Honey Pot, Adelaide Fringe must actively do more to ensure that both local and lower-income artists are allowed the same opportunity as the privileged ones who can afford the huge costs involved at performing at Adelaide Fringe.

### **Fringe Theatre Fest, United Kingdom**

#### Serving Fringe Maple Syrup in North Devon

This case-study will document the formation of a Fringe Theatre Fest, a fringe festival in the North Devon town of Barnstaple, which adopted the CAFF model without ever possessing membership of the organisation. It will highlight the trans-geographical nature of fringe festivals and will analyse the features of the 'CAFF Model' in relation to Fringe Theatre Fest and will consider whether it's claims of 'open access' can be upheld. I will also examine Fringe Theatre Fest through the lens of one of my research questions for my study, by asking if fringe festivals and their models are unique to their own environment.

In "Festivals as a Subject for Geographical Research" (2014), Waldemar Cudny states: "At present, there is no single definition of a festival, but several have been formulated in sociology, anthropology, event studies and geography".<sup>105</sup> One of the research questions this thesis seeks to explore is whether Fringes are unique to their own geography, and in the same article, Cudny states that festivals "celebrate elements which are significant in a given community's life and consolidate it. They are often related to the culture and religion of local communities". Cudny highlights the significance of festivals celebrating elements "related to culture.... of local communities", which aligns with current CAFF memberships as out of the 32 official member festivals of CAFF, none are situated outside of the North American continent. This is not due to regulations imposed by CAFF for those wishing to formally join, as they actively encourage those situated "beyond" Canada to start their own CAFF Fringes.<sup>106</sup> The lack of CAFF model Fringes outside of Canada and the United States of

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<sup>105</sup>Waldemar Cudny, "Festivals as a Subject for Geographical Research," *Geografisk Tidsskrift-Danish Journal of Geography* 114, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>106</sup> The Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals, "Start a Fringe," <https://fringefestivals.com/start-a-fringe/>.

America could suggest that Fringe organisers feel this model wouldn't work within their geographic landscape and relate to the "local communities" they serve as Cudny states. Although, as this case-study will now detail in the case of Fringe Theatre Fest it's more a lack of an official adoption of this model through the formal CAFF membership process.

In the late 1990s North Devon theatre-makers Bill Buffery and Gill Nathanson toured their work to Canada. It was during this time that they first encountered CAFF model Fringes in the cities of Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Edmonton. There has been some research conducted on Canadian Fringes, including a notable study by Kyle M. Woosman et.al (2009) on personal motivations for tourists attending the Winnipeg Fringe Festival. The study concluded that in 2005, most stakeholders at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival were from the local area and their motivations for attending included "enjoyment in life" and "connectivity with fellow attendees in the festival experience".<sup>107</sup> This case-study will reveal how Buffery and Nathanson experienced this "enjoyment in life" in Canada as Woosman suggests. Then after a successful tour, how they returned to their home of Barnstaple with the ambition to import the five principals of the 'CAFF Model' to establishing their own fringe festival in North Devon in rebellion against the "money driven"<sup>108</sup> Fringes found in the U.K.

Fringe Theatre Fest would be the first 'CAFF Model' Fringe outside of the North American continent and would offer U.K fringe artists an alternative to the well-established 'Edinburgh Model' festivals found in Scotland, Brighton and London. During his interview, Buffery explored how the idea of creating a CAFF Model festival first appeared. He said: "although, they were in big cities. We could see they were important things about how they worked, that could benefit Barnstaple".<sup>109</sup> Buffery and Nathanson would not ever be able to replicate the size and scale of the Canadian festivals<sup>110</sup> as the local infrastructure and size of potential audiences was different. Equally, the culture for Fringers is arguably different in Canada compared to the U.K, with pre-existing 'Fringe Models' used in both countries dictating the overall experience for both artists and audiences. Therefore, they believed that the CAFF

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<sup>107</sup> Kyle M. Woosnam, Kerry E. McElroy, and Christine M. Van Winkle, "The Role of Personal Values in Determining Tourist Motivations: An Application to the Winnipeg Fringe Theatre Festival, a Cultural Special Event," *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management* 18, no. 5 (2009).

<sup>108</sup> Bill Buffery and Gill Nathanson, interview by Cameron Abbott-Betts, July 17, 2019. 5.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>110</sup> \* When Buffery and Nathanson returned to Canada for a funded research trip in 2001, the population of Barnstaple was 22,508.<sup>110</sup> This meant that the size of their community was significantly smaller compared to the 619,540 living in the Canadian city of Winnipeg.

principles would serve as a new offer to U.K artists and would be beneficial for their community.

In 2007, after receiving support from the local tourism board, Buffery and Nathanson launched the first ever Fringe Theatre Fest. In the-interview, Buffery described the event as “very tiny”.<sup>111</sup> Although over the last 15 years, Fringe Theatre Fest’s programme has grown in size, with online publisher *Fringe Review* describing the festival as a “hidden gem” on the fringe scene.<sup>112</sup> Every year, during a bank holiday weekend in May, audiences have gathered in the town of Barnstaple to watch pieces of theatre that has quite literally been picked out of a hat.

As seen within my video documentation, I performed at the festival in 2019. During that year, 76 companies made up their programme, across 7 venues.<sup>113</sup> My first-hand experiences brought me to the conclusion that Fringe Theatre Fest had grown too much in size and had outstripped its local market, its “given community” and could not, or had not wanted to, support flows of exogenous audience members. Many of the artists were struggling to sell tickets. This was a small rural community and there was a misalignment between the size and scope of the artistic offer, and the numbers of audience wanting to participate. In my video documentation, I highlight my reflections at Fringe Theatre Fest in 2019 and determine the size of the programming was “too big”, which had a negative effect on my experience as an artist.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, as my video documentation and this case-study reveals, it may have been due to a lack of ‘quality’ within the programme discouraging audiences from buying additional tickets and ‘taking risks’ on seeing multiple shows. My company sold enough tickets to break even, however, my experiences still meant that I left Barnstaple with many conflicting thoughts about my own definition of ‘fringe’. In one sense in their rebellion against what they perceive as artistic judgement on artists, Buffery and Nathanson really embody the 1947 ‘fringe spirit’. Although, I argue in this case-study that I do believe it

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<sup>111</sup> Nathanson.2.

<sup>112</sup> Fringe Review, "Barnstaple Fringe Theatrefest 2019," <http://fringereview.co.uk/fringe-festivals-in-the-uk/barnstaple-fringe-theatrefest/>.

<sup>113</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 00:12:17.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.00:07:12.

presents a disadvantage to those who view ‘fringe’ as an artform rather than as opportunity to stage their new work.



Figure 3. RKF Arriving at Barnstaple Train Station ahead of performing at Fringe Theatre Fest in 2019 (Photo by author).

### **The Canadian Approach**

Data taken from WFN shows that, as of 2022, Canada currently has the most active Fringes taking place annually in the world. The popularity of fringe festivals has risen so rapidly in Canada since the first in Edmonton in 1982, that CAFF has trademarked the word ‘fringe’. Therefore, by trademarking ‘Fringe’ and ‘fringe festival’, CAFF knows that any producer who is looking to establish a Fringe within Canada cannot undermine their conception of ‘fringe’. During an original interview I conducted for my study, Jill Roszell the Administrator of CAFF and former Executive Director of Edmonton Fringe told me about why she thought CAFF Model was important. She said:

... you have all these Fringes popping up. They are start getting together formally every year to talk about Fringe. They all start using the same model and we realised that you have a group of people that really do think the same way. They had the same



mindset about how to support the artists and having accessible ticket prices... Providing a venue. We are going to do everything to support the artists. They show up with a show. They take the box-office. This is the support mechanism that we can do to really give them a level up. Especially for emerging work.<sup>115</sup>

Roszell presents the view that the homogenisation and corporatisation of this policy is intended to protect and support artists refusing their respected Fringes to become curated arts festivals. Although, by creating a system from a cultural ideology, CAFF may have prevented art being created by new fringe festivals because they believe they don't fit into their design. Although, Roszell highlights that CAFF Fringes are best suited for "emerging work", which could suggest artists performing at CAFF fringe festivals are engaging as a training opportunity, which has been my experience also. For example, as seen in the prologue of this thesis, my first encounter of 'fringe' was at a 'CAFF Model' festival. I had a positive experience, but I was also at a very early stage in my career. Nonetheless, the CAFF environment was extremely beneficial for my professional development as a young and hungry touring theatre maker. I had to undertake tasks and roles which I would otherwise, typically not have to do.<sup>116</sup> But as time went on, I wanted more and better opportunities. I soon realised that the CAFF Fringes were initially such a draw for me because of the far away and sometimes exotic locations they were in. However, if I wanted to find a way to be an artist full-time, I would need to be more sensible with my choices in terms of my ability to make money. Therefore, I began to move away from CAFF Fringes to allow this to happen.

In *Queer Theory Now* (2019), Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan state "it is antithetical to the spirit of... (queer) theory to tie it down to a single meaning".<sup>117</sup> 'Fringe theatre' shares features with queer theory in that it is plural, 'outside the norm' and exogenous. However, there are tensions in which it creates with it being indigenous of the location and community, whilst acting as an outside force that temporarily inhabits public space. Although throughout this thesis, I argue that Fringes have the potential to create a 'queer environment' for artists and audiences. As highlighted in McCann and Monaghan's quote above in defining queer theory, it is clear from my research that 'fringe' is also difficult "to tie it down to a single meaning." Therefore, I suggest that trademarking a word and

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<sup>115</sup> Jill Roszell, interview by Cameron Abbott-Betts, April 17, 2020. Various.

<sup>116</sup> \* **My job wasn't just to learn lines, rehearse and perform. Additionally, I had to design posters, send out press releases, secure funding through fundraising, source props and set and sell my show to all that passed me on the street whilst I was flyering.**

<sup>117</sup> Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).1.

expression that they didn't even invent; with the term 'fringe' being born in Edinburgh,<sup>118</sup> CAFF may have orientated themselves towards an anti-fringe place. More significantly for my study, as the most popular 'fringe model' in the world, CAFF may have orientated 'fringe' to an anti-queer place.

### **Open-Access for a Price**

Like the 'Edinburgh Model', costs of participation at CAFF Fringes also vary significantly for artists. This is due to a common requirement of registration fees for artists selected from a CAFF lottery. This fee varies from festival to festival and isn't controlled by CAFF. This allows CAFF Fringes to charge extremely high fees, with the San Diego International Fringe Festival charging artists up to \$1,000 depending on size of venue.<sup>119</sup> Fringe Theatre Fest in Barnstaple does not impose application fees. Like most other fringe festivals in the United Kingdom, it is completely free to apply to participate in the festival. The requirement of an application fee doesn't fit within their own ideo-cultural principles of 'fringe'. In his interview Buffery suggests the Edinburgh Model is more economically motivated than the CAFF model:

The 'CAFF Model' and Canada together, actually show a model how we as people can/could work together, that the British system doesn't. The Edinburgh Fringe model reflects Britain; it's class ridden, and it's money driven. You don't really become aware of that until you step outside of Britain and see that there are actually other ways to model.<sup>120</sup>

Buffery presents a clear political statement against the "money driven" approach found within the 'Edinburgh Model'. Therefore, I present the view that the formation of Fringe Theatre Fest was a rebellion towards the 'Edinburgh Model' itself. I agree with Buffery that 'Edinburgh Model' Fringes are more motivated by financial return and the pursuit of growth. This argument is supported by Billington who wrote in *The Guardian*, "where once the fringe encouraged individual serendipity, it is now ruthlessly dominated by four central venues. The Scotsman Assembly, Gilded Balloon, Pleasance and George Square Theatre now produce

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<sup>118</sup> \* **The EFF gets its more common name, 'The Fringe' when in 1948 journalist Robert Kemp writes, "round the fringe of official Festival drama, there seems to be more private enterprise than before ... I am afraid some of us are not going to be at home during the evenings".**

<sup>119</sup> The Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals, "San Diego International Fringe Festival," <https://fringefestivals.com/festival/san-diego-fringe-festival>.

<sup>120</sup> Nathanson. 1.

their own 136-page brochure listing several hundred shows. It is increasingly like shopping in a cultural hypermarket".<sup>121</sup>

In her interview, Roszell highlighted the problems that this has created by saying "you are not giving 100% box-office if 50% of that is going to fees".<sup>122</sup> Therefore, with self-proclaimed CAFF lovers such as Buffery and Nathanson choosing not to charge their artists applications fees or high financial participation costs<sup>123</sup> within their own festival, it suggests that they have recognised the unpredictable economic return for artists performing at CAFF fringe festivals and have tried to counteract that with their own financial modelling.

Reed states that "queer space is space in the process of, literally, taking place, of claiming territory".<sup>124</sup> I argue that fringe festivals can help "claim" queer space as Reed suggests. This can be facilitated through diverse and inclusive programming, engendering permissions to experiment with content, and allowing artists to claim non-traditional arts spaces. I argue that in most cases of CAFF Fringes, everybody doesn't have an equal chance to "claim" queer space. High performance fees created by CAFF Fringes means a large proportion of lower-income artists are excluded from taking part at these festivals, creating an imbalanced social dynamic within the festival programmes and reducing inclusivity. Thus, creating an anti-queer place.

In *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism* (2015) Drucker states, "like so many other hopes under neoliberalism, most LGBT aspirations can only be achieved in practice by those who have the money to pay for them".<sup>125</sup> Drucker argues that LGBTQIA+ gathering places, music, literature and music often now come "with a price tag".<sup>126</sup> This in turn excludes many from being able to interact with their aspirations. With that in mind, a unique feature of CAFF model fringe festivals is that artists are typically required to pay a non-refundable application fee. In fact, if the artist is not randomly selected by the lottery or by

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<sup>121</sup> Billington, "Why I Hate the Fringe."

<sup>122</sup> Roszell. 2.

<sup>123</sup> \* **In 2023, Fringe Theatre Fest companies paid £100 participation fee, £65 of which would be refunded if they completed all of their performances.**

<sup>124</sup> Christopher Reed, "Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment," *Art Journal* 55, no. 4 (1996). 64-70.

<sup>125</sup> Peter Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). 383.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

other means, the festival will keep the fee as a form of payment.<sup>127 128</sup> I argue that this is a neoliberalist strategy deployed by CAFF Fringes means that artists are being asked to gamble in the pursuit of their aspirations, which can only be achieved by “those who have the money to pay for them” as Drucker describes.

### **Quality Control**

I will now highlight the benefits and disadvantages of ‘CAFF Model’ Fringes not judging their applications for artistic quality within their ‘open access’ structure. This was emphasised in Nathanson’s interview whilst we were discussing the term ‘quality control’. She said: “this thing called ‘quality control’. We would say no! We are giving the power to the audience to make that decision”.<sup>129</sup> Buffery then asked me, “what gives the person/people the right to make those judgements?” I argue that by highlighting the subjective nature of judging artistic craft, Buffery attaches himself to the expansive ideals of unfettered and uncensored material in CAFF fringes.

In the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* (1994), François Abbé-Decarroux states that “the importance of quality in the services sector, especially in the performing arts, cannot be denied. Quality plays a pivotal role in the consumer’s perception and appreciation of the service”.<sup>130</sup> This view is supported by academic Jennifer Radbourne who states that “audiences will be fiercely loyal if they can experience fulfilment and realisation in the arts experience”.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, as evidenced in this section, the relationship between artistic quality as defined by Radbourne, audiences and their continued engagement and participation in fringe festivals is fundamental for artists trying to position their work as meaningful and

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<sup>127</sup> \* **The cost of this fee varies from one festival to the next. However, in 2021 on average the artists application fee for a CAFF member fringe festival in Canada was \$25 (CAN), with other festival charging as much as \$50 (CAN)**

<sup>128</sup> \* **In 2020, Orlando Fringe which is the longest running fringe festival in the United States of America received 385 applications, with only 101 of those receiving a spot. The application fee was \$25-\$50 (depending on when the artist applied). This means that Orlando Fringe may have received up to \$14,200 from unsuccessful applicants alone.**

<sup>129</sup> Nathanson. 4.

<sup>130</sup> François Abbé-Decarroux, "The Perception of Quality and the Demand for Services: Empirical Application to the Performing Arts," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 23, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>131</sup> Jennifer Radbourne, "The Quest for Self Actualisation-Meeting New Consumer Needs in the Cultural Industries" (paper presented at the ESRC Seminar Series Creative Futures-Driving the Cultural Industries Marketing Agenda, 2007).

carrying creative worth, which may also see them cover their financial outlay through ticket sales to good audience numbers.

Firstly, I argue that what make Fringes different from other events performed at theatres or arts venues throughout the year, is the ability for audiences to see multiple shows within one day. This view is supported by Hollands, who wrote a case-study on Prague Fringe in the *Journal of Cultural Economy* (2010). Using data from 2007, Hollands' survey states:

Unlike conventional theatre-going where an audience goes specifically to consume one performance, fringe is all about taking in many different shows a day. The weaving together of a programme of seeing shows over the course of a week is, in itself, a participatory activity and produces the idea of having a 'festival experience'. Questionnaire data showed that over 60% of the audience planned to see between two-five shows, while another quarter planned to see six or more shows.<sup>132</sup>

The data produced by Holland highlights the multi-participation routes in which stakeholders can interact with 'fringe', by interacting with multiple performances. This in turn generates their own unique experience within the 'fringe world' at any given festival.

A common marketing strategy deployed by fringe festivals is asking audiences to 'take a risk'<sup>133</sup> when choosing shows. In an article in the *International Journal of Arts Management* (2009), Radbourne et.al defines risk within an arts context. They write:

Risk refers to the possibility of either loss or gain. Colbert et al. (2001, p. 84-85) describe four related kinds of risk that determine the likelihood of re-consumption by theatregoers: functional risk (the possibility that the product will not "meet the consumer's expectation"); economic risk (in which the cost makes the decision-making process more complicated); psychological risk (in which the product poses a threat to the consumer's desired self-image); and social risk (which is concerned with how the consumer wishes to be perceived, and thus is not necessarily experienced by all consumers).<sup>134</sup>

The lack of censorship of shows within 'CAFF Model' Fringes may not meet the "consumer's expectation (s)" as Radbourne et.al describe above. For example, if a fringe festival refuses to deploy a form of censorship than who does the responsibility fall upon if the content of the performance is deemed offensive? In the case of Fringe Theatre Fest, this

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<sup>132</sup> Robert G. Hollands, "Engaging and Alternative Cultural Tourism?," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 3, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>133</sup> Ventnor Fringe, "Fringe Tips: Planning Your Time at the Fringe."

<sup>134</sup> Jennifer Radbourne et al., "The Audience Experience: Measuring Quality in the Performing Arts," *International journal of arts management* (2009). 16-29.

led to funding bodies and venues asking Buffery and Nathanson for some reassurance. As Nathanson states:

From the beginning we have fought with theatres about whether or not we should draw the names out of a hat... It's up to them about what they like and what they don't like. As soon as we start to make those decisions then we should be paying people, shouldn't we? Because we are saying that's quality. You want that one... Therefore, you pay people.<sup>135</sup>

With Barnstaple theatres and venues asking Buffery and Nathanson for an element of guarantee regarding the level of quality in their programming and Buffery and Nathanson outrightly saying “no” to that request, a schism appeared between the venues and festival in the vision and values of *who* and *what* a fringe festival is for. With Nathanson saying that they have “fought with theatres” about their open access policy, in the specific case of Fringe Theatre Fest, some venues would have felt more comfortable if the festival was juried, as an offensive performance at their place of business could tarnish their reputation. Additionally, with Nathanson saying “it's up to them about what they like and what they don't like” she believes in giving audiences complete control in judging artistic quality at her Fringe. Although, this is a nice sentiment it might come too late as audiences would be no doubt dissuaded from seeing the next show if they didn't have a positive experience previously and may consider ‘fringe shows’ as what Radbourne describes as a “functional risk”. Therefore, with CAFF Fringes adopting a policy within their modelling that doesn't judge applications this could be seen to discourage audiences from buying multiple tickets if they deem that the programme lacks ‘quality’.

## **Conclusion**

One of the main research questions for my study is determining the conditions needed to design and deliver a fringe festival for Colchester. This case-study has highlighted how Buffery and Nathanson's past experiences in Canada, were vital in forming Fringe Theatre Fest in Devon. Although, it also highlighted that introducing the culture of ‘fringe’ to a community through the CAFF model is a much greater task. Furthermore, I have outlined how through application fees and high participation costs, CAFF model Fringes are also guilty of excluding many artists from taking part. Therefore, in designing the CFF there is an

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<sup>135</sup> Nathanson. 4.

imperative to impose restrictions on participating costs in order to deliver on aims for artist-centered practices for participation.

Larry M Bogad writes on Bakhtin in “ACTIVISM Tactical carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance” (2006) and states: “Carnival is as much for the benefit and social change of the activists as it is for any spectators who will hopefully become spect-actors.”<sup>136</sup> Buffery and Nathanson’s personal commitment to the CAFF model was clear from their interview and the fact they established the first Fringe of its kind outside of North America. Furthermore, this case-study has determined they have evolved and expanded the CAFF principles to fit into their own political ideals. Moreover, there is a clear political outlook to Fringe Theatre Fest and its anti-elitist and anti-capitalist nature serving as a rebellion towards the Edinburgh Model, which I argue fits into Bakhtin’s principles of the ‘carnavalesque’.

Another research question that I am looking to answer in my study is what benefits artists can gain through performing their work at a fringe festival. I would conclude from this case-study that the ‘CAFF Model’ presents its artists with a training opportunity and/or a chance to present new work. However, I have reservations about the long-term benefits for artists as large portions of the programme may lack quality, which in turn could discourage producers and others who may present opportunities from attending. Although, by allowing audiences to determine what is a quality fringe performance and what is not, Buffery and Nathanson are looking to recreate the same spirit seen in 1947 by the eight uninvited companies in Edinburgh.

After performing my own work at Fringe Theatre Fest in 2019, I found myself at a crossroads about how I perceived the CAFF model in the U.K. The open access CAFF style lottery is fundamentally what makes ‘fringe’ so different to other arts festivals. Although, as someone that values my own artistic craft and time, I found myself wanting to be in a more professional environment.<sup>137</sup> In 2019 there were shows at Fringe Theatre Fest which were cancelled due to a lack of audience support. I left Barnstaple thinking of ways of combatting this for my own fringe festival.

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<sup>136</sup> Larry M Bogad, "Activism Tactical Carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance," in *A Boal Companion* (Routledge, 2006).56.

<sup>137</sup> \* **Personally, this was an environment which consisted of professional actors and directors who I could learn from and producers and reviewers that could provide me with future opportunities for my work.**

## Prague Fringe, Czech Republic

### Volunteering at a Fringe

#### Introduction

Through this case-study I explore the role of the volunteer at a fringe festival, whilst specifically focusing on Prague Fringe. Using an autoethnographic focus from my own experience as a volunteer at a Prague Fringe in 2019, I unpick the ideas of ‘quality’ within ‘fringe’ and how participation and the ‘fringe experience’ is a fundamental offer for those volunteering at Prague Fringe. I will then highlight the need for willing volunteers who will work for free, whilst analysing the reasons they decide to donate their time and efforts within a fringe festival setting, sometimes at a high financial cost to themselves, which in turn creates an access issue as it will dissuade lower-income volunteers from taking part. Finally, I will look to determine who the volunteers are and by using queer theory will conclude that Prague Fringe looks to offer ‘social experience’ within a queer environment as a form of bonus-payment in return for free labour at their festival. Therefore, this case-study outlines the labour necessities and assumptions that come with Fringe working, and how that is at odds with some aspects of the queering of spaces.

After visiting the Prague Fringe Festival as a cultural tourist in 2018 and speaking to some of the international assistants there at that time, it appeared to me that Prague Fringe offered some of their volunteers a unique experience. My video documentation highlights my time at Prague Fringe in 2019, leading me to form a significant relationship with the festival. Since then, I have attended as a visitor or volunteered at the festival since 2018.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, I have used many elements of Prague Fringe within my own creative practice of developing the CFF. This was due to my belief that the ‘European Model’ which has been adopted by Prague Fringe would be best the choice for a first-time Fringe in Colchester.

In *Collaborative Autoethnography* (2016), Heewon Chang et.al write:

Previous relationships with each other may constrict the possibility of forming new relationships, and familiarity could blind you from gaining new perspectives about each other and your research topic. In contrast, working with new research partners

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<sup>138</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 00:03:36.



could help you gain fresh perspectives on the research topic through the eyes of strangers.<sup>139</sup>

Prague Fringe has allowed me to form networks and build relationships within the ‘fringe world’, as a theatre-maker, a producer, as a researcher and autoethnographer. In another work titled *Autoethnography as Method* (2016), Chang states “initial familiarity gives autoethnographers an edge over other researchers in data collection and in-depth data”.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, I argue that my relationship with the festival has allowed me to expand my network and given me great experience as both a researcher and a festival organiser.



Figure 4. Fringe Club at Prague Fringe 2019 with Artist and a fellow Volunteer (Photo by author).

This case-study will also look to answer two research questions of this thesis. By analysing the community which was built within the Prague Fringe whilst I volunteered there, it will outline the benefits artists and volunteers gain through participating at a fringe festival. Secondly, if a higher calibre of acts found within ‘European Model’ programmes, present a better offer to audiences and volunteers compared to other models. This case-study will return to the data produced Robert G. Hollands on Prague Fringe in 2007. Additionally, it will use the work of Răzvan-Lucian Andronic who outlines the characteristics of a volunteer

<sup>139</sup> Heewon Chang, Faith Ngunjiri, and Kathy-Ann C Hernandez, *Collaborative Autoethnography* (New York: Routledge, 2016). 57.

<sup>140</sup> Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (New York: Routledge, 2016). 52.

in “Volunteering: Theoretical Approaches and Personal Characterises” (2014).<sup>141</sup>

Furthermore, I will consider David Stevenson’s work *Managing Organisational Success* (2019), which gives a rich account of successful volunteer management, whilst focusing on the Valetta Film Festival in Malta. Although, there have been very few studies which have produced research specifically on volunteering at Fringes, with Sam Middlemiss’s work “The Legal Rights of Workers and Volunteers at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe” (2021) being the only recent addition to the academy.<sup>142</sup> Therefore, by using the work of Andronic, Stevenson and Middlemiss to augment my own experiences of volunteering at the Prague Fringe, I will provide new and original data to this subject through this case-study on volunteerism within a fringe festival.

### **Environmental Context**

The story of Prague Fringe starts at the EFF in the mid-1990s. Steve Gove had been working as a front-of-house venue manager for the Assembly Rooms at the EFF. In 1997, Gove (an openly queer man) relocated to the Czech Republic with his partner. Gove hadn’t previously been to the country and didn’t speak the Czech language. In the year 2000 the relationship ended, and Gove found himself at a crossroads. During his interview Gove described this moment as significant to the creation of Prague Fringe, going on to say:

I had been going to Edinburgh every single year (since 1996) and I just had this idea that it would be quite cool to take some Czech theatre shows to Edinburgh. But then I was actually like, no that isn’t going to work. It’s going to be far too expensive. Why don’t I try and take a bit of Edinburgh to Prague?<sup>143</sup>

In 1993 Czechoslovakia split into modern day states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.<sup>144</sup> The country had experienced war and changing leadership since the occupation and “Nazi (Germany) pattern of dominance”<sup>145</sup> in 1939, before becoming under Soviet control for around 40 years. In 1996 the Czech Republic held their first general election, which was

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<sup>141</sup> Răzvan-Lucian Andronic, "Volunteering: Theoretical Approaches and Personal Characteristics," *Scientific Research & Education in the Air Force-AFASES 2* (2014).

<sup>142</sup> Sam Middlemiss, "The Legal Rights of Workers and Volunteers at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe," *International Journal of Law and Management* 63, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>143</sup> Gove.1.

<sup>144</sup> Glenn Campbell, "Scottish Independence: Lessons from the Czech/Slovak Split " BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-21110521>

<sup>145</sup> Carol Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation Versus State* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

arguably a significant moment for the nation. In “Voting under Different Rules / Governing under Different Rules” (2016), political scientist Tomáš Lebeda states that “the 1996 elections presaged the first two-year period of unstable, stymied executive power”.<sup>146</sup> Although the 1996 elections were the first to take place in an independent Czech Republic, the country wouldn’t see political stability until a snap-election in 1998. It was during this time that the process of transforming the Czech Republic and moving away from its Soviet past and communist ideals really take shape. Therefore, I argue that a newly formed country assessing its identity and values presented Gove unexpected fertile ground to establish a new fringe festival.<sup>147</sup>

In his interview, Gove reflects that at that time for aspiring businesses in the capital, “there were so many gaps in the market”.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, with the market being open for business, a queer and aspiring Fringe leader such as Gove looked to Prague and its ongoing transformation from its soviet past as an opportunity to form new alternative and queer spaces within the city. Roman Kuhar argues that, “the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 represents a crucial turning point in the development of gay movements in Eastern Europe”.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, in an article by Vera Honuskova and P. Šturma titled "Legal Study on Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity" (2010), they state that although the Czech Republic didn’t legally recognise same-sex couples until 2005, it is “perhaps the most positive opinion concerning LGBT persons among all the countries of the former Soviet part of Europe”.<sup>150</sup> Gove was presented with the right political environment, social attitudes, and business opportunities to allow a queer place to grow in the form of Prague Fringe.

The festival is the first English language theatre festival in the city and attracts not only international artists, but also international volunteers. It has run annually in the month of May ever since its formation in 2001.<sup>151</sup> In 2019, the festival hosted 60 international companies

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<sup>146</sup> Tomáš Lebeda, "Voting under Different Rules/Governing under Different Rules," *Acta Politologica* 8, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>147</sup>\* **Czechia has a long performance history, including a culture of surreal arts, puppetry, and dark tales that were cooked up over decades of ‘occupation’ and repression which gives a particular receptivity for experimental and fringe performances.**

<sup>148</sup> Gove.2.

<sup>149</sup> Roman Kuhar, "Ljubljana: The Tales from the Queer Margins of the City," *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe Since 1945* (1945). 135.

<sup>150</sup> Vera Honuskova and P Šturma, "Legal Study on Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010).

<sup>151</sup> \* **Except in 2021 when the festival was held in November after being re-scheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

performing across 7 venues over a 9-day period.<sup>152</sup> With the festival running for over 20 years, The Prague Fringe is one of the founding members of the ‘European Model’ Fringes.<sup>153</sup> In theory, ticket-split models such as this one mean that both the festival and the artist must work with each other to generate income. Nonetheless, there are no set guidelines for the fees, or the amount artists will earn from tickets. In the specific case of Prague Fringe, currently selected artists are required to pay up to £112 per performance for an 80-seat venue. They receive a total of 60% of their ticket sales (minus any booking fees) and in 2019 audiences were charged up to £7 per ticket.<sup>154</sup> Based on these costs and ticket-split, artists performing 5 times in the largest venue would have to sell 133 tickets across all the performances to break even. These costs don’t include travel, accommodation or food and drink whilst at the festival. Therefore, ‘European Model’ festivals such as Prague are also guilty of excluding low-income artists or those who cannot access arts funding from participating. Next, I draw out Gove’s comments on some of the motivations for the volunteers at Prague Fringe, his feeling is that the city itself is a key draw for attracting people to its Fringe. These same motivations could also be determined for the artists.

I argue the easiest process for fringe festivals sourcing their volunteers is at a local level. This allows for easier organisational management within the festival structure and ability to source a greater number of volunteers each year. However, as this case-study will consider, the Prague Fringe had a unique approach. In *Managing Organisational Success in the Arts* (2018), David Stevenson states, “the competitive nature of the global festival circuit means individual festivals must distinguish themselves from other events and effectively market their offers as ‘unique’”<sup>155</sup>. I argue that one of the things that makes Prague Fringe unique is the city itself. In 2021, Prague was voted as *Time Out’s* most beautiful city in the world.<sup>156</sup> In his interview, Gove stated, “It’s Prague! I mean a lot of it of course is how we manage the ‘thing’. But a tremendous amount of it is Prague. Because Prague is so special. It makes you feel special when you are here”.<sup>157</sup> This is supported by Hollands, whose survey on Prague

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<sup>152</sup> Prague Fringe Festival, "2019 Programme," <https://www.praguefringe.com/index.php?id=130>.

<sup>153</sup> \* **As stated in the introduction for this chapter, the key components of the European Model’ are that the festival programme is juried, and Fringes manage all their own venues. The financial structure means selected artists pay a direct fee to take part and earn percentage split of their ticket-sales.**

<sup>154</sup> Prague Fringe Festival, "Artist Application," <https://www.praguefringe.com/participate/artist-application-info/>.

<sup>155</sup> David Stevenson, *Managing Organisational Success in the Arts* (Oxon: Routledge, 2019). 147.

<sup>156</sup> Dickinson, S. "Prague has just been voted the most beautiful city in the world", *Time Out*, <<https://www.timeout.com/news/prague-has-just-been-voted-the-most-beautiful-city-in-the-world-091521>> (accessed 12 November 2021).

<sup>157</sup> Gove. 4.

Fringe revealed that “the overall audience (including performers, directors/producers, volunteers/technicians) were made up of a good mix of visitors from abroad (45%) and people living in Prague (55%), of whom 32% were non-Czech’s living in Prague and 23% were Czech”.<sup>158</sup>

In a chapter on regional events and place attachment theory in *Power, Politics and International Events: Socio-cultural Analyses of Festivals and Spectacles* (2014), Louise Devismes presents the view that when ‘person’ and ‘location’ cross-over, it “is the result of positive emotional bonds, based upon particularities of the natural environment”.<sup>159</sup> Devismes’ view can be linked to Bakhtin’s account of ‘outsideness’. In the same work, Peeren examines identities and territory through a Bakhtinian lens. Whilst focusing on the Notting Hill Carnival, Peeren describes the event as a “Caribbean-inspired festival”<sup>160</sup> which attracts multiple identities and ethnic groups. She states that the “the carnival is a performative event enacting a particular chronotropic construction of time-space and a specific communal identity.”<sup>161</sup> The international aspect at Prague Fringe between artists and volunteers no doubt helps create its own ‘fringe community’. Yet, it may impose on territory which is not the Fringes to inhabit.

In “Ethics in Practice: A Critical Appreciation of Mikhail Bakhtin’s Concept of “Outsideness”” (2018), Rachel Pollard defines the term as “Bakhtin’s phenomenological account of how we perceive and relate to each other as people in a social world”.<sup>162</sup> Bakhtin writes, “outsideness consists of fully exploiting the privilege of one’s own unique place outside other human beings”.<sup>163</sup> Therefore, this case-study will now unpick whether Prague Fringe is encouraging international volunteers in their pursuit of “exploiting the privilege” of their “unique place” as Bakhtin suggests.

Gove clearly sees the “special” city of Prague as an offering to artists, volunteers and audiences. However, as seen in the quotation by Cudny in the previous chapter, festivals

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<sup>158</sup> Hollands, "Engaging and Alternative Cultural Tourism?."

<sup>159</sup> Louisa Devismes, "Regional Events and Festivals in Europe: Revitalizing Traditions and Modernizing Identities," in *Power, Politics and International Events*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2013). 41.

<sup>160</sup> Esther Peeren, *Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture: Bakhtin and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). 173.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 197.

<sup>162</sup> Rachel Pollard, "Ethics in Practice: A Critical Appreciation of Mikhail Bakhtin’s Concept of “Outsideness” in Relation to Responsibility and the Creation of Meaning in Psychotherapy," *American journal of psychotherapy* 65, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>163</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World." 88.

“often relate to the culture and religion of local communities”.<sup>164</sup> Therefore, with the programme in 2019 featuring only English-speaking shows, Gove may be fostering cultural tourism and exogenous product into the Czech Republic which discourages local culture, or certainly misrepresents the profile of indigenous, local artists under a banner of the ‘Prague Fringe’. The pandemic has led to a change in programme policy for Prague Fringe. In 2020, with international travel banned and Czech borders closed for large periods of the year, for the first time the Prague Fringe presented local performances by Czech artists. This has now become a feature of the Prague Fringe which looks to feature both foreign and Czech artists in the same programme creating a collaboration of art forms and cultures within the ‘fringe environment’. The change of policy has led to a change in principles for Gove and have demonstrably enabled him to evolve his own perceptions of ‘fringe’.

### **Motivations**

The popularity of ‘fringe’ has risen rapidly since its birth in Edinburgh in 1947,<sup>165</sup> with some defining it as a “space for work that doesn’t fit the usual mould”<sup>166</sup> making it an attractive offer for audiences. Data undertaken at the EFF in 2019 supports this claim, with 78% of audiences stating they went to see something different to what they would otherwise.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, if we consider volunteers’ motivations parallel to those of an audience member, then Prague Fringe certainly provides such an offer.

In the 2018 article “A Skills Exchange for Unemployed People”, Barbara Senior suggests that the reward of free tickets to high quality shows/ performances could be a significant draw for those undertaking voluntary work.<sup>168</sup> I argue that fringe festivals adopt a different method in populating their programmes compared to other arts festivals. Thus, I will explore the potential motivations for a volunteer at a Fringe and how they may differ from one Fringe to the next. The very nature of ‘fringe’ is ‘open access’ for artists; the ideal that any artist can

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<sup>164</sup> Cudny, "Festivals as a Subject for Geographical Research."

<sup>165</sup> Fringe, "The Fringe Story."

<sup>166</sup> Michael Abercromby, "Fringe Benefits," *Stage Milk*, 06 April 2017.

<sup>167</sup> Maurane Ramon, "How to Use Your Audience Data with a Purpose: The Edinburgh Festival Fringe," We Will Thrive, <https://wewillthrive.co.uk/resources/case-studies/how-to-use-your-audience-data-with-a-purpose-the-edinburgh-festival-fringe/>.

<sup>168</sup> Barbara Senior and John B. Naylor, "A Skills Exchange for Unemployed People," *Human Relations* 37, no. 8 (1984).

apply to take-part typically remains the same. What this does mean, however, is that no matter the ‘fringe model’ applied by a fringe festival, a range in quality of artistic content is typically present in the programming when compared to curated arts festivals. Prague Fringe are combatting the ‘quality control’ question within their programming by being a ‘Juried Fringe’.<sup>169</sup> Typically, Fringe programmes are filled with a range of artistic styles and disciplines and the Prague Fringe programme is no different to that. But, with fringe festivals themselves defining ‘fringe performances’ as “unconventional”,<sup>170</sup> a question arises which asks if Fringes are offering the same level of quality to stakeholders as to larger programmed arts festivals? I would suggest most likely not.

Hollands highlights the key role of the festival assistants in the functioning of the festival:

While the directors are responsible for much of the planning and organising of the event prior to it taking place, the actual day-to-day running of the festival is largely in the hands of a small (28 in 2007), but extremely dedicated set of front-of-house volunteers<sup>171</sup>

In terms of acquiring new skills, Prague Fringe also offers that to their festival assistants. Some of the volunteers in 2019 were highly experienced, others had no previous experiences in working at fringe events.<sup>172</sup> Although, age and experience played a significant role for the latter. The fact that Prague Fringe advertises their voluntary positions on their social media pages and website would suggest that those applying already have knowledge of the festival. Therefore, some of the individuals were there for their personal affection to ‘fringe’, rather than for professional development.

There is a strong argument to suggest that Prague Fringe offers many social expanding experiences for their volunteers. Volunteers live, eat, work and socialise together throughout the period of the festival, so undoubtedly friendships and relationships can be built and sometimes flourish. This is highlighted in my video documentation during my last day in Prague, whilst celebrating the closure of the Fringe with fellow volunteers.<sup>173</sup> However, social exchange theory states that individuals are driven by ‘values’ and ‘costs’ when determining which relationships pursue.<sup>174</sup> Prague Fringe looks to offer an ‘value’ to their

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<sup>169</sup> **\*Artists apply and are then selected by a group of judges based on the merit of their application**

<sup>170</sup> Island Fringe, "What Is a Fringe," <https://islandfringe.com/what-is-a-fringe/>.

<sup>171</sup> Hollands, "Engaging and Alternative Cultural Tourism?."

<sup>172</sup> **\*All volunteers receive box-office training and are given the opportunity to manage a venue at least once during the festival.**

<sup>173</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 00:03:05:00.

<sup>174</sup> John W Thibaut, *The Social Psychology of Groups* (New York: Routledge, 1959). 16.

volunteers in an environment where social expansion can thrive. My video documentation highlights that the experience of a volunteer is fuelled with the offer of late-nights and alcohol, which is a recent concern for many Fringes currently active.<sup>175</sup> As I will later suggest, the role of Fringe Club is key to any positive social or networking opportunity within any given Fringe. The Prague Fringe also believes in those ideals, with after show events taking place each night throughout the duration of the festival. This creates a social environment for volunteers, artists, staff and audiences to mix with one another in a more informal setting. Prague Fringe's separate late-night programme is the only part of the festival which all the festival assistants can attend at the same time and is a key feature in their marketing strategy for gaining volunteer workers.

### **The Profile**

Hollands data on Prague Fringe in 2007 states that “in terms of social backgrounds these volunteers are largely young university students interested in theatre, drawn from overseas (primarily the U.K, but also Canada, USA) and from the Czech Republic (50% from abroad and 50% from the CR)”. From my own personal experiences at fringe festivals over the last 8 years, volunteers have ranged from teenagers to over 70s. But some Fringes only seem to attract younger volunteers. This view is supported by data collected by my study at Prague Fringe in 2019, the youngest festival assistant was 18 and the oldest was 43, with most of the festival assistants age ranged from 21-28.

Research conducted by Hiromi Taniguchi in his (2016) study “Men's and Women's Volunteering: Gender Differences in the Effects of Employment and Family Characteristics” determines that women are much more likely to volunteer than men.<sup>176</sup> This argument is supported by data collected by my study as 83% of the 30 festival assistants at Prague Fringe in 2019 were female. Andronic states that volunteers are prominently from ‘urban areas’. From my own data gathering, this was true for the most part at Prague Fringe in 2019, with a strong international element of the voluntary workforce. At this time, the most represented country for volunteers was from Australia, followed by the United Kingdom. If we are to

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<sup>175</sup> Various, "Lectures Given at the World Fringe Congress" (Adelaide Australia 2020).

<sup>176</sup> Hiromi Taniguchi, "Men's and Women's Volunteering: Gender Differences in the Effects of Employment and Family Characteristics," *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2006).



believe that a large portion of festival assistants at Prague Fringe had experience within a Fringe before, then it is useful to note that the main Fringe season in Australia had recently finished in March.<sup>177</sup> Whereas the British fringe festival season had only just began, with Brighton Fringe launching at the beginning of May, meaning there was less availability from this cohort to go to Prague.<sup>178</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By analysing the processes of the ‘European Model’ this case-study has highlighted that like the ‘CAFF’ and ‘Edinburgh’ models there seems to be high financial costs involved which are excluding many from taking part or experiencing the festival at all, which in turn creates a directional push away from a queer place. Therefore, by using the knowledge gained of the extant practice and methodologies of Prague Fringe this case-study will aid me in the design of the CFF, which will aim to be more cost effective for both artists and volunteers.

The financial implications alone whilst volunteering at Prague Fringe could alienate and/or restrict many from being involved. Even with free accommodation and other benefits, there is still a major cost involved with international travel and taking time off work, which many young people wouldn’t be able to afford. Within the context and themes of my study, it would be germane to ask why a long-standing festival of 20 years hasn’t acquired the resources to pay its staff. This is a wide-spread and common issue within ‘fringe’ and without radical change in terms of the level of funding made available to those festivals, on the prevalent models discussed here, Fringes simply would not be able to run without a large voluntary cohort. When asked about this during his interview Gove said, “paying the volunteers would mean the festival takes on a different atmosphere. It becomes another thing... It’s special because of what it is right now. In some ways we pay with ‘experience’”.<sup>179</sup> There is much to suggest that Prague does indeed “pay with experience” as Gove suggests. The ‘European Model’ which Prague Fringe has been instrumental in creating means that its volunteers are able to see internationally acclaimed acts as part of their role. This could make Prague Fringe a very desirable festival for a volunteer. Over time it has become a social

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<sup>177</sup> Adelaide Fringe, "2019 Programme," <https://adelaidefringe.com.au/news/adelaide-fringe-ready-to-party-with-release-of-2019-program>.

<sup>178</sup> Brighton Fringe, "Key Dates," <https://www.brightonfringe.org/news-updates/key-dates-2019/>.

<sup>179</sup> Gove. 4.

offering for young international volunteers to gather for the duration of the festival. Therefore, the main incentive of volunteering at Prague Fringe for the international festival assistants could be the location itself as Gove suggested. The beauty found in the city of Prague makes it a special festival on the ‘fringe circuit’ for those involved at the Fringe.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, as someone that travels to the city of Prague every year for the Fringe, I can understand Gove’s view that the city itself is a big draw. My time as a volunteer there was a very insightful one. It was the first time I have been able to see the inner workings of a fringe festival. This was invaluable for my ACCP process, and my pursuit of creating my own fringe festival.

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<sup>180</sup> \* However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic Prague Fringe had to reschedule their festival in 2021 to November. The programme was significantly smaller and because of this the need for volunteers wasn’t as great. Prague Fringe instead sourced local bodies to help fill the role of festival assistants. Could this be the new way forward for Prague Fringe? That is yet to be seen, but there is no doubt that this is a more sustainable way of practice.

## Making the Fringe

### Introduction

In this chapter, I give an overview of the formation of the CFF and reflect on the process as a festival director and how I kept the idea of forming a ‘fringe’ in Colchester to myself for many years due to a fear of someone with more experience doing it before me, which in turn led me to adopt an anti-fringe approach. Firstly, I draw up upon the practices and methods of fringe festival models found within the case-studies, whilst outlining my own decision-making in choosing the ‘European Model’ for the CFF due to it being the best suited for a new ‘fringe audience’. Next, I determine some of the specific conditions needed for a fringe festival in Colchester to be created, whilst proceeding to document the key decisions over an 18-month period.

In *Making Adaptive Resilience Real* (2010), Mark Robinson highlights how arts organisations should forever be ‘adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances’.<sup>181</sup> With that in mind, this chapter will proceed to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic both negatively and positively impacted the inaugural CFF and forced me to become both a resilient researcher and arts producer. Therefore, this chapter discusses the key insights into artistic models, the development of personal resilience caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a change in my own ‘fringe philosophy’ in a bid to keep the CFF alive. Finally, I outline how these findings may benefit those researching the socio-political and identity issues within the arts and provide an insight into the challenges of organising artistic events during the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to further knowledge on modes of adaptation and durability.

As explained, my love for ‘fringe’ began in 2015 when I was an artist at IndyFringe (USA). My experiences at IndyFringe allowed my love for ‘fringe’ to grow and I left knowing that one day I would attempt at establishing my own in my hometown of Colchester. However, in 2015 I was a recently graduated student that was at the very beginnings of my career as a theatre-maker and wasn’t quite ready for such an ambitious venture. I would spend the next 7 years gathering as much first-hand experiences at Fringes as I could. This allowed me to gain

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<sup>181</sup> Mark Robinson, *Making Adaptive Resilience Real* (Arts Council England, 2010).

a real in-depth and deep insight into the methods and processes deployed by fringe festival directors allowing me to develop my own ACCP methodology and framework.<sup>182</sup>

I began this PhD in 2018 after keeping the very idea of forming the CFF to myself for several years. I convinced myself that if I made my intentions public, someone else would do it before me. I knew producers and promoters within Colchester that regularly went to the EFF and this created a fear to manifest within myself that my PhD research would become void if those who I believed were better connected within the town to start such a venture, did it before me. This connects Peter Drahos' conceptualisation that intellectual property "swells the growth of private power".<sup>183</sup> Although, as time passed and after much reflection, I came to believe that I had no right in possessing the "private power" of the CFF alone. I did not own the concept of 'fringe' in Colchester and by keeping it to myself, I was depriving others from being part of its journey. In fact, by viewing my vision of the CFF as the only and rightful path, I was adopting an anti-fringe approach. The history of 'fringe' highlights its non-owned dimension within its ethos, which in turn allows 'Fringe' to become an egalitarian society.<sup>184 185</sup>

Over time I would adopt an approach of sharing my knowledge and passion for 'fringe' with others, whilst also being open to the lessons they could teach me. I would learn to balance a 'fringe ethos' with business and entrepreneurial skills. I began to understand grant-writing and marketing skills, and how to network with individuals and organisations that would eventually provide the CFF with much support in the years to come. Furthermore, I knew that I maybe couldn't, and wouldn't want, to do this forever. So, I realised that if others around me shared the same passion for the CFF, I could pass on the Fringe to keep it alive. This idea of having temporary possession of, and liability for, a Fringe is highlighted in Croall's interview. She told me that being the director of a Fringe means you are just the "guardian of it for now. You will move on and then someone else will take it".<sup>186</sup> In 2018 I wasn't ready to organise such an event. Although I have gained numerous first-hand experiences at fringe

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<sup>182</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>183</sup> Peter Drahos, *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property* (London: Routledge, 2016). 1.

<sup>184</sup> \* This is highlighted in the formation of the EFF when eight uninvited theatre companies built a new radical arts space after they were turned away by those who held power

<sup>185</sup> Edinburgh Festival Fringe Festival, "About the Fringe," <https://www.edfringe.com/learn/about>

<sup>186</sup> Croall.4.

festivals across the world and had created an ever-expanding network, I hadn't lived in Colchester for a long time. I was out of touch with the local arts scene and its people.<sup>187</sup>

In late November 2018, I was invited to attend a talk by creative producer Matthew Lindley. Also attending was freelance producer, Steve Goatman. We briefly talked and during this spontaneous meeting, I informed him about my vision for the CFF. Instantly, I saw that he was very keen to be involved. It was a significant moment for the CFF; we were speaking the same language regarding ethos and identity of a Fringe. I invited Steve on board, and he readily agreed. This would be the start of a long-standing partnership; We were a balanced team, both possessing different strengths. Steve was an experienced producer who specialised in grant writing and budgeting. Whereas I had the first-hand knowledge and network of fringe festivals which I had built as a 'fringe artist'. Steve and I would spend the next two years working together to create the CFF, but as this chapter will reveal the journey was much longer than we both ever expected and due to the COVID-19 pandemic we changed course on our vision of the CFF many times. But we eventually, we were successful in our pursuit of creating a fringe festival in Colchester.

### **Modelling: A Sister Festival?**

As outlined, the first step in creating my own fringe festival was determining which fringe model would be best to use, as it would shape the CFF's policies, finances, venue management and the process of selecting our artists. I identified three consistent models currently being used by fringe festivals: the Edinburgh, CAFF and European models. Additionally, I outlined there are now hybrid modelled fringes appearing across the globe which possess different characteristics and incentives to other fringe festivals found within its bespoke modelling.<sup>188 189</sup> There were benefits of choosing the hybrid model for the CFF for research purposes and my pursuit of producing original research to the academy. However, hybrid Fringes are much less common, and at the time of writing, not enough research had

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<sup>187</sup> \* I realised that the task of creating the CFF would be too much for me alone, so I would have to start 'opening the door' to others if the CFF was ever going to be launched.

<sup>188</sup> \* An example of a hybrid Fringe can be found at Tsitsit Fringe, which happens in multiple locations across the U.K which exclusively looks to programme work that highlights Jewish communities past and present.

<sup>189</sup> Tsitsit Fringe, "What Is Tsitsit?," <https://tsitsitfringe.org/>.

been conducted on their operation and benefits.<sup>190</sup> Therefore, I made a conscious decision to use one of the proven and well-established three main models as a guide for starting my own. I will detail in this chapter how the product would be a ‘hybrid’ version of the ‘European Model’, as I believed that it aligned within Colchester’s environment and ethos.

As explored, all three models have different strengths and drawbacks. I had to determine what I wanted to achieve from the CFF and its aims and objectives, before choosing the model. From the outset, I wanted to create an artist-friendly fringe festival and my own experiences have taught me that ticket sales play a key role in that experience for an artist. This view is also highlighted by Thomasson in “‘Too Big for Its Boots’?: Precarity on the Adelaide Fringe” (2019). She writes:

In March 2016, a debate erupted via social media and within the press over whether ‘the Adelaide Fringe [has] become too big for its boots’, after long-standing fringe artists complained of poor ticket sales in the smaller independent venues. British comedian Alexis Dubus accused the Adelaide Fringe via Facebook of allowing ‘greed and complacency to dictate its direction’ resulting in an ‘atmosphere of entitlement among Adelaide audiences’ who are discouraged from attending smaller shows by less established artists by the ‘big venues’ allegedly giving away free tickets to boost their food and alcohol sales<sup>191</sup>

The commercialisation of fringe festivals programming celebrity acts is a threat to smaller or less-known artists, yet I don’t agree with the view as seen in the quotation that the “entitlement” of audiences is to blame for not buying tickets to shows performed by less established artists. One of the most magical moments of ‘fringe’ for audience members is their ability to watch something they have pre-booked in advance or randomly coming across a show they had no plans to see at all. Therefore, I had to consider the experience for a newly built ‘fringe audience’ in Colchester, when considering the most suitable model. Kim Byunggook, investigating experiences and ‘quality’ at the Chungsong Apple Festival in South Korea (2015), found that “perceived festival quality had a significant effect on satisfaction in a festival setting.”<sup>192</sup> Therefore, the definition of ‘fringe’ could be described as a platform for those who may not receive an opportunity elsewhere, I argue as the culture and

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<sup>190</sup> \* **Additionally, I had no previous first-hand experiences at these festivals, this made it a risky choice when determining the CFF’s model, as first-hand experiences of models have been a fundamental part of my research methodology.**

<sup>191</sup> Sarah Thomasson, “‘Too Big for Its Boots’?: Precarity on the Adelaide Fringe,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 29, no. 1 (2019). 39–55.

<sup>192</sup> Byunggook Kim, “What Facilitates a Festival Tourist? Investigating Tourists’ Experiences at a Local Community Festival,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 20, no. 9 (2015).

understanding of ‘fringe’ may not be widely known in Colchester, a completely open access festival would allow for less quality work to be presented, which in turn, could lead to a more negative experience for the CFF’s newly engaged audience. This could directly impact ticket sales and lead to a more negative artist experience. Equally, I didn’t believe in giving local long-standing venues curatorial dictatorship gained from the ‘Edinburgh Model’. As discussed, this modelling is used both at the EFF and Adelaide Fringe and my experiences at these festivals led me to believe that moving away from a ‘Edinburgh Model’ would be best for CFF artists. The idea of creating a fringe festival in the town was to offer something different to audiences and give artists a platform to perform their work. Therefore, I felt I would have lost the ability to do that if I chose to use the ‘Edinburgh Model’ for the CFF.

Unlike CAFF Fringes who choose their artists at random or on a first-come-first-served basis, European Fringes select their artists through a juried process. I have argued throughout this thesis that the strengths of this model are a better standard of performances through a programming process. Though the costs and payment structure for artists may vary, typically artists will earn money from a ticket-split and have a lower participation fee, due to Fringes adopting this model typically managing their own venues. Therefore, I determined that the European Model would be the best to achieve the CFF’s goals. Although as stated in the previous chapter, it is the hardest model to define. Instead, fringe festivals adopting this model share similar characteristics, which enable them to be grouped within this model.<sup>193</sup>

In *Producing on the Fringe* (2015), Miklas is critical about this form of curation within juried fringe festivals. Miklas’s thesis focuses on the specific business models and selection processes used by fringe festivals in the United States. In contrast to my own belief, Miklas takes a very strong stance against juried fringe festivals, even declaring them “controversial”.

<sup>194</sup> However, I argue that this opinion conflicts with my personal experiences as a ‘fringe artist’, where a better standard of artistic content leads to a more positive all-round experience for performers, as audiences are more likely to engage with consistent ticket-buying when they have enjoyed their previous experience. This opinion was voiced by Interviewee Silverwood, who told me that being surrounded by other artists who are still developing and using a Fringe as a platform to develop their own practice, can actually “get in the way”<sup>195</sup> of his own interests when participating at Fringes. Silverwood’s point has

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<sup>193</sup> \* This is the case for both the Prague Fringe and Gothenburg Fringe.

<sup>194</sup> Miklas, *Producing on the Fringe: How Fringe Festival Structure Impacts Participant Experience*.

<sup>195</sup> Silverwood.3.

merit, as the juried ‘European Model’ does have the ability to produce a more established and high-quality programme, and therefore can be attractive to both artists and audiences.

However, I argue that it a Fringe’s responsibility to remain as a ‘grass roots’ space to develop its artists, so having a productive balance of experienced and new talent within Fringe programmes was at the forefront of my principles for the CFF.

When working with multiple venues, ‘European Model’ Fringes connects spaces and businesses and encourages an overall collaboration between multiple stakeholders. Thus, creating a prosperous festival for its community. I have determined this from volunteering at Prague Fringe in 2019, which allowed me to gain a sense of the everyday workings of the festival and its model. Moreover, I saw the benefits within the model of the ticket-split offered to its artists, which enabled both artist and festival to work together to sell tickets to respected shows. The juried aspect of the programming allowed audiences to typically see newly developed and more tested work side-by-side, with the latter helping to maintain positive relationships between audiences and the festival.

As previously argued, the ‘European Model’ also has challenges and disadvantages. Its financial structure can exclude many lower-income artists from taking part. The economic feasibility of the Prague Fringe operates on international artists who look to the festival as a ‘working holiday’, but I understood the town of Colchester may not have the same appeal for ‘fringe tourism’. Additionally, I saw the benefits of having a programme which consisted of mostly local artists, seen at CAFF festivals such as the Orlando Fringe.<sup>196</sup> In the *International Journal of Festival and Event Management* (2011), Jepson and Clarke discuss the importance of community and their shared ownership of a local festival. They describe successful festivals as a “themed and inclusive community event or series of events which have been created as the result of an inclusive community planning process to celebrate the particular way of life of people and groups in the local community with emphasis on particular space and time.”<sup>197</sup> Therefore, with local artists making up most of the programme, the CFF would be able to celebrate the local communities “way of life” described by Jepson and Clarke and community values which will be analysed in greater detail in the following chapter. In turn, this would allow more local audience members to

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<sup>196</sup> \* **The Orlando Fringe (USA) reserves 50% of its slots for local companies (companies within Central Florida), with National and International companies sharing the other 50% of the programming.**

<sup>197</sup> Alan Clarke and Allan Jepson, "Power, Hegemony, and Relationships in the Festival Planning and Construction Process," *International Journal of Event and Festival Management* (2011).7-19.



engage with the festival as they may have an existing relationship with some of the artists, benefitting the wider programme, with the aim of creating a goodwill ‘halo effect’ for the artists who were not local.

I argue that beyond the domains of the local, presenting both national and international artists is important within the programming. It offers something different to audiences and allows the opportunity for cultural exchange, and for local artists to network and form relationships with exogenous art forms and artists, they may not typically encounter otherwise. It would also give local artists a chance to experience being part of a wider ‘fringe community’.

Discussing CAFF’s touring artists’ experience at Fringes (2019), Thea Fitz-James suggests: “Some fringe artists (fringers) tour all year round, going to Australia from January to March, and then back to Canada for the summer months. The touring community works incredibly closely, and, as such, we develop deep relationships; many fringe artists have long careers and start families together”.<sup>198</sup> Fitz-James highlights some of the feelings I have personally experienced whilst touring from one Fringe to the next. Whilst on tour at Fringes, I have felt part of a wider “community” and have built many long-lasting “deep relationships” as Fitz-James describes. Therefore, although I valued giving local artists the most opportunities within the programming of the CFF, I also wanted to create the conditions for them to build relationships and partnerships with non-local artists. The CFF’s version of the ‘European Model’ would be alike to ‘CAFF Model’ fringe festivals and would consist of 50% local (East Anglian), 25% national and 25% international artists making up the programming. Although significant parts of the ‘European Model’ remained, alike to many other Fringes in the world the CFF developed its own hybrid modelling.

As seen in *Table 1*<sup>199</sup> the intended modelling of the CFF and Prague Fringe had many similarities. The significant differences between the CFF and Prague Fringe would be the size of the festival and the costs for artists. I know from my time in Prague, that the festival hires its venues, which creates greater costs to their artists. This led me to believe that if I could persuade venue owners in Colchester to absorb the cost of hiring fees, then the CFF could reduce the cost for artists significantly. This in turn creates tension within my own fringe model, as I would be passing on costs to local venues and businesses. However, at the time I

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<sup>198</sup> Thea Fitz-James, "Consent on the Fringe: Restorative Justice and Accountable Communities," *Canadian Theatre Review* 180 (2019).

<sup>199</sup> \* See Appendix 1.

believed I could offer something in return to our venues, with the potential of new audiences visiting their spaces and exciting and/or diverse performance work being programmed there.

### **Conditions for a Fringe**

In “Contemporary Festival: Polyphony of Voices and Some New Agents” (2007), Fjell states that “in the last 50-60 years the number of festivals in Europe has escalated from about 400 to approx. 30,000, and since the early 1990s, an entire global industry of festivals and events has evolved and developed”.<sup>200</sup> Fjell suggests that festivals currently play an integral role in European arts culture. Although, with festivals now becoming more frequent, there have undoubtedly been some negatives for local communities hosting them. For example, Rick Rollins et. al. detail in their study on Parksville Sand Castle Festival (Vancouver, Canada) in “Community Festivals: Measuring Community Support and Opposition” (1999), festivals can create anti-social behaviour and negative environmental impacts such as “increased motor traffic”.<sup>201</sup> Rollins highlights a long-standing argument regarding the negative environmental impact festivals are causing on their communities and the world. Similarly, Andrea Collins and Crispin Cooper’s (2015) study on festivals contribution to the ecological footprint is a useful study to refer to on this topic and provides insight into some of the main causes of the negative environmental footprint caused by festivals.<sup>202</sup> The negative environmental impacts at festivals aren’t just due to cultural tourism, but also due to the large number of printed materials which are distributed each year. For example, Brighton Fringe detail on their website that in 2019 alone, 90,000 programmes were printed;<sup>203</sup> these free brochures containing information for each individual show and venue were distributed throughout the local area and surrounding counties. In “Independent theatres and the Creation of a Fringe Atmosphere” (2009), Frew and Ali-Knight define fringe festival brochures as a “data base of information”.<sup>204</sup> I would agree that they are a vital source to refer to for ‘fringe audiences’, but more needs to be done by ‘fringe policy makers’ to reduce the use of printed

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<sup>200</sup> Fjell, "Contemporary Festival: Polyphony of Voices and Some New Agents."

<sup>201</sup> Rollins, Delamere, and Sepos, "Community Festivals: Measuring Community Support and Opposition".

<sup>202</sup> Collins and Cooper, "Measuring and Managing the Environmental Impact of Festivals: The Contribution of the Ecological Footprint."

<sup>203</sup> Brighton Fringe, "No Brochure for Brighton Fringe 2023," <https://www.brightonfringe.org/no-brochure-for-brighton-fringe-2023-due-to-soaring-costs/>.

<sup>204</sup> Frew and Ali-Knight, "Independent Theatres and the Creation of a Fringe Atmosphere."

marketing materials found at their festivals. Therefore, the future of fringe brochures and general advertisement may have to be digitalised in order to reduce excess print which is undoubtedly contributing to the decline in our planet's future.

Using the data provided by Fjell, I argue that the increase in festivals may suggest a handbook can be followed by organisers when at the very beginnings of the process. Although, as seen in the previous chapter there are so many different factors which make organising an event no matter how alike to others, unique to their own environment.<sup>205</sup> With that in mind, data produced from the interviews with long-standing Fringe Directors Croall, Gove, Patterson, Buffery and Nathanson has allowed me to determine that there are three conditions needed for a fringe festival to be formed, which will ultimately determine the type and delivery of a festival. These conditions are: *Place*, *Space* and *Artists*. I will now outline each condition in the context of the town of Colchester and will look to provide an ACCP framework of how I will look to best serve these conditions within my own practice through the form of the CFF.

### *Place*

In August 1992, I was born at Colchester General Hospital. Colchester would be my home for the next 19 years. It is a place in which I have always returned to. A place I feel safe in. Where my family still lives. Where I learnt to say my first words, had my first kiss by the bus shelter outside my school, but also a place where I have made many mistakes. Although, it will always feel like home, and I will forever take comfort in that as I begin to examine the rationale of using Colchester as the location in which to conduct the practice element of this PhD. As highlighted by Tim Cresswell the word 'place' has several different meanings, "place is not a specialised piece of academic terminology.... It is a word wrapped in common sense."<sup>206</sup> For Cresswell 'place' can be categorised into either its relationship to everyday life or to geography. For this study, I am interested in the latter, for the purpose of this thesis I consider 'place' as a fixed geographical location on a map. With that in mind, Colchester is the 'place' within my research. Moreover, its transformation into what political geographers such as John Agnew (1987) have described as a "meaningful location" created by a personal

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<sup>205</sup> \* For example, as seen at the EFF the size of an event is able to grow out of its demand from consumers.

<sup>206</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2014). 1

‘sense of place’.<sup>207</sup> In *Situating Everyday Life* (2012), Pink highlights how auto-ethnographers’ use of place and practice can “lead us to an appreciation of how human action is always situated in relation to specific environmental” elements.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, following Agnew and Pink, the ‘sense of place’ I feel within Colchester is due to the experience of key life events whilst growing up and the familiarity I have with its geographical make-up. This creates fertile research ground for me as an autoethnographer due to my personal “relation” to Colchester as Pink describes. Colchester’s theatrical history also makes it an interesting location for a Fringe.<sup>209</sup> Butler’s *Theatre in Colchester* (1981) highlights of the most significant moments of the town’s theatrical history and its journey to establishing the Mercury Theatre.<sup>210</sup> The correlation between historic locations and British fringe festivals is evident when reviewing active Fringes, as they can also be found in the ancient and history-promoting cities of Bath, Edinburgh and London. The ideal of new meets old is also found in Bakhtian’s definition of ‘carnival’. For example, in the prologue in *Rabelais and his World*, translator Helene Iswolsky describes the carnival as a ‘revolution’ and that “the birth of the new... is as indispensable and inevitable as the death of the old”.<sup>211</sup>

### Space

Like Bakhtin’s carnival, Fringes are a temporary celebration which inhabit time and place. This in turn can allow the creation of a space to host performances for fringe festival audiences. In *For Space* (2005) Doreen Massey writes that we should “recognise space as always under construction”<sup>212</sup>. This implies that ‘spaces’ are fluid and forever changing. I argue that ‘fringe’ spaces are also constantly “under construction” as Massey describes. For example, a large proportion of the non-conventional performance ‘spaces’ found at Fringes are elastic and ‘pop-up’. Each year, new deals are made, and contracts signed between Fringes and venues. This creates an ever-evolving process between ‘fringe’, ‘place’ and its transformed ‘spaces’ in the process of becoming arthouses. Massey suggests that ‘space’ is

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<sup>207</sup> John Agnew, *The United States in the World-Economy: A Regional Geography*, vol. 1 (CUP Archive, 1987).

<sup>208</sup> Sarah Pink, *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places* (London: Sage Publications, 2012).3

<sup>209</sup> Andrew Phillips’ book *Colchester: A History* (2017)<sup>209</sup> details the rich history on display throughout its landscape and the remains of Roman walls still shape the design and makeup of Colchester’s environment.

<sup>210</sup> Nicholas Butler, *Theatre in Colchester* (Colchester: Hewitt Photo-Lith, 1981).39-52.

<sup>211</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World."6.

<sup>212</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005). 9.

constantly being created around us and will forever be unfinished and defines it as a “sphere of a dynamic simultaneity” that segues into “loose ends and ongoing stories.”<sup>213</sup> Within the ‘spaces’ audiences may find work that is new and untested. Performed by artists who may lack professional experience. Like many of the performances themselves, these ‘spaces’ don’t fall into traditional or mainstream categories. Therefore, by determining Fringes as a temporary event that inhabit places and creates spaces, whilst celebrating the imperfections that both the ‘space’ and sometimes the ‘performances’ have created, the audience can find themselves in a “sphere of dynamic simultaneity”. If audiences accept this evolving matrix between ‘place’ and spaces’, then a more forgiving and positive environment is created for artists, adding to the ACCP framework.

‘Fringe’ spaces can take many forms and shapes within a ‘place’; they aren’t constrained into fitting into a pre-existing concept of what a performance space should look like. One of the main ‘principles of fringe’ that I identify is that it provides an opportunity for performances to be held in a variety of traditional and non-traditional theatrical spaces. Moreover, if the spaces are proximate, audiences could see multiple performances within any given day. This allows Fringes to be redesigned and transformed by alternative spaces into a theatrical stage. For example, at the EFF in 2018 it was possible for artists to perform in a caravan<sup>214</sup> or even an antique shop.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, through the ‘fringe’ lens, ‘space’ relates to the compression and interrelatedness of multiple spaces and the possibility and promise of journeying between those spaces.

The common playing time at a fringe festival is around 45-60 minutes.<sup>216</sup> With set up time and a strike of 15 minutes, performances must be easily transferable and fit into these guidelines. Due to the scheduling of the programme, audiences don’t typically have a great amount of time to travel from one venue to another. Thus, fringe venues need to be in propinquity.<sup>217</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter, there are two differences within Fringe Models regarding venue management. The first allows the artist to choose or approach their own venues; this could be based on the suitability of their show to that space or the venues

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>214</sup> Edinburgh Fringe, "Venues: Cranston Caravan Club," <https://tickets.edfringe.com/venues/cranston-caravan-club>.

<sup>215</sup> "Venues: Georgian Antiques," <https://tickets.edfringe.com/venues/georgian-antiques>

<sup>216</sup> Prague Fringe, "Artist Application Info," <https://www.praguefringe.com/participate/artist-application-info/>.

<sup>217</sup> \* **Therefore, venues don’t necessarily need to be traditional theatrical spaces, but more a variety of accessible buildings that are situated in the same geographical area. Depending on the specific Fringe Model, they are flexible both in their design and approach, so that they can cater for a variety of art forms.**

overall reputation with stakeholders and the industry. In this case a Fringe acts as a broker between the artist and venue and gives the latter all the prominence. Alternatively, the other approach sees the Fringe directly select the venue for the artist, based on their technical specifications in which the artist has previously provided and can create more bespoke or left-field choices in terms of venue allocation for artists. These are usually known as ‘Fringe Managed Venues’ and are most common in the ‘CAFF’ and ‘European Models’.<sup>218</sup> The CFF would be adopting the latter, therefore my own relationship with the venues would be imperative for the operation of the CFF.

Arguably, one of the memorable factors of the EFF is the street performances that take place throughout the Royal Mile. Pink et al. describes street walking as a “perpetual making of public space”.<sup>219</sup> During an interview for the *Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies* (2007), Ahmed states that spaces are public, but they are “also a space of an intimate encounter, whether it is between two strangers who pass each other by and notice each other in a particular way”.<sup>220</sup> Therefore, one of the positive aspects of street performances at the EFF could be the ability it possesses in bringing strangers together. The community within a fringe festival is made up of both endogenous locals, and those exogenous and temporary visitors involved in the making and participating at Fringes (artists/audiences). In “Living Space at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe: Spatial Tactics and the Politics of Smooth Space” (2013), Ian Munro and Silvia Jordan write about the strategies street artists employ to create performance areas within public spaces at the EFF and how the contract made between street performers and the environment they share with a local community, is made by the “openness” created by ‘fringe’. They write:

Openness is a key defining characteristic of the Festival, especially the street festival, which was both open access and free of charge. Openness is very much a part of the ethic, not only of the Festival Fringe, but also of the street performing tradition. The value of openness was remarked upon by many of the artists. For them it represented an ethics of space and the use of space, which was apparent in the tactics of street performers, both in the way they developed techniques for creating a space for their

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<sup>218</sup> \* Sometimes, artists are encouraged not to contact the venues directly. This could be seen as a clear divide between Fringe and the everyday cycle of a working venue, and some believe it’s important not to violate this.

<sup>219</sup> Sarah Pink et al., "Walking across Disciplines: From Ethnography to Arts Practice," *Visual studies* 25, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>220</sup> Salla Tuori and Salla Peltonen, "Feminist Politics: An Interview with Sara Ahmed," *NORA—Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 4 (2007).

individual performances and in the way they acted as a collective network for appropriating urban spaces and socializing them as performance spaces.<sup>221</sup>

Munro and Jordan highlight how “openness” is a key ethic when street performers redesign public spaces. Although new arts spaces are created and designated at Fringes, we should recognise that they are still shared with a local community and inscribed by the usages the local community recognise. To revisit this in relation to fringe as carnival, Iswolsky describes carnival laughter as “not an individual reaction to some isolated ‘comic’ event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people.” Street performers like the ones found at the EFF do allow for wider community engagement into the festival. The ‘space’ it creates can be inclusive and accessible for those that decide to stop and engage with the artists. Although, other non-conventional performance ‘spaces’ which are found and celebrated within the world of ‘fringe’, have caused a wide-spread concern about physical accessibility found at fringe festivals such as the EFF. Eliza Gearty writes in *The Skinny* that only 40% of venues in the EFF were wheelchair accessible in 2017. Gearty highlights that although it increased to 49% in 2019, it is “nowhere near good enough”<sup>222</sup> and I would agree that more needs to be done by the policy makers at Fringes to allow for greater accessibility for those that need it within their spaces. Therefore, I committed to using 100% wheelchair accessible venues for CFF in the first year of the festival so that it could involve “all the people”<sup>223</sup> as Iswolsky suggests.

I argue throughout this thesis that fringe festivals can create a ‘queertopia’ environment for its participants and community. Reed presents an alternative view, “some would argue that queerness, as an ineffable ideal of oppositional culture, is so fluid and contingent that the idea of a concrete queer space is an oxymoron”.<sup>224</sup> By viewing queer spaces as “fluid” as Reed describes, I present the argument that queer spaces are not originally built to be ‘queertopias’. Instead, they have been moulded into that by the people that inhabit them. This is a similar relationship between ‘fringe’ and their spaces. As a temporary contract is built where the festival will look to transform the space to fit with their own ‘fringe’ ideology. Although this is only temporary and not “concrete” as Reed describes, there is a fluidity around a ‘fringe’, which celebrates outsidersness and alternative modes and changes the nature of a space so that it becomes queer.

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<sup>221</sup> Iain Munro and Silvia Jordan, “‘Living Space’ at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe: Spatial Tactics and the Politics of Smooth Space,” *Human Relations* 66, no. 11 (2013).

<sup>222</sup> Eliza Gearty, “How Can the Edinburgh Fringe Become More Accessible?,” *The Skinny* 2019.

<sup>223</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, “Rabelais and His World.” 11.

<sup>224</sup> Reed, “Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment.” 64.

For a Fringe to inhabit venues and to turn them into ‘queertopias’, it is imperative to have management in place that is willing to support such an event, with benefits offered including commercial gain or supporting art in their local area. Furthermore, there needs to be a symbiotic relationship between a Fringe and venue and one that looks to support one another. In 2017, Limerick Fringe (Republic of Ireland) presented all their venues on their website, along with a bio, pictures and a link to their external webpage.<sup>225 226</sup> As stated at the beginning of this chapter, a good model of practice would be to secure these spaces for free or at a reduced rate. This would allow significantly cheaper fees for artists. Furthermore, offers presented at each venue would be tailored to what they could benefit from; the promise of new clientele in their space, money spent at their bar, or general the marketing of their business.

### Artists

Undoubtedly, without artists the creation of a Fringe is impossible. The question for fringe organisers is who their artists are and how do they find them. For towns such as Colchester, local artists are fundamental resource. The CFF was a newly established Fringe, the local community might not have ever heard of a fringe festival before. Therefore, prioritising the programming of local acts means in theory that audiences are more likely to engage with the wider programme, which in turn benefits both the national and international artists performing at fringe festivals.

The origin of ‘fringe’ was created from an artistic protest by artists against more well-established companies, I argue that there is a case to suggest that the artistic content created by artists at Fringes also needs to share values of protest and/or a position outside the established norm. This argument can be supported by analysing Bakhtin’s definition of ‘folk carnival humour’. In *Introducing Bakhtin* (1997), Vice describes folk carnival humour as “folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody”.<sup>227</sup> Fringe programmes also share this ethos of artistic variety as found in ‘folk carnival humour’ and typically celebrate all performance art forms. Moreover, Vice describes this as a “boundless world of humours

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<sup>225</sup> Limerick Fringe, "About," <http://limerickfringe.com/>.

<sup>226</sup> \* **This encourages the audience to attend other events at the venues prior to their own.**

<sup>227</sup> Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*. 151-155.



forms and manifestations [which] opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture". The comparison between the ecclesiastical described by Bakhtin in folk humour and 'higher art forms is displayed since the formation of the Edinburgh festivals. However, I would also argue it offers a place for the alternative acts which "oppose the serious tone" of the mainstream as Vice describes. Therefore, the CFF would need to attract artists that sit on the edge of the artistic mainstream if I was going to create a 'fringe environment' through the programming.

In *Contemporary British Queer Performance* (2012), Steven Greer writes "the open promise of such rhetoric – of sexual difference (re)read as the desirable cutting edge – might be set against the real-world negotiation of access to venues and (semi-public) space".<sup>228</sup> The CFF received 71 applications from artists looking to perform in 2020. Data taken from the application forms shows that 23 out of the 71 applications (32%) were from companies that had one or more members who represented as being LGBTQIA+. I would hope that this suggests queer artists felt comfortable in performing their work within a 'fringe' environment. Although, the number was lower than I originally anticipated. This may have been due the CFF being a new event so the visibility for queer artists was still small. Another view could be that even with the best intentions I hadn't made the CFF completely "accessible" for the queer artists as Greer suggests.

### **Preparing for a Pandemic**

I arrived back from the WFC in Australia on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020 with every intention to get straight back to work in preparation for the first ever CFF in May. However, due to the threat of COVID-19, I soon realised that a conversation needed to take place between Steve and I about what our next steps would be. At this stage, much was still unknown about the virus, and it was spreading at different rates globally. From then on, we kept a close eye on other fringe festivals to see their own course of action in a bid for guidance. We specifically focused on other Fringes due to take place in May 2020, including Prague Fringe, Brighton Fringe and Wandsworth Arts Fringe, but there was no public news on their plans. After conducting follow-

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<sup>228</sup> Stephen Greer and Stephen Greer, "Staging Difference: The Rise of Queer Arts Festivals," *Contemporary British Queer Performance* (2012). 188.

up interviews with fringe directors across the world,<sup>229</sup> it became abundantly clear that there was no contingency method in place to deal with such a disaster. It seemed that Fringes were holding out for as long as possible, before making an ultimate decision. This was new ground for everyone and there didn't seem to be one solution that could be implemented across the fringe network.

On 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 as a pandemic,<sup>230</sup> leading to the U.K Government closing its borders, social hubs and schools. With social interaction strictly limited and no end date in sight, the arts industry watched on. We were lost. As event organisers, all creative power and decision-making had been taken away from us. Our venues, artists and other stakeholders were contacting us, asking us what our next steps would be. We didn't yet know the answer, and this is highlighted in my video documentation when I film a series of video diary entries in my bedroom, whilst I wait nervously for more concrete guidance on what next steps to take.<sup>231</sup> The only thing that was clear, was we had to make a final decision within a matter of days, as we were due to print 8,000 brochures at the end of the month.

One of the many issues for us surrounding our pending decision, was that we had spent 18 months working extremely hard to get to this point. It played on my mind, that if we cancelled prematurely, a lot of our hard work may have been wasted.<sup>232</sup> There was also the issue of our international artists that had already booked flights to the U.K. It became apparent that if we cancelled our Fringe and their airline did not cancel their flights or accept this as a reason, then they would receive no refund. I felt that we had to wait for as long as possible, to give them a chance. As an artist myself, I knew it could financially cripple their company if they suffered such a financial loss. However, the safety of our artists, audiences and volunteers had to come first.

The global pandemic ended up making that decision for many fringe festivals, including the CFF. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the U.K Government announced that all social spaces, including pubs, restaurants and theatres would be closed with immediate effect.<sup>233</sup> There was no

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<sup>229</sup> Gove.3.

<sup>230</sup> World Health Organisation, "Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19)," <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>.

<sup>231</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the 'Fringe' Experience." 01:09:04

<sup>232</sup> \* **For example, the process of finding new venues, artists and sponsorship may have to be started all over again, and this might have been too great a task for us.**

<sup>233</sup> Lanre Bakare, "Covid-19 Prompts All Major British Theatres to Close Doors," *The Guardian*, 16 March 2020.

definitive date for when these measures would be lifted. The question now was do we cancel or postpone to a later date? Both had merits and disadvantages. We knew that if we cancelled, then we would have to programme the whole festival again. This was a big job. This led us to the idea of postponing, but due to a lack of information about the virus and how long it would be in our society it was impossible to pick a new date that would be 100% safe from further disruption from COVID-19.

In a follow up interview with Steve Gove, I asked if it was even possible to prepare for such a disaster:

I mean you never have a meeting where you say what would happen if the whole thing had to cancel if.... You would start laughing at people. Okay, what would happen if one theatre burnt down? Well, you would have to go and find another theatre. You would do something! You come up with these fantastical imaginative scenarios that you try to troubleshoot. But you never could have imagined this. Even if you had, what would the plan be? You can't make the plan! So, it was such a shock! <sup>234</sup>

With an experienced director such as Gove describing the scenario as a “shock” and something you couldn't never plan for; it allowed me to see just how unprepared everyone was. There was no plan in place, and even the EFF were criticised by our own artists for the time it took for an outcome to be announced. Nonetheless, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 the EFF was officially cancelled. <sup>235</sup>

### **The Shop Window Takeover**

Steve and I postponed our festival for May 2020. The revised dates would be in November of the same year. But once again, due to a rise in COVID rates in August, <sup>236</sup> we realised that the festival could not take place once more. We immediately contacted our artists and venues and moved the festival to April 2021. At the time, due to the progress in producing vaccines <sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Gove.3.

<sup>235</sup> Edinburgh Festival Fringe, "2020 Fringe Announcement from Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive," <https://www.edfringe.com/covid-19>.

<sup>236</sup> BBC News, "Coronavirus: Daily Cases Highest since Mid-June," <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-53938272>

<sup>237</sup> National Institutes of Health, "Phase 3 Clinical Testing in the US of AstraZeneca Covid-19 Vaccine Candidate Begins," <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/phase-3-clinical-testing-us-astrazeneca-covid-19-vaccine-candidate-begins>.

and predicted forecasts from politicians<sup>238</sup> we believed this was the best path to take. Sadly, we were wrong. However, in November 2020, Steve and I decided that it was vital we produced ‘something’ in April 2021. This was because we were worried that our artists, venues and new social media followers would soon lose interest if we didn’t present at least a snippet of our Fringe soon. We would spend the next weeks planning for a contingency. The aim was to produce a COVID-secure project that could sit alongside the CFF in April 2021, or on its own as a ‘standalone event’ in the eventuality that we would once more have to rearrange the dates for the main festival programme. Thus, the Colchester Fringe: Shop Window Takeover (SWT) was created.

In response to rising COVID-19 rates amongst the population, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020 the British government announced a three-tiered system approach which meant different regions of the country face varied restrictions based on factors such as rates of transmissions and hospitalisations on a local level.<sup>239</sup> However, in response to a new mutant variant of COVID-19 on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2020 the Prime Minister increased this to a four-tiered system which would lawfully ask large parts of the country to ‘stay at home’.<sup>240</sup> The tier level in Colchester didn’t increase until 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2020, when it was moved from Tier 3 into Tier 4. Although, this tiered system was due to end by the end of March 2021.<sup>241</sup> The concept we wanted to design for this new project would be created with the intention of navigating around these specific COVID-19 restrictions implemented by government and the tiered system.

Due to medical researchers such as Weed and Foad (2020) supporting the principle that transmission of the virus spreads much less frequently outside,<sup>242</sup> and academic papers such as Stephen Kissler’s (2020) study on social distancing strategies suggesting that we may have to maintain social distancing until at least 2022, we decided that our best chance of success would be to host something outdoors. However, due to unpredictable British weather we

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<sup>238</sup> Martin Bagot, "Life in Uk Won't Be Back to Normal until Easter 2021, Warns Jonathan Van Tam," *The Mirror*, 14 August 2020.

<sup>239</sup> Peter Walker, "Boris Johnson Sets out New Three-Tier System of Covid Restrictions for England," *The Guardian*, 23 November 2020.

<sup>240</sup> Boris Johnson, "Prime Minister Announces Tier 4: 'Stay at Home' Alert Level in Response to New Covid Variant," GOV.UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-tier-4-stay-at-home-alert-level-in-response-to-new-covid-variant>.

<sup>241</sup> Essex County Council, "Remaining Areas of Essex Placed in Tier 4," <https://www.essex.gov.uk/news/remaining-areas-of-essex-placed-in-tier-4>.

<sup>242</sup> Mike Weed and Abby Foad, "Rapid Scoping Review of Evidence of Outdoor Transmission of Covid-19," *MedRxiv* (2020).

came to the realisation that it couldn't take place completely outside. We then returned to an idea that we looked at during the very beginnings of the CFF, curating short performances in vacant shop windows within the town centre. This would weather-proof the artists and their shows, keep audiences outdoors and allow for controlled social distancing on the streets. This project would be reliant on a successful ACE grant application which we would be submitting in December 2020. We would be asking for £15,000 to programme six artists in four shop windows.

In "The Effect of Festival Atmospheric on Visitors' Emotions and Satisfaction" (2012), Jenny Lee presents the importance of creating a festival atmosphere, "certain aspects of festival atmospheric play an essential role in eliciting moderate to strong specific emotions in visitors. The significant emotion-eliciting attributes of festival atmospheric were ambience, layout/design, and service encounter/social interaction."<sup>243</sup> It was imperative to create a festival atmosphere which embodied these characteristics, even if our main festival programme couldn't take place. We tried to do this by offering two artists within our main festival programme the chance to take part within the SWT. As stated previously, unlike the main festival programme this specific project was solely reliant on funding. Thankfully, on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021 we received the news from ACE that our application for funding was successful.

The idea of putting live performance in vacant shop windows isn't a new one. In fact, one Fringe has moulded their whole festival experience around the concept. The Storefront Fringe which is situated in Kingston (Ontario), Canada was founded in 2017<sup>244</sup> by a local arts organisation called Theatre Kingston, this specific Fringe has adopted the CAFF model.<sup>245</sup>

The 2020 edition of the Storefront Fringe was cancelled due to the pandemic.<sup>246</sup> However, it may have inspired another Fringe to follow suit in its format. The Scranton Fringe Festival (SFF), which was established in 2015<sup>247</sup> and is one of the few Fringes in the U.S.A that

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<sup>243</sup> Jenny Jiyeon Lee, "The Effect of Festival Atmospheric on Visitors' Emotions and Satisfaction," (2016). 125.

<sup>244</sup> Theatre Kingston, "What Is Theatre Kingston," <https://www.theatrekingston.com/about.html>.

<sup>245</sup> \* **During its first year in 2017, the Storefront Fringe saw 17 companies, perform over 8 days in 3 vacant storefronts.**

<sup>246</sup> Ted Raymond, "Storefront Fringe Festival in Kingston Cancelled Due to Covid-19 Pandemic," <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/storefront-fringe-festival-in-kingston-cancelled-due-to-covid-19-pandemic-1.4944037>.

<sup>247</sup> Scranton Fringe Festival, "About," <https://scrantonfringe.org/about/>.

doesn't hold a CAFF membership.<sup>248</sup> In September 2020, in response to the pandemic as well producing a digital offer of their programme they produced a project called 'Fringe Under Glass':

Fringe Under Glass provides a unique, safer theatrical experience and spectacular visuals to engage small groups of audience members led from window to window throughout the Electric City by a Fringe tour guide. The live performances will feature wireless audio transmission by solo artists or small groups of creative talent, providing a safe performance space and allowing the artists the opportunity to incorporate new technology into their work.<sup>249</sup>

Both the Storefront Fringe and 'Fringe Under the Glass' have aided the practice-led approach within this study. Although, the study's version of this format differs from these versions in a few instances. For example, there were no tickets on sale for the SWT. The event was free for all potential audiences. Therefore, unlike these other versions who pay artists through ticket sales, we instead paid them a set fee. This means fractions of our audience were passers-by that stumbled across our event unexpectedly.<sup>250</sup>

In *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals* (2018), Judith Mair states that "the very existence of festival organisations is determined by their ability to generate funds, and this ultimately means attracting and satisfying attendees".<sup>251</sup> The SWT had changed the CFF's outlook and ability to finance itself. Due to the pandemic and the postponements caused we were presented with much more time to write funding applications and secure partnerships. What started as a non-profit and voluntary venture was now receiving funding from a national body. We were in position to attract and satisfy our attendees as Mair suggests. I argue that the SWT was a success and a great indication that the town of Colchester has an appetite for 'fringe'. Through data given to us by our partners, it is estimated that 2,250 audience members physically engaged with the SWT on the day, allowing the CFF launch its brand to a large audience. However, I would also argue that due to it being a curated event where most artists were formally invited/commissioned, it moved away from the open-access principle of

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<sup>248</sup> \* **This is because artists are selected by a juried panel, rather than on a first-come-first-served or lottery basis like all CAFF Fringes. Therefore, it's not an open-access Fringe and does not qualify for a CAFF membership.**

<sup>249</sup> Scranton Fringe Festival, "Fringe under Glass," <https://scrantonfringe.org/2021/02/15/special-news-fringe-under-glass-2021/?fbclid=IwAR1sGltjPS5hPEaSlpjY7-tGsiihidQiljglg-ukdaojtLrt45XGEkhlivL4>.

<sup>250</sup> \* **This approach has its flaws and its merits. The latter being that as a newly established Fringe we were looking to build our audience, and through brand marketing at the SWT it gives us the opportunity to do so. However, as were also reliant of footfall within the town centre on that day and if its low for any reason, our audience numbers would have suffered.**

<sup>251</sup> Judith Mair, "The Value of Festivals," in *The Routledge Handbook of Festivals*, ed. Getz Donald, et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). 27.

‘fringe’ where anyone with an artform has the chance to participate. Although, it proved that ‘fringe’ has the power to bring a community together after the toughest of times caused by the pandemic. The pandemic would force Fringes to remodel and restructure their festivals,<sup>252</sup> but the question of what the future holds for fringe festivals post-pandemic is still very much unknown.

One of the principles of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival is that it has the potential to overthrow a hierarchical power. In an academic article (2011) on Bakhtin and the ‘carnavalesque’, Andrew Robinson suggests that “hierarchies are overturned through inversions, debasements and profanations, performed by normally silenced voices and energies.”<sup>253</sup> I argue that the “silenced voices” that Robinson is referring to could be linked to the underrepresented queer and global majority artists performing at the SWT in capitalist spaces. Athina Karatzogianni and Robinson provide analysis of repressed members of society fighting against capitalism in *Power, Resistance and Conflict in the Contemporary World: Social movements, Networks and Hierarchies* (2010) by stating that “the overthrow of capitalism should not be posited in terms of replacement with another hierarchical system (whether reformist or revolutionary) but, rather, in terms of the emancipation of the forces of difference which are repressed and alienated beneath capitalist structures.”<sup>254</sup> Although, like ‘carnival’, Fringes are only a temporary celebration. Meaning that although they may overthrow a hierarchical force (or in this case a capitalist space), it will only occur for a short period of time.

By occupying retail sites, events such as the SWT may have succeeded in the temporary ‘queerification’ of capitalist spaces. Although, it was not without its tensions and paradoxes, as the SWT may have in fact been in partnership with capitalism rather than rebelling against. The event succeeded in giving queer artists a platform in a public space. Although, how we measured success of the SWT was very much different to some of the other partners involved. For example, we entered these empty retail units at no financial cost. The shopping districts that controlled them, were interested in the event as they believed it would generate an increase of footfall of stakeholders for the commercial businesses situated within their retail districts. One of our Drag artists recognised the tension between the event and the capitalist

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<sup>252</sup> \* **The Prague Fringe would move their summer festival to the Autumn and decrease the size of their programme by nearly 75%.**

<sup>253</sup> Andrew Robinson, "In Theory Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power," *Ceasefire* 12 (2011).

<sup>254</sup> Athina Karatzogianni and Andrew Robinson, *Power, Resistance and Conflict in the Contemporary World: Social Movements, Networks and Hierarchies* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010).49.

spaces in which we inhabited and included Donna Summer's song *She Works Hard for the Money* (1983) within her set list.<sup>255</sup>

I argue that the CFF community experienced a form of 'queer anarchy' during the performance of this song. In an academic article titled "Polyamory and Queer Anarchism: Infinite Possibilities for Resistance" (2012), Susan Song argues that society can create a new 'queer-anarchist' and that "by allowing for multiple and fluid forms of identifying and relating sexually that go beyond a gay/straight binary, a queer anarchist practice allows for challenging the state and capitalism, as well as challenging sexual oppressions and norms that are often embedded in the state and other hierarchical social relations."<sup>256</sup> In the same article, Song adds that "we must strive to create and accept new forms of relating in our anarchist movements that smash the state and that fight oppressions in and outside of our bedrooms". The SWT Drag artist in question, openly displayed a form of 'queer anarchy' performing this song in a capitalist space. The performance became a protest against "the state" as Song describes, and by encouraging the audience to sing and dance along, the SWT crowd also become part of that protest.

The SWT was an imperfect event, which was never meant to happen. As detailed throughout this section, it was in some ways a last resort caused by the pandemic in producing a 'fringe experience' within Colchester. The event itself was a contradiction to 'fringe ideals' I have detailed throughout this thesis. However, to make any progress in allowing for a queer space to be created, deals had to be made. Both shopping districts were very supportive of the event and didn't once try to censor any of work or ambitions. Alike to Bakhtin's carnival, the SWT has allowed me to believe that 'fringe' has the power to bring together opposing forces within its sphere in celebration of openness and difference. Furthermore, as evidenced in my video documentation which showcases the SWT acts performing, it allowed me to see first-hand that the concept of 'fringe' does work in my hometown and that members of our community enjoyed being part of it.<sup>257</sup>

We held the inaugural CFF in October 2021. Back in March 2020, we had secured our artists, venues, volunteers and partners and were days away from opening ticket sales. However, the

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<sup>255</sup> Donna Summer and Michael Omartian, "She Works Hard for the Money," (Sweet Summer Night Music & See This House Music, 1983).

<sup>256</sup> Susan Song, "Polyamory and Queer Anarchism: Infinite Possibilities for Resistance," *Queering anarchism* (2012).4-5.

<sup>257</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the 'Fringe' Experience." 01:57:08 - 01:58:32



pandemic forced us to restart most of the process. Although this took a significant amount of time and resilience, thankfully not much had changed in relation to our plans. It was still a four-day festival, taking place in venues which we had previously booked within the town centre. Also, a large proportion of our artists from 2020 followed us into the 2021 festival. The main significant difference was the time of the year. What was originally supposed to be a summer festival had now become an Autumn one.



Figure 5. SESKA performing to the SWT audience in 2020 (Photo by author).

This chapter has documented some of the key decision-making and thought processes from the CFF since its formation. Supported by my own original research on fringe models and interviews with fellow fringe festival directors, it has highlighted how I have used my extant practice of Fringes and ACCP framework to design a fringe festival for Colchester. Equally, I have begun to unpick the key conditions needed for a fringe festival to be established. Whilst, highlighting the importance of *Place*, *Space* and *Artists* within fringe festivals and how they are in dialogue with a wider and ever-expanding community. The video documentation supporting this thesis, highlights my personal battle and frustrations as a researcher and event organiser during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this chapter serves to provide an insight into the challenges of organising artistic events during the COVID-19 pandemic and the

resilience and ‘luck’ in navigating a route to success during these unprecedented times. Finally, I have outlined how these findings may benefit those researching cultural issues such as accessibility and community involvement within the performing arts.

## Living in the Fringe

### Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that fringe festivals can create a queer environment and by drawing upon the work of queer theorists such as Ahmed, Jagose and Judith Halberstam I will unpick how diverse and inclusive programming allow the alternative and outsidership spirit within ‘fringe’ to shine through within a festival format and will determine if I was able to recreate the ‘fringe experience’ I have previously encountered as an artist. Firstly, by determining the key principles of ‘fringe’ during the time the CFF took place and analysing the relationship between a Fringe and its ‘community’ I look to answer two key research questions within this PhD. The first by looking for a solid definition of the word ‘fringe’ and the second of determining the relationship between a fringe festival and its community. Secondly, by using the Bakhtinian principles of carnival specifically within the work *Rabelais and his World* (1965), I argue that from the moment a fringe festival begins it presents a temporary alternative to everyday life for its ‘community’ and will determine the relationship possibilities it can seek to foster between community members. By outlining the key moments through autoethnographic accounts during the time the CFF took place, I highlight what it felt like to ‘live within’ the CFF from the personal scope as the co-director of the festival and will use the work of Pink to support how it felt to be situated within the world of the CFF.

I have argued throughout that the word ‘fringe’ is one that alludes a fixed definition, although my thesis aims to constellate multiple sources and types of information to create a typology for ‘fringe’, whilst defining both its boundaries and genre. I have determined that due to the elastic nature of fringe models, taking contrasting shapes and sizes, that not one definition provided by festival directors can ever be the same. However, I argue that the ethos of ‘fringe’ makes it an event which sits-on-the-edge of other more mainstream arts festivals. Aligned to the plurality of features and modes in the typology of ‘fringe’, this chapter doesn’t look to determine one single definition of the word ‘queer’. Instead, the “no-fixed value”<sup>258</sup> of the word queer, as Jagose suggests, mean fringe festivals can be a ‘queer event’, which in turn can produce a ‘queer environment’ for its community. Ultimately it argues that through a

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<sup>258</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*.1.

Fringe, ‘queerness’ can be a mindset or a way of life which includes being open-minded to new and unknown performances and joining communities based on interests rather than as a grouping of individual sexualities. Nonetheless, it would be subjective to seek one single definition of queerness, so fundamentally the sexual politics involved around the term make it too important to remove sexual identity from any given definition. In an article on queer theory within cinema and media studies (2013), Maria Pramaggiore writes, “while political activism energized the notion of queerness as a diverse category comprising sexual dissidents who embrace the subversion of heterosexual normativity, for many theorists, queerness provides an opportunity for deconstructing identity norms altogether”.<sup>259</sup> By considering queerness as a lived practice that both rejects normative identities and stands as a commentary on those identities, this definition connects both identity and mindset/ a way of living. I argue in this chapter that both ‘fringe’ and queerness share a similar mindset which allows us to work outside the mainstream and subverts homogenous tastes often created by patriarchal forces. Equally, they both use a subversion of methodologies which are creative, satirical and socially readable as a commentary.

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021, I opened the debut Colchester Fringe Festival (CFF) 17 months later than originally planned. The CFF would take me to a place where I hadn’t been before, another world, or as Bakhtin describes a “fairy-tale world”.<sup>260</sup> In total, 23 artists/companies performed in 6 venues over a four-day period. There were 89 ticketed performances, as well as free workshops, music, and interactive circus activities across the weekend. The programme consisted of local<sup>261</sup>, national and international artists.<sup>262</sup>

The work presented was original and was made by artists from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. The printed brochure provided potential audience members with a 30-word blurb, image and show name for each act.<sup>263</sup> It asked audiences to ‘take a risk’ and to step out of their own boundaries when presented with the choice of viewing work, which in turn took them away from a “straight path”.<sup>264</sup> Before the opening day of the festival, the CFF had sold over 1,000 tickets (which roughly encountered for a 1/3 of all tickets on-sale). This

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<sup>259</sup> Maria Pramaggiore, "Queer Theory," *Oxford Bibliographies* (2013).

<sup>260</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World."48.

<sup>261</sup> \* **We considered any company which had one or more artist (s) from East Anglia as a local act.**

<sup>262</sup> \* **The core CFF team was comprised of Steve Goatman and I (Co-directors), Ellen Burgin (General Manager), Charlie Willis-Osbourne (Technical Director), and Tazi Amy and Jack Sampson (Technicians). We also had a team of volunteers, photographers, and a videographer.**

<sup>263</sup> **See Appendix 2**

<sup>264</sup> Sara Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology," in *Queer Phenomenology* (Duke University Press, 2006). 21.

was a positive sign that audience members were somewhat willing to at least try-out portions of the CFF. There were shows which had sold-out completely, but these mainly consisted of shows suitable for families or local productions.

In this thesis, I argue that there is a clear state of mind shared within the world of ‘fringe’. Although, every fringe festival is formed by its own unique characteristics.<sup>265</sup> However, as stated in previous chapters, the role of geographical conditions caused by the location of a Fringe can directly impact the eventual scale and model of a festival, which in turn have a direct effect on the Fringe’s identity. Nonetheless, I have determined the commonalities between Fringes, shared beliefs and mindsets, feelings and affect that occur within fringe festivals is what aligns fringe festivals to one another.

This chapter is supported by autoethnographic research and original video documentation of the CFF. The videographer was asked to capture as many moments as possible in a *vérité* documentary style to build a record of the event, the places that housed fringe performances, and the people that comprised this new community. Allowing the rawness and the reality of the event to shine through in the final product. It is also supported with images taken at the festival. This chapter will provide reflections of the state of my mind, and body, whilst documenting the journey living within the CFF.

### **An Alternative to Everyday Life**

In *Situating Everyday Life* (2012), Pink writes “the everyday is where we live our lives... Yet we cannot directly capture its flow”.<sup>266</sup> I argue from the moment the CFF began, “everyday” life as Pink described, paused for me. The frantic nature of running a festival creates a life that moves with such rapidity and density that I was unable to “directly capture its flow”. This aligns with the quality of feeling I have simultaneously felt within Fringes, yet the world in which each fringe festival creates alludes a reproducible description. Fringes are alike, but none can be the same. In fact, to experience the principles of ‘fringe’ in my hometown was a surreal and fairy-tale experience, which I argue can also be linked to Bakhtin’s definition of

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<sup>265</sup> \* **An example of this can be illustrated when looking at comparable characteristics within a Fringe such as scale, duration, number of years active, application procedure and economic policy. These characteristics are ultimately determined by the individual Fringe organisers.**

<sup>266</sup> Sarah Pink, "Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places," (London: Sage Publications, 2012). 30.

‘carnival’. My core team and a portion of my artists within the programme consisted of experienced Fringers, all of which had their own relationship and memories to ‘fringe’. Arguably, this was an important aspect in my bid to create a ‘fringe experience’ in Colchester, as I was surrounded by people who understood the principles of ‘fringe’ and the ‘dream world’ in which it takes place in. Bakhtin describes a dreamlike state, as a “fairy-tale world” and one which “can be defined as strange”.<sup>267</sup> I will now outline this strange place that Bakhtin describes as one that can also be described as a queer one. The combination of Bakhtin and queer theory has established application. As outlined in a previous chapter, in the work *Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture: Bakhtin and Beyond* (2008), Peeren applied Bakhtin’s ideas alongside queer theory to the Notting Hill Carnival and how although this carnival is primarily a celebration for those of Caribbean heritage, it is celebrated by multiple identities and ethnic groups.

From my own lived experiences, I argue that the relationships which are built with fellow artists within a Fringe are made from the alternative nature of the format of the festivals. Equally, ‘fringe’ creates a place for ‘outsiders’ and for those that don’t sit within heteronormative ‘social norms’. People on a ‘straight path’ may find the very essence of queerness ‘strange’, as Ahmed argues in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) “to become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must “turn away” from objects that take us off the line”.<sup>268</sup> When a Fringe temporarily queers spaces, places, objects, and people, it provides a break, a respite or schism from heteronormativity. Both Barber and Jagose argue that the heterosexual-homosexual division must be challenged to open space for the multiple identities, embodiments, and discourses that fall outside assumed binaries.<sup>269</sup> The importance of making an inclusive and diverse programme at the CFF was fundamental to us since the very beginning of the process.

According to the Countywide report conducted in 2019 by Essex County Council, “90.8% of Essex’s population identify as White British”.<sup>270</sup> Ahmed argues that many mainstream spaces are ‘white spaces’: “the white body must also be a respectable and clean body. Such a body is therefore also middle class and straight: it is a body that is ‘in line’ with the ‘lines’ that

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<sup>267</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World." 48.

<sup>268</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology." 7-21.

<sup>269</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*.

<sup>270</sup> Essex County Council, "County Wide Report," (2019).

accumulate as signs of history to become institutional givens".<sup>271</sup> *Chart 2* highlights the percentage of Global Majority, LGBTQIA+ and Disabled artists represented by companies performing at the CFF.<sup>272</sup> The data was taken from the application form which artists filled out when they initially applied to perform their work at the festival. The question specifically asks if one or more of the artists in their company identify as being part of one or more of these groups, 'none-of-the-above', or if they would prefer not to say. In total there were 23 selected companies within the main festival programme. The data produced supports the fact that the CFF was successful in producing a diverse performance programme. With at least one artist from 31% of the companies involved representing as LGBQIA+ and 35% stating that they didn't fit into these categories, these groups were over-represented above the regular population and therefore made for a special and composition of people making up the fringe programme and in-turn allowed the creation of a 'fringe atmosphere'.

Ahmed is not only referring to race within these spaces but the intersectionality of identities, as Vitry highlights, "she points to the accumulation of lines which intersect at certain points and might allow a queer, white body to extend more readily in white space than a black body".<sup>273</sup> As the core CFF team were White-British, we made an overt statement within our programming that we wanted to create a space for Global Majority artists to perform their work. However, only 4 companies out of the 23 (15%) had Global Majority performance-based artists involved in their shows. With 50% of the companies within our programme being from Essex or surrounding area, the lack of Global Majority artists at CFF was exacerbated by geographical weightings but also speaks to a larger issue about numbers of Global Majority artists, access to resources and financial backing for non-white artists, and the work needed to reassure Global Majority artists that fringe festivals are a safe and supportive place.

The exposure to new work which involved hard-hitting current social topics was always going to be risky programming for our audiences. The CTC Dance Company who are based in London presented a contemporary dance show at the Headgate Theatre exploring the identity of a relationship between a cis-male and a transgender female.<sup>274</sup> In the lead-up to the show, ticket-sales had not gone well. Therefore, some concerns grew about the appetite

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<sup>271</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology." 136

<sup>272</sup> \* See Appendix 1.

<sup>273</sup> Chloé Vitry, "Queering Space and Organizing with Sara Ahmed's Queer Phenomenology," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. 3 (2021). 935–949.

<sup>274</sup> Colchester Fringe, "Ink'd," <https://www.colchesterfringe.com/inkd>.

for such an event in the town. Thankfully, after the first performance, word-of-mouth about the show may have spread around the town and on the last night, they were close to selling-out the theatre. I personally interviewed the transgender female artist involved in the show during the CFF, with the full interview being part of the video documentation supporting this thesis.<sup>275</sup> The artist states that the CFF was the first official Fringe that she has been part of as a performer, and although she heard stories from her friends about the EFF and their own struggles, that she has “loved the freedom” and “vibe” at the CFF. She also told me that she thought that it was interesting to see people who may not necessarily go to the theatre regularly, attend their show. Announcing that it might be the most “accessible way to get into theatre”. Local magazine and reviewer writing as *Paper Champion* outlined the feeling within the town about the show. It suggests that the show was a new form of artistic offer for them in Colchester, and they described it as the most “emotionally intense and moving pieces I saw all weekend.”<sup>276</sup> I argue that this aligns with Ahmed’s view of being lost when orientating towards queer places. She writes, “getting lost still takes us somewhere and being lost is a way of inhabiting space by registering what is not familiar”.<sup>277</sup> This would suggest that members of the audience viewing this piece of work and the reviewer themselves may have found themselves initially ‘lost’ and in a place which wasn’t “familiar”, but by allowing them to register this truth and inhabit this new literal and psychic space, could in turn allow for a new perspective.

During the first day of the Fringe, I felt extremely nervous and lost. This is highlighted in my video documentation when I say: “I feel like I don’t really know what I’m doing, but I feel like I do”.<sup>278</sup> The process leading up to this point had left me feeling a mix of emotions. With all the heartache caused by the pandemic in my bid to create the CFF, I couldn’t believe it was finally happening. But it was, it just didn’t feel real. Similarly, as Ahmed describes in the quotation above, during the CFF the objects and bodies around me seemed to naturally orbit from one point to the next. Yet, the “dreamlike state” I found myself in had created a sense of euphoria and ecstasy. Somehow, I felt completely in control of the festival, but also hopeless in managing the ‘fringe experience’ of others which I was so desperate to recreate. In the same book, Ahmed highlights how “familiar”<sup>279</sup> surroundings allow a sense of security to

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<sup>275</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 02:22:49-02:23:45.

<sup>276</sup> Paper Champion, "Review: Colchester Fringe Festival 2021," <https://paperchampionzine.com/2021/10/27/review-colchester-fringe-festival-2021/>

<sup>277</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology." 7.

<sup>278</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 02:13:30- 02:13:56

<sup>279</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology." 7.



build within us. Although, I was both accustomed and “familiar” as Ahmed describes, with both the concept of ‘fringe’ and the surroundings of my hometown in Colchester, I still felt disorientated within the world of the CFF. It felt as if two friends from different social circles had met for the first time, and I was situated in the middle conducting the conversation. At the time, I considered ‘fringe’ and Colchester to be two separate worlds, yet both of which I had a place in. For example, in my video documentation during the first day of the CFF, I describe a small conflict between the CFF and The Headgate Theatre, who were hosting most of the shows during the festival.<sup>280</sup> My relationship with The Headgate began when I was seven years old, and I have been attending and performing there ever since. However, during the opening hours of the CFF I was concerned that they would be unable to deal with the ‘frantic nature’ that ‘fringe’ brings, with audiences and performers being constantly ushered in and out of one space. The Headgate Theatre told me to trust them and to let them run it. It was hard for me at first, but as I reflect it was the right decision. Although our model means we manage the venues, we don’t own them. In fact, we are just a just once piece of their large programme which they run all year round. So, this conflict taught me to work with my venues rather than against them, and equally to trust those around me.

On day two of the festival the reality of it all became more normal. In my video documentation, I am much more upbeat and calmer in comparison to the previous day.<sup>281</sup> This was due to the organisational processes of running the CFF becoming more refined, but equally I could see the relationships and sense of community being built within the CFF. For example, our Fringe Club had developed into a space where strangers had become friends. Where everyone had a place to celebrate their own identity and personality.<sup>282</sup> This was the type of environment I wanted to create for the CFF community, but as the next chapter will reveal the risks of creating such an environment fuelled by alcohol and late nights could be considered dangerous for the CFF community.

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<sup>280</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 02:14:50-02:15:16

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. 02:15:47-02:16:07

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. 02:17:14-02:17:31

## **The Fringe Community**

In *Community* (2018) Gerrard Delanty writes, “the social bond is essentially communal. Without community, there can be no society”.<sup>283</sup> This aligns with my own experiences within ‘fringe communities’, as the “social bond” within the Fringes is a major part of what has shaped some of the relationships in which have been built. In “Consent on the Fringe: Restorative Justice and Accountable Communities” (2019), Fitz-James states that “the fringe community is the perfect place to [envision] new possibilities.”<sup>284</sup> Whilst living inside fringe festivals in recent years, I have become a member of a ‘fringe community’. My role within these communities has taken many forms. For example, I have been an artist, volunteer, audience member, critic, or more recently a visiting friend to those who run their own festivals. Whilst these communities created by the fringe festivals have typically differed in experience, there was the common threads of sense of community and togetherness remained the same. The time spent within these communities with like-minded people has mostly been joyful for me, with the Fringes themselves being at the heart of this welcoming and the reason for bringing us together.

The nature of ‘fringe’ was a completely new experience for the town of Colchester. However, a community within a fringe festival stretches much further than just geographically. By comparing the Bakhtinian ideology of carnival to that of a Fringe, it should be considered as *not* as “spectacle seen by people”, but something they “live in”.<sup>285</sup> The CFF provided a place for people to “live in” as Bakhtin describes. Its community was sizeable and ever evolving and involved artists, audiences, venue managers, volunteers, technicians’, photographers, sponsors, bar staff, security personal and many more. Each community member undertook different roles and responsibilities within the festival. The amount of time and engagement offered by a community member also varied. In fact, the nature of ‘fringe’ meant that we took over spaces and temporarily changed their environment. This in turn, created a period of communicability and transmission of ‘fringe’ within the town and some community members may have unknowingly joined our ‘fringe community’, just by taking a ‘selfie’ at one of our pop-up spaces within the town. Others may have attended one show as an audience member, volunteered as an usher or performed in their own show as an artist. Nonetheless, for that

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<sup>283</sup> Gerard Delanty, *Community* (Routledge, 2018). 4.

<sup>284</sup> Fitz-James, "Consent on the Fringe: Restorative Justice and Accountable Communities."

<sup>285</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World."7.

period however brief it may have been, they were brought together and the ‘fringe community’ shared a state of mind. The togetherness of the community is also highlighted by Bakhtin who suggests that carnival laughter “is not an individual reaction to some isolated ‘comic’ event”,<sup>286</sup> but is instead laughter shared by all. I argue that just as Bakhtin’s ‘carnival laughter’, the consensual agreement towards laughter at an “event” such as the CFF created a shared sense of togetherness for each community member, and that something bigger happens when we all join together.

Halberstam argues in *In a Queer Time & Place* (2005) that there “is such a thing as ‘queer time’ and ‘queer place’,” acknowledging that it might only be temporary and at certain times.<sup>287</sup> Arguably, a fringe festival such as the CFF provided a temporary “queer place and time” for its community as Halberstam suggests. The very ethos of the CFF and programming choices created a temporary queer environment for its community. The model of the CFF relied on each community member taking part and fulfilling their role. Within this matrix of relationships, artists *need* audience members so they can perform, and audience members *need* a venue to watch artists. Although, members of the community may have been strangers before the event, the CFF’s “temporary queer space” could lead to the birth of a relationship between these community members once the festival was over. Additionally, I argue that a ‘fringe’ can allow its community to feel part of something much bigger. This is highlighted by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), by writing that the carnival is a festival “of all-annihilating and all-renewing time.”<sup>288</sup> Fringes are undoubtedly “all-renewing” as every year the programmed artists at any given festival change, allowing community members to feel like they are part of something new every time a Fringe takes place.

The psychology of ‘sense of community’ was explored by Sarason (1974) who defines it as a sense of belonging with ‘our’ group by comparing that against the feeling of meeting the ‘other’ group or a community outside ourselves.<sup>289</sup> Therefore, the ‘CFF Community’ would be formed both as a recognition of similar traits and ideological principles, but also as one that is opposed to another outside group. Undoubtedly, the overall experience for each

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.11.

<sup>287</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, vol. 3 (New York: NYU press, 2005).1.

<sup>288</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).124.

<sup>289</sup> Seymour B Sarason, *The Psychological Sense of Community: Prospects for a Community Psychology* (Jossey-Bass, 1974).

community member would contrast from one member to the next. Although, Sarason's ideal of a connection within a community may provide a model of the relationship between the CFF and its community members.

Our first community was the 'online community', which is one that exists predominantly within a virtual space and was arguably among the first to encounter the CFF. Although academics such as Jenny Preece have questioned the legitimacy of the phrase, claiming it's "mucky business" to attempt a definition of the term.<sup>290</sup> It would have been beyond Bakhtin's comprehension to think about how the internet has transformed and arguably simplified the way communities are born, which has enabled organisations who are looking to grow their own community to reach a greater number of people in a much shorter amount of time. The CFF community first existed in a virtual form (via online social-media platforms). Our strategy was to build interests and future engagement at our events by using social media as a platform. Thus, creating an 'online community'.

The 'online community' was made up of a wide range of people either locally or nationally. The first moments of measuring the reaction from the 'online community' can be traced back to the summer social media launch in 2019.<sup>291</sup> These initial online posts were to make people aware of our new fringe festival, whilst letting them know important dates and how to get involved in the future. The stakes and incentives differ for 'online communities' compared to 'in-person communities'. As a member of an 'online community' your identity *can* remain anonymous, with the member also having the ability of leaving the community by simply logging off and/or unsubscribing. Equally, as an autoethnographer it allowed me to research and analyse a wider pool of interactions with the CFF.

The CFF 'In-Person Community' was born during the week of the festival. Without this community being born, there is no festival. As detailed though my autoethnography in the previous section, it was the relationships which were built by artists and volunteers at our Fringe Club that allowed a communal spirit to be made. Creating a 'buzz' around the CFF would be imperative if we were to build our physical community. We received a total of £2,500 from a local organisation to set-up a pop-up space within the heart of the town-centre. It would consist of a large tent and a bar. Throughout the planning stages of the festival, we

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<sup>290</sup> Jenny Preece and Diane Maloney-Krichmar, "Online Communities: Design, Theory, and Practice," *Journal of computer-mediated communication* 10, no. 4 (2005).

<sup>291</sup> See example social media post in Appendix 2

knew the importance of setting-up our brand presence in the town-centre. Simultaneously, this would give out-of-town artists opportunities to promote their work which would prove to be vital if we were to sell tickets across the programme. This space was originally planned to be a fringe venue and would host stand-up comedy acts and a local drag queen for their respected shows. However, although the land was managed by one of our partners, it was also owned by a local church group, who informed our partners they were against anything being staged which was considered “rude” or “unsavoury”. We saw this as a direct conflict in our efforts to create an inclusive and diverse space.

Through his theory, Bakhtin also presents a conflict between carnival and the church as a force which wants to create orderly behaviour and sustain a status quo within the community. In *Introducing Bakhtin* (1998), Vice states that Bakhtin defines this as a ‘parody of ecclesiastical rhetoric and writes, “beyond the abuses and curses are the Church’s intolerance, intimidation, and *autos-de-fé*”.<sup>292</sup> This suggests that the Church’s “intimidation” was a in a bid to control and assert authority over the carnival. In an article titled “Bakhtin and Rabelais: Theory as Praxis” (1982), Michael Holquist supports this view and writes, “Bakhtin leaves no doubt that the give- and-take between the medieval church/state nexus on the one hand and the carnival on the other was a real power struggle”.<sup>293</sup> The “power struggle” between the Church and carnival through a Bakhtin lens was a similar feeling to one that I experienced at the CFF. Although, in the case of the CFF vs the Church there is a significant question which should be asked, which is was this Church group just looking to be community friendly? I would like to think that this was the case rather than a form of homophobic censorship by preventing drag queens to use the space.

Although disheartened by the local church’s response, we couldn’t make the promise of censoring “unsavoury” content from shows. When analysing the etymological root of the word ‘unsavoury’, it is defined as something that is unpleasant or disagreeable to the taste. All art is subjective, and the very nature of ‘fringe’ celebrates that very subjectiveness through its models, programming and giving audiences choices about what they want to see. Therefore, we were left with no choice then to rehome these shows in a more inclusive environment at another venue.

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<sup>292</sup> Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*. 151-155.

<sup>293</sup> Michael Holquist, "Bakhtin and Rabelais: Theory as Praxis," *Boundary 2* (1982).

I argue that CFF was in direct rebellion against mainstream theatre, whilst aligning with Bakhtin's definition of 'grotesque realism'. Vice describes Bakhtin's 'grotesque realism' as one that is, "opposed to all forms of "high art" and a means to rebel against authority. The CFF shared some of these values and is evidenced in our 'fringe model' adopting a programme that champions shorter shows, which celebrate artistic risk-taking, promote egalitarianism with tickets being cheaper, have unconventional staging in sometimes non-traditional theatrical spaces and produce different kinds of relationships for its 'fringe audience'. Undoubtedly, by refusing to censor specific content or artists within our programming, we rebelled against an "authority" in form of the Church and the customs and traditionalistic rituals that come with its ideological principles. Ultimately, we had to acquiesce to what the Church wanted in moving that part of our programming away from the land.



*Figure 6. Family Circus activities at 'The Tent' at Colchester Fringe Festival 2021 (Photo by author).*

With the set-back of not being able to use The Tent as a venue we had to rethink our strategy for utilising the space. Alike to many other Fringes, we redesigned it as a meeting place for our artists and audience members. An environment where people could come and ask questions about the festival, pick up a programme or even buy a ticket. Additionally, it served as a space where artists could actively hand out flyers or socialise. On the weekend we had

programmed free-circus family-friendly activities led by a local company and had DJ's and musicians perform throughout the day. The free-circus activities were an extremely popular part of the programming, and we estimate that thousands of people took part in this side of programming in some respect. This was a place for our non-theatre going audiences or those that may have not known they were part of something much bigger. It allowed us to redesign a 'space' within the town and assert an identity as the CFF. Many people who interacted with this part of the festival may have not known they were part of something much bigger. However, by analysing this part of the programming within the CFF, I was able to see first-hand the importance of creating a 'Fringe Community' and it allowed me to determine that maintaining a positive relationship between a Fringe its community is fundamental for the longevity of any fringe festival. By providing free activities/events for all community members to enjoy (even those that hadn't bought tickets to the Fringe), the CFF was able to not only set-up a presence within the town, but also create a 'sense of community' that is open and inclusive to all.

## **Conclusion**

I suggest that the CFF provided its community a temporary alternative to their everyday life or "fairy tale world".<sup>294</sup> Equally, we were able to provide a queer environment and place to live within for the four days in which the festival took place. Although, the stakes involved in producing such an environment were high. Asking unknowing community members to make the proactive choice of stepping outside their boundaries into a 'queer place' may have been dangerous for some of our queer artists on untested ground. In the next chapter, I will detail a moment during the CFF where two women shouted homophobic abuse at one of our drag artists during their performance. This presented a clear instant where Colchester and its community revolted against the CFF and the celebration of queerness within its programme. Meaning my personal experience living within the CFF was both exciting and terrifying at times.

I conclude that all fringe festivals have an element of 'queerness' about them, but ultimately some Fringes are queerer than others. Some of the larger Fringes such as the EFF have grown so large and have become motivated purely financial capital, reputation and status that the

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<sup>294</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World."48.

very alternativism which they once shared with queerness may have been lost. However, that is not to say that queer elements within larger Fringes such as the EFF have not remained. Pockets of radicality will form within a fringe festival due to its artists as well as its management structure. Fundamentally, queerness remains within 'fringe' because of the shared state of mind between those who take-part or "live within".

Created by my ACCP methodology, through the practice element of my research this chapter has outlined that I was able to recreate a 'fringe atmosphere' in Colchester through the CFF. It has highlighted how diverse and inclusive programming allowed alternative modes to shine through the programme, which in turn created an outsidership spirit, aligning with both Bakhtin and queerness for the CFF community members. The actual definition of 'fringe' is one that is elastic and somewhat ever-changing. Although, its key principles are that it sits-on-the-edge of the mainstream and for some is a 'way of living'. The success of delivering the CFF has allowed me to determine that that Fringes are queer, due to the shared mindset of community members and makers allowing for 'fringe' to flourish in a new place such as Colchester. Lastly, the video documentation supporting this chapter has outlined the key moments and the highs/lows within the CFF, whilst outlining what it personally felt like for me as one of its founders.



## Evaluating the Fringe

By reflecting and evaluating the CFF, I will address two research questions for my study. The first will determine the conditions needed to design and deliver a successful fringe festival for Colchester. Secondly, through the lens of the practice undertaken, it will return to the relationship between a fringe festival and its community and will reflect on the ways in which work presented on the 'fringe' is in dialogue with the wider performance community. It will draw upon event-evaluation theory found in the work of Donald Getz (2018) and will specifically evaluate the relationships that were built at the CFF using feedback from stakeholders. The evaluation of the CFF within this chapter, is guided by the practice of strategizing, planning, marketing, delivering and closing the inaugural festival. The practice informed ACCP research framework of this study prompted a deeper exploration into complex socio-political and intra-personal issues found when delivering a novel arts event. Within this chapter I will return to the questions of the spaces allocated to certain types of performance, and how the freedoms found at fringe festivals can also be in tension with a curated approach that tries to remove or level-out social inequities. Additionally, it will unpick a current issue found at fringe festivals of a culture drinking excessive amounts of alcohol and the power-relationships and in-groups that are created through this behaviour. I witnessed this phenomenon at the CFF and note the tensions of an imported artistic community performing for a local community in high-pressure environments where reward might be distant or delayed, and where relationships must be built quickly and are not embedded into matrixed community affiliations. I will look to the analysis of Bakhtin and particularly the 'feast of the fools' to provide readings of this point and use this theory to provide a lens for understanding this issue.

In relation to the first morning after closing the festival, I felt a sense of relief that it was over. Although, the anxiety of worrying about every scenario that could go wrong had floated away, I found myself laying on my bed not being able to move. My video documentation highlights that the aches, pains and bruises caused by the physical requirements of the festival were only part of the issue. The jadedness from long-days, late-nights and a lack of nutritional meals was the other. Producing and delivering the fringe festival, had pushed both my mind and body to unhealthy and unsustainable places.<sup>295</sup> Yet, I found myself in a state of

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<sup>295</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the 'Fringe' Experience." 02:31:45 – 02:32:22

euphoria about what I had achieved. The journey to this point had been much longer than expected. In fact, on many occasions, it seemed that the CFF would never happen. The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted my practice in ways which I could never have imagined when beginning this research. Ever-changing lockdowns, social distancing regulations and travel bans over a two-year period, led to numerous postponements of the CFF. Therefore, in the pursuit of delivering a fringe event in Colchester, I observed myself change my own personal expectations of the festival and my definition of ‘fringe’.

### **Modes of Evaluation**

There has been some valuable academic research conducted on arts festival evaluation. Although, María-Angeles Rastrollo-Horrillo and Lourdes Navarrete (2020) work highlights that “the role and impacts of festivals on the territory in which they are held has been widely studied; but the literature has ignored the study of the role of festivals in the internationalization of performing arts.”<sup>296</sup> Arts festival evaluation can begin from numerous avenues once the festival has been completed. In an article titled “Festival evaluation: An exploration of seven U.K arts festivals” (2013), Michael Williams and Glenn A J Bowdin write:

Evaluation is becoming increasingly recognised as a valuable tool in demonstrating success and achievement of objectives. This may be driven by internal management requirements (for example, to evaluate against the objectives, evaluate finance and use of resources, audience satisfaction and aspects of the programme) or external stakeholders (for example, economic, social/cultural and environmental impacts, achievement of audience development objectives).<sup>297</sup>

My research is interested in the “social/cultural” impacts as Williams and Bowdin describe above. This allows me to understand the effects that the CFF had on the Colchester community, venues and artists.

The three most common forms of evaluation are: *process*, *impact*, *outcome* and *summative evaluation* (Nutbeam & Bauman 2006). In the work *Event Evaluation: Theory and Methods for Event Management and Tourism* (2018) Getz argues that the modes of evaluation are

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<sup>296</sup> María-Angeles Rastrollo-Horrillo and Lourdes Navarrete, "Evaluation Model of the Roles of Festivals in the Internationalization of Performing Arts: Evidence from Flamenco Festivals," *Sustainability* 12, no. 24 (2020).21.

<sup>297</sup> Michael Williams and Glenn AJ Bowdin, "Festival Evaluation: An Exploration of Seven Uk Arts Festivals," in *Events and Festivals* (Routledge, 2013). 190.

different depending on the organisations size and reputation. Getz writes, “in the not-for-profit sector, events are usually conceived as providing a necessary or worthwhile service to the community or a specific group, and therefore some measure of value such as attendance, or of legitimacy- such as political and other stakeholder support- is essential to their continuance.”<sup>298</sup> As an organisation which looks to serve the community, Getz is suggesting that a clear analysis on audience data and stakeholder support would be the best method for a non-profit such as the CFF. However, although some aspects of this quantitative approach to support my findings will be useful, I argue that the methodology of this evaluation will mostly evolve from my auto-ethnographic accounts which have guided me throughout this research, complemented by video documentation taken at the CFF in 2021 to help me revisit key moments during the festival. Sandra Gattenhof et.al. (2021) work provides insight into the benefits of using pre-recorded footage to aid the evaluation process. They write: “The idea of integrating new media elements (such as digital storytelling or video “grabs” with artists or images) into production and curation while also capturing the “value” of creative events in an accessible archival online format was new but gaining attention for the possible importance of its use.”<sup>299</sup>

There are many areas of the CFF that I could look to evaluate, although I have broken them down into two key parts. They are: *Relationships* and *Atmosphere*. I will now look to provide analysis and evaluation on the relationships which were built at the CFF and the atmosphere which was created.

### **Relationships between Artists, Audiences and Place**

Since 2018, and throughout the process of creating the CFF many relationships have been built within our community. Some have been long-lasting and healthy, whilst others have proven to be temporary and negative. The process has allowed versions of myself to emerge, which I didn’t know existed. At the start of this project, I worked alone and enjoyed the freedom of my own artistic choices. But, after meeting Steve in late 2018, I began to

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<sup>298</sup> Donald Getz, *Event Evaluation:: Theory and Methods for Event Management and Tourism* (Oxford Goodfellow Publishers Ltd, 2018).42.

<sup>299</sup> Sandra Gattenhof et al., "Building an Embedded Framework: Early Models," *The Social Impact of Creative Arts in Australian Communities* (2021). 25.

understand the scale of the task ahead and concluded that undertaking this journey by myself would be difficult.<sup>300</sup>

This section will analyse the relationships that were built within the CFF community whilst it took place in a physical form. As seen in the previous chapter *Living in the Fringe*, I argue that the CFF community was a large and ever-expanding force. It was made up of artists, audiences, venues, volunteers, and unknown passers-by. The role of motivations and benefits within evaluation theory is highlighted in a case-study on the Stavanger Food Festival in Norway (2017) by Ambassador Rezene Meretse, Reidar J. Mykletun and Kari Einarsen. They write:

More studies have addressed the why of attending festivals as seen through the lens of motivation theory. However, although both motivation and benefits relate to needs, it is argued here that the two are not the same, as motivation is a driving and directing force while benefits are the outcome of the striving, related more to visitors' experiences and satisfaction.<sup>301</sup>

This section will not only evaluate my own personal relationship with each community member, but also look to the relationship that they had with the CFF.

### Artists

The relationship between festival stakeholders is highlighted in Stevenson's *Managing Organisational Success in the Arts* (2019). In this case-study on the Lammermuir Festival (Scotland), Stevenson highlights that how "artists and managers are sibling rivals who, although disagreeing about the methods, are both agreed that society needs to change".<sup>302</sup> I argue that a fringe festival and its artists can also look to change society as Stevenson suggests. As I have argued, Fringes give artists a stage to present their own work, in a place or environment where they might not otherwise have one. This could be seen as a political statement towards a higher authority asking why opportunities aren't currently available to them. Therefore, a Fringe can act as a bridge towards that. As a 'fringe artist' myself, I

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<sup>300</sup> \* **By the end of the CFF, I was managing a core team of 25 people. All of which contributed into the making of the festival. They were either volunteers who had bought into the idea of a Fringe in Colchester, or friends I have made at other fringe festivals, lending me a helping hand when I so desperately needed it.**

<sup>301</sup> Ambassador Rezene Meretse, Reidar J Mykletun, and Kari Einarsen, "Participants' Benefits from Visiting a Food Festival—the Case of the Stavanger Food Festival (Gladmatfestivalen)," *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 16, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>302</sup> Stevenson, *Managing Organisational Success in the Arts*. 65.

believed that I could create an ideal ‘fringe environment’ for artists to prosper. This was created from our model, financial costs, size of programme and the geography of the artists. However, this section will reveal that out of all the stakeholders involved in the CFF community, I personally found the artists the most difficult to manage.

Although the pandemic had led to a new application process, the CFF programme still consisted of 50% (East Anglian), 25% (National) and 25% (International) artists. Most of which, had deferred their place from the postponed 2020 festival. A high percentage of the national and international artists had performed at Fringes before. I argue this had enabled a ‘fringe culture’ to grow within them and made them more familiar and accepting to our decision-making. Therefore, initially the local artists were the ones I was concerned about. With a lack of experience at fringe festivals, I worried that they may not be used to the ‘pop-up’ and alternative nature of ‘fringe’. However, I argue that local artists are very much needed in a newly formed Fringe. For example, local artists contributed to a large amount of our audience numbers. This in turn, benefited the whole programme, as audience members interacting with local shows due to a pre-existing relationship, were encouraged to engage with the rest of the programme.

Most of the communication between artists and myself before the festival was through email correspondence. This task became much more difficult in the height of the pandemic, as the situation was evolving at such a rapid speed. Information and plans were changing at a very fast rate and although I tried to keep on top of it, one artist was not too pleased with my communication whilst navigating through the pandemic. The CFF was originally due to take place over a bank-holiday weekend in May, therefore at that time every show was promised three performances. Although, when we had to move dates to a weekend in October this wasn’t feasible. Therefore, we made the decision to only give ‘children’s shows’ two performances. To compensate them for this, we guaranteed them a £100 fee if they ran a free workshop over the weekend. I believed this to be a fair substitute, for losing a performance slot. Although, the artist in question didn’t agree and repeatedly asked for an extra show. This just wasn’t possible, as we were operating at a maximum capacity already. The situation couldn’t be resolved and although the artist turned up and performed as contracted, this would be the first conflict I would experience with a CFF artist. As seen in this example, not all artists will have a positive experience at a Fringe. The CFF would be no different. Although, data taken from the CFF 2022 applications would suggest that a large selection

did. 17 out of the 23 companies (74%) applied to take-part in the festival in 2022, which would indicate that artists mostly had a positive experience at the CFF in 2021.

### Audiences

What artists value from fringe festival participation is a question which has been asked throughout this thesis. Undoubtedly, financial gain from ticket sales is a clear motive for artists. In fact, if audiences don't buy tickets for their shows, then the overall experience for artists could be a negative one. This argument is supported in *Theatre Audiences* (1997) by Susan Bennett. Bennett writes, "the effects of processes of evaluation are particularly acute in the case of theatre. While publishers of novels survive on a fairly modest success rate, both big and low-budget theatres can collapse under the economic burden of a single failed production".<sup>303</sup>

One of the significant challenges for this PaR project was the fact I had to introduce the culture of 'fringe' to many of the members of the audience. The amount of exposure or understanding of 'fringe' was unknown as I was unable to produce quantitative data due to time constraints caused by the impact of running the festival itself. This produced a big gap in the determining the relationship and understanding our audiences had with 'fringe' before the CFF took place. As the CFF had adopted a ticket split within its model (60:40 in the artists favour), if audiences didn't buy tickets, then both artists and the festival would suffer and potentially "collapse" as Bennett suggests. Although, I argue that this financial structure allows for a relationship to be built between artist and festival as both need to benefit from ticket sales. During his interview, 'fringe artist' Silverwood also shared Bennett's view of the importance of a business mindset as a 'fringe artist':

Lots of people have different reasons for doing Fringes. For me, at the stage I am at now of my career it is a business. So, it is really important that whenever I do this, as a producer, performer, whether I'm running a venue it has to be a sensible business choice.<sup>304</sup>

I argue that any artist performing at the CFF in 2021, had taken a risk and may have not adopted a "sensible choice" as Silverwood suggests. In the lead-up to the festival, this risk was clearly being felt by our artists, as I would receive anxious emails regarding their ticket-

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<sup>303</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences* (New York: Routledge, 2013). 54.

<sup>304</sup> Silverwood.5.

sales. Local artists were even requesting to cancel shows due to a fear of small audiences. Even though I was as anxious as they were about a lack of ticket-sales, my job was to remain calm and to reassure them that it would be okay. My experience as a touring ‘fringe artist’ taught me that pre-sales of tickets at fringe festivals are typically not that strong compared to other type of events. This could suggest that audiences are more hesitant to commit their time and finances to new work and instead are more inclined to wait for others to experience it first. This philosophy has been expressed to me many times by Fringe organisers whilst touring over the years. Although would the culture of buying tickets ‘on the door’ be the same for a newly formed fringe audience? Data taken from the CFF box-office shows that on the eve of the CFF we had sold a total of 1056 tickets. Which encountered for around 1/3 of available tickets. This was much higher than I had ever hoped to achieve. By the end of the festival, we sold a total of 1746 tickets, which accounts for 56% of all tickets which were on sale. The data produced suggests that CFF audiences were more comfortable pre-buying tickets then they were ‘buying on the door’.

### Atmosphere

I will now explore the general atmosphere at the CFF and will draw upon event impact research theory, evaluating the relationships that were built at the CFF and the atmosphere it created. I will also begin to discuss a key and current issue at Fringes which has enabled a culture of drinking excessive alcohol. Furthermore, I will highlight how the CFF was also responsible of this and will look through the analysis of Bakhtin and particularly the ‘feast of the fools’ and will look to provide a solution.

Within the prologue of this thesis, I outline the ‘buzz’ and unique atmosphere that I experienced at IndyFringe in 2015. This is a feeling which I have experienced at many other Fringes since, it can best described as an atmosphere. It is created out of the community members that makeup a Fringe and their own unique interaction with each festival. I argue, it’s what makes a fringe festival a queer place and why it shares much with Bakhtin’s carnival:

While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it

is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.<sup>305</sup>

Although not all Fringes possess this atmosphere, I argue that it can only be allowed to grow if the model allows it. In 2017, my theatre company and I were invited to perform at the Paris Fringe. To keep costs low and to enhance our chances of maximum profit, we made the trip using a combination of overnight buses and a ferry, all the while carrying our costume and props in our suitcases. We arrived in Paris tired after the long and uncomfortable journey. Although, the buzz of performing our work in the city of Paris at a Fringe quashed our jadedness. After completing our dress and tech rehearsal we were expecting to be greeted by a member of the festival team. Although, that introduction never came. In fact, for the whole three days we were there we didn't meet one member of the Paris Fringe team or any other artists. There was no fringe club or social opportunities, it was a turn-up, perform and then leave experience. Therefore, from the very beginnings I hoped the CFF would create a 'fringe atmosphere'.

Returning to work of Ahmed, in orientation terms, the town of Colchester arguably is predominately on a "straight path",<sup>306</sup> although there are many local organisations that are actively looking to change that. Since 2018, Colchester Pride has been organising its own events in the town, which celebrate LGBTQIA+ culture.<sup>307</sup> Additionally, there is Outhouse East, an organisation set-up in 1979 to provide gay members of the Essex community with help and advice over the telephone during the aids epidemic. Currently, they now offer local LGBTQIA+ members a safe place to talk with like-minded people about their sexuality.<sup>308</sup> Ahmed suggests to those who are currently on a 'straight path' that "departure from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible".<sup>309</sup> Taking a "risk" as Ahmed describes coincides with what the CFF asked of our audiences. Through our diverse programming, we encouraged audiences to actively seek an artistic alternative to what they may have been previously accustomed too.

In the last 10 years the population of Colchester has risen by an estimated 10%,<sup>310</sup> with data taken from the Colchester Culture Strategy (2022) stating that there are now "over 70

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<sup>305</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World."7-8.

<sup>306</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology."

<sup>307</sup> Colchester Pride, "Pride Presents," <https://www.colchesterpride.org/pride-presents>.

<sup>308</sup> Outhouse East, "Our History," <https://theouthouse.org.uk/about-us/history-of-the-outhouse/>.

<sup>309</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology."21.

<sup>310</sup> Rebecca Creed, "Data Reveals Colchester Is One of Fastest Growing Areas in the Uk," *Daily Gazette*, 27th August 2019.



languages are spoken in the Borough”.<sup>311</sup> This suggests that Colchester is becoming a more diverse place to live. Yet, it would be premature to say that homophobia and racism doesn't still exist in a town with Essex Police reporting a total 15,474 hate crime incidents in the county in 2020 alone.<sup>312</sup> We tried our utmost to programme the festival, accordingly, keeping our openly LGBTQIA+ acts away from potential hostile locations within the town. However, as the next section will show we were not always successful in that pursuit.

One the aims of the CFF was to create a vibrant and inviting atmosphere for stakeholders in the town of Colchester. As stated in other parts of the thesis, the atmosphere that can be created at Fringes is very much alike to Bakhtin's "fairy tale world". It's fresh outlook and alternative nature make it hard to describe. I have argued that this very definition makes it also a queer space. Initially, I had many concerns about how welcoming our local community would be to such change to openness and diversity. With queer stakeholders and allies being all situated in one place, it could encourage hate and discrimination from those wishing to inflict it. As fringe festivals adopt spaces and, in some instances transform them into theatres, some will prove to be suitable, and others will not. The CFF housed performances in 6 spaces, in 5 different venues. Out of these five venues, only one of them was a traditional theatre space.

Like many other Fringes, the CFF would be looking to create a temporary and changeable queer space. Returning to the work *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures* (2014) it is presented that "that the meanings of city space are not made solely by the builders and shapers of the urban environment. Cities are made in the everyday machinations of people's lives".<sup>313</sup> Although Cindy Patton presents another view on this debate in her chapter "Stealth Bombers of Desire: The Globalization of *Alterity*" (2002). She writes, "the new desire for great precision in marking territory is not just an obsession with taking political space, but an attempt to include (or exclude!) the habitation of people who have thought of their home in the grammar of another national identity".<sup>314</sup> Aided by the unexpected October sunshine and surprise festivity for the local community, I argue that the CFF created an atmosphere of togetherness

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<sup>311</sup> Colchester Borough Council, "Colchester Cultural Strategy," (2022). 10

<sup>312</sup> Essex Police, "Hate Crime Statistics," (2021).

<sup>313</sup> Jennifer V Evans and Matt Cook, *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).7.

<sup>314</sup> Cindy Patton, "Stealth Bombers of Desire: The Globalization Of," *Alterity" in Emerging Democracies'*, in A. Cruz-Malavé and MF Manalansan IV (eds), *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (2002).209.

and “support” as seen in the above quotation. In fact, in *Queers in Space* (1997) Ingram writes: “with greater visibility, bodies marked as queer create specific forms of space around them”.<sup>315</sup> This view is supported from data taken from our box-office with 29% of ticket-buyers living outside of CO postcodes.<sup>316</sup> I argue that this is a clear indication that fringe festivals can encourage cultural tourism. Equally, it could be suggested that queer people are willing to travel to inhabit queer spaces. This view can be supported by Ingram who states, “we travel great distances in order to live in the ways that enhance fuller contact with one another”.<sup>317</sup> One of the significant moments in the creation of the queer space during the CFF was the fact we had a volunteer in full drag attire handing out flyers and programmers to passers-by. This suggests that they viewed the CFF as a safe and inclusive environment to live within.

In a broader festival context, Alison Hutton’s and Jennie Jaensch’s study “Alcohol use at outdoor music festivals” (2015) provides data from festivalgoers at 26 outdoor music festivals in Australia. Their research found that out of “4,950 patient presentations, 15% of these were for drug and alcohol related admissions”.<sup>318</sup> In recent years, the active encouragement of the consumption of alcohol at Fringes in a bid to create an atmosphere has been a talking point at Fringes such as the EFF. This was highlighted in an article by the *BBC* in 2011, where comedian EFF artist Arthur Smith was quoted as saying “all the guests at his chat show would be drunk”.<sup>319</sup> Smith, an artist who had been performing at the EFF for 30 years was heavily criticised for comment and it started a debate about the EFF’s stance on discouraging alcoholic abuse within their festival environment. I argue that this issue is spread across the world of ‘fringe’ and not just the EFF. However, as this section and my video documentation reveals<sup>320</sup> I would also be responsible for encouraging the consumption of alcohol at the CFF.

The encouragement of drunkenness alongside creativity can also be found in a broader and historical context within the arts. For example, Horace in *Epistles I* pronounces that “no

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<sup>315</sup> Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space : Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. 41.

<sup>316</sup> \* **Colchester Postcodes**

<sup>317</sup> Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space : Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. 27.

<sup>318</sup> Alison Hutton and Jennie Jaensch, "Alcohol Use at Outdoor Music Festivals," *Australian Nursing and Midwifery Journal* 22, no. 10 (2015). 42

<sup>319</sup> BBC News, "Edinburgh Fringe: Boozy Shows Take a Look at Drink," BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-14444948>.

<sup>320</sup> Abbott-Betts, "Creating the Colchester Fringe Festival: Finding the ‘Fringe’ Experience." 02:27:19 – 02:28:18

poems can please for long or live that are written by water-drinkers.”<sup>321</sup> The link between festivity and intoxication can also be found in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) and specifically the analysis of the ‘feast of the fools’. Although, in “Drunk the Night Before: An Anatomy of Intoxication” (2022), Roth writes, “Bakhtin’s festive aesthetic ranges from the literal intoxication of ‘carnival’ to the metaphoric intoxication of the ‘carnavalesque’.”<sup>322</sup> In *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (1978), Burke supports this view and states that the three main themes in carnival were “food, sex and violence”.<sup>323</sup> In fact, in the same article Roth highlights that “when drink appears in Bakhtin’s descriptions, it is confined (and distorted) within the phrase “food and drink” or variants like “appetite and thirst”.<sup>324</sup> Bakhtin doesn’t directly state that that the ‘feast of the fools’ involves alcohol, instead suggests that the ‘carnavalesque’ produces an intoxication through its atmosphere, or in Bakhtian terms ‘laughter’.

I have argued through this thesis that artists can benefit from the relationships in which they are able to build by performing at a Fringe. In my own experiences, the role of a ‘Fringe Club’ is key to this. In fact, I argue that at the heart of every good fringe festival is an inclusive and fun space where artists can attend after shows to interreact and socialise. This offers networking opportunities and the chance to build friendships.<sup>325</sup> In her interview, Croall discusses the use of Fringe Club at the Adelaide Fringe. She said, “in Adelaide, we have this one club and it’s where everybody meets. They use it as a business centre during the day and then they use it as their place to gather at night. Its open every night till three in the morning”.<sup>326</sup> Although, the late nights as Croall suggests have been a feature of my time at fringe festivals, they have been fuelled by a potentially damaging consumption of alcohol. This view is supported in Alasdair J.M. Forsyth et al. article in the *International Journal of Drug Policy* (2016), they write:

entertainers experience an unusually high exposure to alcohol, even compared to others employed in licensed premises (e.g. Bartenders) because of the expectation that they will drink while working. The participants in this sample often struggled to think of any occasion when they had performed in venues where alcohol was not available

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<sup>321</sup> Horace, *Epistles 1* (xix). 1.2.

<sup>322</sup> Marty Roth, "Drunk the Night Before: An Anatomy of Intoxication," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 30, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>323</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Routledge, 2017). 186.

<sup>324</sup> Roth, "Drunk the Night Before: An Anatomy of Intoxication."

<sup>325</sup> \* **The CFF Fringe Club was a music venue on the high street. They allowed us to use the space for free, with the promise that we would encourage our artists to attend every night after the shows.**

<sup>326</sup> Croall.5.

(at least to them). Many had never played to an entirely sober audience, and some claimed never to have performed when entirely sober themselves<sup>327</sup>



Figure 7: Shar Cooterie performing Drag Bingo at Colchester Fringe Festival 2021 (Photo taken by author).

The CFF undoubtedly provided “high exposure to alcohol” to our artists at our Fringe Club as seen in the above quotation. For many it moved away from Bakhtin’s metaphorical intoxication caused by the festivity and became a party fuelled by alcohol. With artists receiving discount drinks, the CFF’s Fringe club was busy and a joyful place. However, as I reflect now, I must consider that by creating this environment I may have presented an extremely dangerous place for some of those who attended and there were also issues with drunkenness from audience members. On the Saturday of the CFF, it was the busiest day and biggest test in terms of organisation. We had workshops and performances programmed from 11am to 11pm. The final performance of the day was *Drago Bingo* hosted by local drag queen Shar Cooterie. The nature of this event is typically provocative, and deliberately unsettles boundaries and typical social mores, and this performance was true to form. It was a sell-out show. 80 audience members packed into the Headgate Theatre auditorium to play the

<sup>327</sup> Alasdair JM Forsyth, Jemma C Lennox, and Carol Emslie, ““That’s Cool, You’re a Musician and You Drink””: Exploring Entertainers’ Accounts of Their Unique Workplace Relationship with Alcohol,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 36 (2016). 92.

well-known and much-loved British game. The bar staff had informed me they were running out of alcohol, it seemed the audiences throughout the day had drunk their fill.

Unfortunately, during the show a couple of members of the audience were shouting out. At the time I couldn't quite hear what they were saying but I could sense that it was creating an uncomfortable atmosphere in the room. I decided to approach the source of the noise and soon saw that two middle-aged white women were the ones causing the disruption. I noticed that they were extremely drunk and were openly saying homophobic remarks about the artist. I was in a tricky situation. Naturally, I wanted to remove them from the theatre, but I knew this risked confrontation which could interrupt the show and damage the artist's experience. Therefore, I decided to sit next to them and offered to help them play the game. After a few minutes, one of the women would soon touch my leg and attempted to kiss me. Finding myself in the middle of a very uncomfortable situation, I knew I had to get them out of the theatre. I suggested the three of us leave the auditorium and go to the bar. Once there I bought them a drink and told the bar staff not to serve them again, I then returned to the auditorium and stood by the door for the rest of the show, so they were unable to regain entry. It was a horrible experience and one that I wouldn't wish any other member of my team to find themselves in during the Fringe.

The behaviour of this one community member played on my mind throughout the rest of the night. I was sickened by her homophobia, especially having bought a ticket to an event titled *Drag Bingo*. A selection of audience members who witnessed the incident congratulated me on how I handled it. Although, I had doubts that I made all the right choices. As someone that promotes queerness and was in pursuit of creating a queer space during the CFF, I maybe should have taken stronger action much earlier on. The trouble was I just didn't know how they would react, and I was fearful of creating a hostile atmosphere. It proved to be a clear sign that some members of the town were not quite ready for such an open and diverse event such as the Fringe. Although, I argue that this was also very much down to the intoxication of these two audience members, caused by the 'fringe environment' which the CFF had created.

In "Queer Youth, Intoxication and Queer Drinking Spaces" (2019) Hunt et al. state that "queer spaces played a central role in creating femme and gender transgressive drinking contexts and were often described as safe and comfortable places in contrast with more

heteronormative drinking spaces”.<sup>328</sup> However, this incident provided further evidence that there is a clear issue throughout ‘fringe’ and its relationship to alcohol. In the same work, Forsyth et al. present a strategy to help combat this very current issue within the arts and suggest that “holding gigs earlier in the evening... the provision of more alcohol-free performance spaces might reduce entertainers’ consumption (e.g. the temptation to self-medicate)”.<sup>329</sup> I suggest Fringe organisers should look to provide “alcohol-free performance spaces” where health and well-being is put ahead of creating a social atmosphere or profits. As Roth suggests through her analysis of Bakhtin, the intoxication of carnival can be “metaphoric”. Research conducted by Alison C. Eales (2016) on the Glasgow Jazz Festival from 1987-2001<sup>330</sup> has proven that arts festivals can retreat from lucrative sponsorship deals within alcoholic brands. Therefore, Fringes such as the EFF should also move away from the intoxication caused from the numerous pop-up bars throughout the city and sponsorships from whisky brands to a more ‘carnavalesque’ intoxication presented by Bakhtin.

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<sup>328</sup> G Hunt et al., "Queer Youth, Intoxication and Queer Drinking Spaces," *Journal of youth studies* 22, no. 3 (2019). 392.

<sup>329</sup> Forsyth, Lennox, and Emslie, "'That's Cool, You're a Musician and You Drink': Exploring Entertainers' Accounts of Their Unique Workplace Relationship with Alcohol." 92.

<sup>330</sup> Alison C Eales, "'One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer': Alcohol Sponsorship at Glasgow Jazz Festival, 1987–2001," *Popular Music* 35, no. 2 (2016).

## ACCP Framework

This subsection will provide more detail into ACCP's definition and how it has developed through my research and my practice. It will outline how the iterative development of ACCP was a key element to my research findings. As outlined, ACCP can be broken down into four distinctive characteristics, they are: *Finance, Opportunities, Communication* and *Environment*.<sup>331</sup> I will now provide more clarity around each characteristic.

Firstly, artists need to be able to access the festival financially. If any given festival implements high costs and low rewards for artists, the creation of future work for those artists is in doubt. Secondly, festivals adopting this framework should provide professional, social and cultural opportunities to their artists. This can add value for artists wishing to network and build relationships with fellow creatives and industry professionals, which in turn, can lead to future opportunities and work. The next characteristic in the framework is to give reliable, transparent and supportive communication to artists. This can be taxing and challenging especially for smaller arts festivals as the administrative duties involved in being responsive to artists can be overwhelming for a smaller team. Nonetheless, communication should always be presented in a clear and detailed way as all artists will have contrasting expectations about an event and the multi-directional demands between artist, producer, venue and audience. The final characteristic is the festival environment and paradigm. I would argue this is the most important characteristic of all. Festivals or events adopting the ACCP framework should be accessible, diverse and open to all. This allows a for a celebration of contrasting identities and communities, leading to an environment for a diverse range of artists to prosper. If a festival can execute an artist-centered perspective across these four characteristics of the framework, then artists are more likely to have a positive experience, leading to a productive festival environment, enhanced reputation, sustainable relationships, circumstances propitious to growth and development for the Fringe.

The creation of ACCP was born out of my own experiences as an artist over a period of many years. Whilst touring as a fringe artist, I began to understand the importance of the 'artist experience' and how aspects that are structural and 'sewn into' the fabric of the festival can radically positively or negatively affect the outcomes of a fringe festival. Throughout my thesis, I have argued artists are the beating heart of any festival. My own lived experiences

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<sup>331</sup> See Appendix 1

have taught me that the role of an artist performing at a fringe festival *can* be much richer and fuller than the performance on stage. Over the years as a visiting artist I have supported other artists and offered professional guidance and connections, I have learned from others and shaped my own practice, I have formed connections with local community members, visited fringe clubs and flyeried on the streets in the places I have performed contributing to local economies. These interactions are deeply rooted in the creation of what I have defined as a ‘fringe atmosphere’, I have argued this environment is as a fundamental element for every fringe festival leader.

The creation of ACCP through this research project is intimately connected to the foundation and ethos of the CFF. The formation of the CFF presented a new opportunity to fashion and hone this methodological framework which attempted to place artists’ needs at the forefront of festival modelling. Through the CFF, I demonstrated that the ACCP framework can be implemented practically and successfully in festival modelling. I note that the CFF has changed over time and so did my producing approach, yet, the ACCP framework has always led my decision-making process. The stabilisation of this model through different iterations means others in similar creative-producing or artistic direction capacities can deploy this framework through their own Fringes. In the next chapter I will outline how ACCP is a unique contribution to knowledge and its potential applications/ future development.



## Conclusion

In this conclusion I summarise the argument and insights of my PaR research. Firstly, by summarising each chapter of this thesis, I will return to the research questions outlined for this thesis and the discoveries they have enabled. Secondly, I demonstrate my studies value and contribution to the extant knowledge in the field, whilst simultaneously analysing certain limitations I have had within my research process. Finally, I will suggest further steps for future research within this field.

By creating a new fringe festival using ACCP, I have determined that the conditions needed to design and deliver a fringe festival, are, *Place, Space* and *Artists*. Secondly, the findings from my study found that the principles of ‘fringe’ allow it to be defined as a genre-based style, which rejects social and artistic customs. Thirdly, through my project, I have investigated the relationship between a fringe festival and its community and have determined that the ‘fringe community’ is made up of many different stakeholders. These include, artists, venues, audiences, volunteers and unknown passers-by, all of which play a major role in creating a ‘fringe atmosphere’. Lastly, through my study I have determined that artists are looking to fringe festival participation for contrasting reasons, all of which will be unique to their own personal circumstances. Although, as Simpson et al. highlighted, “fringe is a common route for early career theatre makers”,<sup>332</sup> creating an ideal space in the form of informal education for actors beginning their careers in which they are tasked with responsibilities such as budgeting, marketing, and networking. The case-studies conducted produced rich data for the academy and future research, and by determining the models currently being offered by fringe festivals I have concluded that fringe festivals are queer events which in-turn, can queer spaces. Fundamentally, they are made either by queer people or those that sit-outside the mainstream. Although, I have detailed that some Fringes are queerer than others and due to rising issues of inclusivity and diversity within programming the ‘open access’ and/or artist friendly models which Fringes claim to be, can in fact create unfavourable environments for artists.

To achieve the completion of my research, I have designed an experimental framework – ACCP -which uses my past and current experiences within ‘fringe’, to create favourable conditions for artists within fringe festivals. My unique framework is guided by my first-hand

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<sup>332</sup> Simpson et al., "Emotions, Performance and Entrepreneurship in the Context of Fringe Theatre."

experiences as a 'fringe artist' and original interviews that I conducted with fringe festival leaders and makers. Through autoethnography I have communicated what it felt like to 'live' inside a Fringe as both an artist and director, using a combination of queer theory and Bakhtin's analysis of 'carnival' to support theorising the unique world fringe festivals create. Equally, Fringes align with Bakhtin's analysis of 'carnival' and how the *status quo* found within society temporarily shifts whilst a Fringe takes place. Thus, my thesis provides researchers with a new framework which can be applied to any form of arts festival curation or festival scholarship.

In the *Introduction* I provide an overview of how Fringes are growing and becoming a more popular addition to artistic programmes in locations across the world, although the actual meaning of 'fringe' differs from one person to the next. This chapter highlighted a major gap in research for my topic, as existing studies on 'fringe' such as Sarah Thomasson (2015) thesis on Adelaide and Edinburgh Fringes predominantly focus on economic effects or cultural tourism during fringe festivals. Whereas there are limited approaches within academia of practice-based and autoethnographic studies of fringe festival creation such as my own.

Demonstrating the interdisciplinary style of my PhD, Chapter One: *Fringe Models* presented the three most common 'Fringe Models' currently used by Fringes. I defined them as the Edinburgh, CAFF (Canadian), and the European models. Through a form of qualitative research methods, born out of my own first-hand experiences at fringe festivals, combined with original interviews conducted with Fringe leaders, this chapter presented three case-studies on fringe festivals representing each one of these models. The broad attention of these models and practices, highlighted the trans-geographical nature of fringe festivals and supported my future practice in designing and delivering the CFF.

Through the case-studies and interviews, this chapter began to unpick key research questions for my study. Firstly, it highlighted the benefits artists can gain through performing their work at fringe festivals, which can be to trial new work, establish networks, a training opportunity or through a form of audience development. However, the insights gained from this chapter presented several political and sociological issues within 'fringe' and highlighted the barriers which are currently in place for artists at fringe festivals across the world. All three case-studies on these models outlined an obstruction of participation for artists through

their modelling. This was due to costs of participation fees; venue hire or the juried aspect within their application process.

My research has questioned the terminology of the wording ‘open access’ within fringe festival modelling. The origin of the EFF and how eight companies staged their own festival after being turned away is told as folklore within the ‘fringe world’. The ‘Edinburgh’ and ‘CAFF’ fringe festivals see this as the most significant part of their modelling, branding themselves as a place where all artists can perform their work. Although, my research has presented the view that this is no more than a confidence trick to attract artists, and what isn’t initially advertised is the financial, logistical and accessibility barriers preventing multiple forms of participation. Although the ‘European Model’ is also guilty of this, the juried aspect within its modelling allows for a more transparent approach between fringe festivals and artists. Nonetheless, all three case-studies highlighted that current fringe festival modelling available for artists needs improvement and how a more hybrid form of modelling may be the best outlook for the future of ‘fringe’.

By analysing the three contrasting models and determining what characteristics they share, this chapter began to outline the key principles of ‘fringe’. The data produced from the case-studies highlighted the ‘Fringe Models’ were very much adapted to their own unique environment, creating contrasting experiences for artists and stakeholders. This chapter allowed me to achieve one of the primary objectives of my thesis, which was to synthesize diverse sources and varieties of information, culminating in the creation of a typology for the term ‘fringe’. The aim was to not only to establish its parameters and genre but also to encompass its ‘world’ and affect, or ‘feeling’ within my own definition. Fundamentally, ‘fringe’ is a type of art form, or a ‘way of life’ which sits outside of the mainstream. Through its alternative nature it sits on the edge of more populist artistic traditions and looks to disrupt the artistic hegemony which holds curatorial power. Through the eyes of society, it isn’t perfect and nor does it strive to be. Alike to the typology of ‘fringe’, my study has not aimed to prescribe a singular definition of the term ‘queer’. Instead, as the concept of ‘queer’, is characterised by its lack of “any fixed value”,<sup>333</sup> as articulated by Jagose, it enables fringe festivals to create a ‘queer event’. Consequently, such events have the capacity to create a ‘queer environment’ for their communities. All Fringes share a similar state-of-mind and are queer, however I present the view that some are queerer than others.

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<sup>333</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*.1.

In Chapter Two: *Making the Fringe* I provided a complete autoethnographic journey of the creation of the CFF. Through this chapter I applied the knowledge and insight gained from the previous chapter, into my own practice in designing the CFF. Due to the significant amount of practice involved, this chapter evolved many times and was highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which eventually forced to me to take a different approach through the formation of the SWT. Through this chapter I presented my rationale for choosing a hybrid-version of the 'European Model' for the CFF.

All Fringes which have been examined within this PhD have an application process in place for artists. The contracts that are made with artists may differ from Fringe to Fringe, but they typically work on the basis with an artist paying a fee and then receiving a percentage of their ticket income. The modelling of the CFF and other 'European Model' Fringes could be deemed to be politically controversial, as Fringes within this model utilise an alternative programming schema in selecting the acts and artists. Although, the SWT was a curated event, it became a dress rehearsal for both for the community to experience a 'taste' of 'fringe' as well as a testbed for my work as a first-time fringe director. The easing of COVID-19 national restrictions allowed me to move away from the rigidly curated model of the SWT and move towards a more traditional Fringe. The CFF was programmed through our application process, and we selected artists based on the level of their application. However, there was more traditional 'fringe freedoms' in the process. For example, we encouraged new work and actively sought to prioritise underrepresented groups within our programming. Although, I argue that the application process structure within 'fringe' does provide obstacles in achieving these goals. For example, if underrepresented groups didn't apply, we were unable to showcase artists that fell into this category. Despite provoking some controversy as being contra to the ethos of earlier Fringes, the model we used gave us a curatorial power which allowed us to choose what we thought was the 'best fit' either artistically or economically for our community.

My study posits the specific conditions needed for a fringe festival to be established are *Place, Space* and *Artists*. Without these key components, fringe festivals cannot be born. Although, my research has shown that Fringe leaders do prioritise certain conditions over the other. For example, with high cultural tourism figures, the EFF is a positive for its geographical location in Edinburgh. However, this has a knock-on effect to artists which are then required to pay higher rates for accommodation due to an inflated market. Equally, within the 'Edinburgh Model' venues hold all curatorial power which allows them to set their

own rules regarding selection, payment and contracting. The ‘CAFF Model’ is not as transferable across the world compared to the other models but it can be a positive for artists who are at the beginning of their careers looking to test their work to audiences in a more forgiving environment. Whereas the ‘European Model’ is the most hybrid and directors can adapt and transform aspects of this modelling to their own unique needs of their environment.

Bakhtin writes, “for all that exists dies and is born simultaneously... the old truth and the new truth”.<sup>334</sup> Throughout my thesis I have provided much analysis on the EFF and how its consumerist appetite may be damaging the ‘fringe world’ and its artists. This is the “new truth” of the EFF. Yet, like many others I still share a certain romance with this Fringe. Yet, as years have passed whilst conducting this research, the conversation within the media and the ‘fringe world’ regarding the high financial costs for artists remains the same. Therefore, the EFF must listen to those that are voicing this opinion and return to its roots as a sanctuary for art-makers. Otherwise, its future as the largest open-access arts festival in the world, may be questioned and instead of being a place for artists with neo-liberal aspirations, it will instead become a place for what Drucker describes as those who “have the money to pay”.<sup>335</sup>

Chapter Three: *Living in the Fringe* looked to provide the reader with a detailed account of what it felt like to be inside the world of the CFF. This chapter is largely supported by my video documentation, to give the reader a chance to visually witness the CFF and its atmosphere. My own inspiration for this project was born out of my lived experiences as an artist whilst performing at IndyFringe and is referenced in the *Prologue* of this thesis. The positive communal feeling I felt was unknown to me at the time but had stuck with me for years after. When I decided to start the CFF, I knew I wanted to recreate that feeling for others. This would be the start of my journey in creating a ‘fringe atmosphere’, a term which would reoccur throughout my study. The ‘fringe atmosphere’ is created by community members. Whilst the Fringe occurs it’s a feeling of festivity and togetherness by artists, staff and volunteers. Neither gender, nor sexuality restrict the ‘fringe atmosphere’. Its fluid, open and diverse and due to a shared state of mind, all Fringes share a sense of queerness.

Throughout my thesis, I have looked to Mikhail Bakhtin and his analysis of ‘carnival’ in the work *Rabelais and his World* (1965). Fundamentally, fringe festivals and Bakhtin’s ‘carnival’ share a similar spirit, in both their artistic protest both against mainstream culture and a

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<sup>334</sup> Bakhtin and Iswolsky, "Rabelais and His World." 17.

<sup>335</sup> Drucker, *Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism*. 383.

‘higher authority’. The social licence which is granted through ‘carnival’ allows for outside voices to be heard and new places to be created. The ‘carnival’ turns the world upside down, where fools become kings and clothes are worn inside out. During the SWT I was able to create that world, as drag artists performed in disused shops to unknown passes by. This means even a small version of ‘fringe’ found in the SWT can have the power to disrupt capitalist norms, even if just temporarily.

In Chapter four: *Evaluating the Fringe* I provided analysis on the relationships between artists, audiences and place through the context of the CFF, whilst providing reflection on the positive and negative outcomes from the event. Throughout this process, I have looked back to my previous experiences as a ‘fringe artist’, which allowed me to have a clear sense of what I wanted to achieve from the very start of launching the CFF. Equally, these memories have guided me in moments of uncertainty. I chose to create a ‘hybrid’ version of the ‘European Model’ and data taken from the CFF’s 2022 application form suggests that the outcomes of my hybrid modelling were positive, as a large percentage of artists reapplied to take-part in 2022.

The use of Bakhtin within my work has allowed me to answer one of my key research questions connected to my study, which was questioning the relationship between a fringe festival and its community. Robinson writes: “Carnival is also taken to provide a positive alternative vision. It is not simply a deconstruction of dominant culture, but an alternative way of living based on a pattern of play.”<sup>336</sup> Presenting Colchester with an “alternative vision” was always going to be an interesting aspect of this study. The reaction was mostly positive, except for the two intoxicated audience members during *Drag Bingo* creating both conflict and a hostile atmosphere at the CFF.

As part of my contribution to new knowledge, I have created my own nomenclatural term and framework which I refer to throughout this thesis as ‘artist-centred creative producing’ (ACCP). ACCP was fundamental for my research process as it puts artists at the forefront of fringe festival designing and planning. Equally, ACCP allowed me to use my own lived experiences to create the suitable conditions needed for artists performing at a newly formed fringe festival such as the CFF. ACCP can be used across festival scholarship and future studies, making it a significant contribution to knowledge for this thesis. This is the first time a researcher has launched a fringe festival and detailed its entire process for academic

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<sup>336</sup> Robinson, "In Theory Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power."

purposes, and whilst using autoethnographic research as a methodological approach on festival production is also new to both this topic and to the academy. My findings will benefit those researching the socio-political and identity issues within the arts and provide an insight into the challenges of organising artistic events during the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to further knowledge on modes of adaptation and durability.

This is the first research thesis which has combined Bakhtin and Queer theory and situated it through a 'fringe' lens. I have highlighted throughout this thesis that much has been written on the economics of Fringes such as the EFF and Adelaide Fringe. However, one of the major gaps in academic research based on fringe festivals is using qualitative and practice-based methodologies found within this thesis, which determines how festival organisation and structure effects participating artists and theatre companies. My study adds to the gap in academic research on the relationship between festival organisation and effects on artists. Equally, I have built upon past 'fringe studies' such as Sarah Thomasson's (2015) research on Edinburgh and Adelaide, Clare J.A Mitchell's (1993) study of the economic effect a theatre festival has communities, Bruce Willems- Braun's (1991) work on Canadian fringe festivals and Robert G. Hollands quantitative survey on Prague Fringe (2010). None of these notable studies employ a practice based/led and autoethnographic research such as mine and this is the first time any study has attempted to group fringe festivals into their modelling and apply them into future practice for academic purposes.

Before beginning this project, I did not consider myself as a producer or director. Through my video documentation my PhD also acts a journey of my personal development in the form of practice as well as providing analysis of 'fringe'. Ahmed writes, "getting lost still takes us somewhere."<sup>337</sup> The video documentation supporting my thesis over a three-year period, allows the reader to view this research in real-time and highlights how past experiences as an artist, combined with academic research can lead to the creation of practice. Whilst underpinning the journey of a creative producer is not black and white and by "getting lost" can be more beneficial to the process. The practice within my PhD is not just focused on producing. As a producer I touch upon many different artforms, which in turn allowed me as a researcher to touch upon numerous methodologies. This has allowed me to create a broad and diverse picture for the reader.

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<sup>337</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology."7.

The limitations of my study were due to my research being extremely experimental, in both its practice and delivery. The scope of the practical element of my study was everchanging and evolving. As a theatre-maker and deviser, I know that no piece I make is ever finished or perfect, and there are always moments within the process that either slow you down or take a different route in producing the final product. My experience of devising a fringe festival for academic purposes was very much the same. Along the way, there were several obstacles put in my path which I had to either adapt to or overcome. The COVID-19 pandemic was the biggest test. However, when I encountered problems, I celebrated them as they provided data for my theory. This was the unique part of my study. The formation of the SWT was a positive addition for my research, although it created many more hours of practice to record and evaluate which I didn't initially plan for.

Due to postponements and cancellations of festivals across the world, for a large period I was unable to provide new data on a large pool Fringes as I originally hoped to achieve.

Originally, I wanted to use qualitative data produced from surveys and interviews to determine an artist's experience at the CFF. However, with the CFF taking place during a global pandemic, I determined that the results produced wouldn't be fair and transferable to future studies. I also originally wanted to understand what the local community knew about 'fringe' before the CFF took place. Although, time constraints caused by the pandemic which left me to reorganise the festival several times didn't allow me enough time to do this aspect within my research.

Autoethnography is an extremely personal process, and my perception of moments within my practice may have been viewed differently by another. The task of deciding what to include and leave out from my accounts was challenged by a desire to annul any biases in my selection of material. Ahmed writes: "let us consider the difference it makes to walk blindfolded into a room that is familiar compared to one that is not".<sup>338</sup> The town of Colchester was key to my research as it is my hometown and a place I am "familiar" with as Amed describes. I had a pre-existing relationship with community members, venues and artists which led me to feel safer within my surroundings. Arguably, the CFF had less chance of failure due to own personal relationship with the town. Therefore, as I wasn't venturing completely into the unknown, I don't know what I may have found if the research took place in a different location, one in which I wasn't familiar with. However, as I have evinced in

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.7.



this account, this research was also founded on a desire to bring a new creative dimension to a community that I did know well, and to see the impacts of the fringe within the hierarchy of an established arts scene.

ACCP was a new framework created to deliver and guide the practice element of my study, and to offer a reproducible set of principles and parameters for other creative producers looking to work in 'fringe'. ACCP has been iteratively tested and honed to construct an ecology of artist-centred practices that span the full fringe lifecycle from initial contact to final performance. By solely focusing on the needs and experiences of artists within a fringe festival setting, my study was limited in producing data and research on the other stakeholders involved within the world of 'fringe', but my research also opens out other correlated avenues of investigation for thinking through other benefitting frameworks. I would suggest the relevance of my ACCP framework to future practiced-based studies on festival production and/or creative producing, and although ACCP was set up within a 'fringe' context, it has applicability for wider genres of festival.

Due to the steep increase in the number of fringe festivals being established over the last 20 years with an estimated 300 now taking place annually all over the world, the beneficial research opportunities for future studies on 'fringe' is greater than ever before. Although, the pandemic may prove to impact this progress. With countries imposing travel bans for large periods in 2020 and 2021, both international artists and cultural tourists were unable to engage with Fringes. This may have directly impacted ticket-sales and the financial stability of Fringes, many of which rely on funding from local and national bodies. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the future of 'fringe' is still very much unknown, with a significant number of the Fringes which I originally researched either having been remodelled, downsized or sadly closed. At the time of writing, it appears that some Fringes are slowly returning to their own form of normality in terms of programming and audience numbers. However, my study only maps the beginnings of the effect of the pandemic through a 'fringe lens'. Therefore, I suggest future studies undertaking research on 'fringe' to build upon my real time accounts of the pandemic and analyse the differences in post-pandemical 'fringe society'. Equally, more work needs to be undertaken about the risks and exposures of 'fringe' to artists, audiences and locations. For example, the capitalist nature found at larger fringe festivals, unhealthy and socially-bullish drinking cultures, which are celebrated and promoted by organisers through sponsorships and social environments, and the lack of accessibility found in many 'fringe' spaces across the world.

The last place I thought would find myself one week after delivering my own festival, was at Prague Fringe. However, I have argued through this thesis that as humans we are naturally drawn to places, we feel comfortable in. If I determine an object as a festival, then mine is 'fringe'. In fact, Ahmed writes, "to be ordained is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us find our way".<sup>339</sup> In some ways Prague Fringe allowed me to find my "way" as Ahmed suggests. It was there in 2019 as a volunteer, I filmed my first video diary entry. Something I would proceed to create on a frequent basis for the next two years. Equally, it allowed me to see the inner workings of a Fringe, whilst allowing me to form some long-lasting friendships that have aided my pursuit in completing this process. It was also a Fringe which I had adopted many characteristics from within my own modelling. So, in some ways it seemed fitting to finish this journey in the same place where it began. The Prague Fringe in 2021 had downsized compared to previous years. Now taking place in November, the festival had really felt the economic effects of the pandemic. The size of the programme had shrunk, and it only used a fraction of the venues which it had previously. There were no branded t-shirts or printed programmes in 2021. Equally, there were no international volunteers selling tickets. Now celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Prague Fringe had reset maybe to a size and feeling as it had in its earlier days. In the months before the festival, Gove and his team had put together a core team of 6 people who had previously worked at the festival. They offered to pay for flights and accommodation in return for their work. I was part of this group, although due to the timeline of the CFF I couldn't commit myself to the work. Instead, I opted to turn up and surprise Gove and his team without any prior announcement. Thankfully, they were happy to see me and once again, my love for the 'fringe' world was clear. I didn't want to be anywhere else.

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<sup>339</sup> Ahmed, "Queer Phenomenology."1.

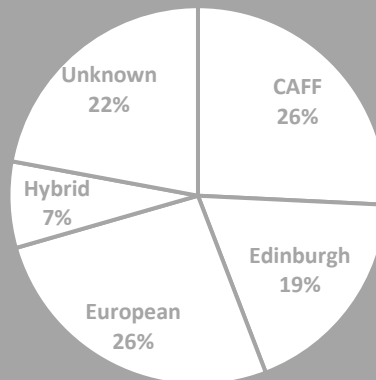
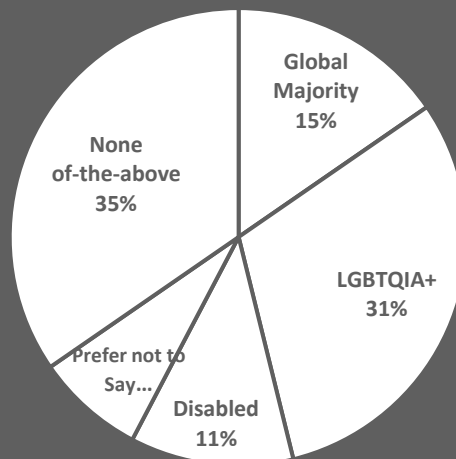
**Appendices 1****CHART 1  
FRINGE MODELS****(CHART 2)  
% OF COMPANIES IN FINAL PROGRAMME**

Table 1

	<b>Prague Fringe (2019)</b>	<b>Colchester Fringe</b>
<b>Programming</b>	Juried	Juried
<b>Duration of Festival</b>	9 days	4 days
<b>Month of Festival</b>	May	May
<b>Number of Venues</b>	8	5
<b>Number of Artists</b>	53	23
<b>Max number of Performances per Artist</b>	9	3
<b>Cost of per Ticket</b>	£7	£7
<b>Ticket % to Artists</b>	60%	60%
<b>Application Fee</b>	£0	£0
<b>Registration Fee for 3 performances</b>	£180-£336	£50

Table 2

<b>Models</b>	<b>Canadian (CAFF)</b>	<b>European</b>	<b>Edinburgh</b>
<b>Example Festival</b>	Edmonton Fringe Festival	Prague Fringe Festival	Edinburgh Festival Fringe
<b>Fees</b>  1. <b>Application</b> 2. <b>Production</b>	1. £21 2. £488 (6-7 performances in 60-99 seated venue)	1. £0 2. £483 (6 performances in 60 seated venue)	1. £393 2. 0-£10,000 per week
<b>Application process</b>	Lottery	Juried	Venue
<b>Ticket Split</b>	100%	60%	Varies (depending on the venue artists may have a ticket split deal / be contracted to pay a guaranteed fee to the venue or <b>both</b> )
<b>Venues</b>	Fringe managed	Fringe managed	Fringe is <b>only</b> the liaison. Venues programme shows
<b>Duration</b>	10 days	9 days	25 days
<b>Number of Companies</b>	73 (2018)	62 (2018)	3,548 (2018)
<b>Number of Performances per Company</b>	6-7	4-6	1-25
<b>Accommodation</b>	Fringe	Artist	Artist

**Finance**

Low costs  
High rewards

**Opportunities**

Social  
Professional

**ACCP  
Framework**

**Communication**

Reliable  
Honest  
Supportive

**Environment**

Accessible  
Diverse  
Open

## Appendices 2

**OFFICIAL PROGRAMME**

**THE FIRST EVER**

# **COLCHESTER FRINGE FESTIVAL**

**21 – 24 OCTOBER 2021**

**A JUMBO WEEKEND OF STOMPING PERFORMANCE FEATURING THEATRE, COMEDY, DANCE, POETRY, CHILDREN'S SHOWS AND MUCH MORE IN VENUES ACROSS COLCHESTER!**

**➤ [WWW.COLCHESTERFRINGE.COM](http://WWW.COLCHESTERFRINGE.COM)**

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 i @COLCHESTERFRINGE

**COLCHESTER FRINGE**



COLCHESTER  
**FRINGE**

**WELCOME  
TO OUR  
PROGRAMME!**

The first ever Colchester Fringe Festival is a heady mix of theatre, comedy, dance, poetry, live music and much more. We are proudly independent and boast a programme of international, national and local acts - over half of whom are from Essex. We've even got a fabulous and fun programme aimed at young people and their grown-ups.

The festival is committed to using 100% wheelchair accessible venues, promoting under-represented voices, and keeping ticket prices as low as we can. Any profits we make will be reinvested into future events.

View the programme, find our venues and buy tickets online at [www.colchesterfringe.com](http://www.colchesterfringe.com)

We hope you enjoy what's on offer!

**Cameron Abbott-Betts & Steve Goatman**  
Colchester Fringe Co-Directors

## What is 'Fringe'?

In 1947 eight uninvited theatre companies arrived at the Edinburgh International Festival eager to perform, only to be turned away. Feeling rejected, they decided to group together and stage their own festival. Thus, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and a new premise of an artistic event was born.

What started out as an artistic protest has produced an estimated 50,000 artists participating annually in fringe festivals in the U.K alone! Also, 250 international fringe festivals draw in 19 million audience members every year to watch theatre, comedy, dance, circus, spoken-word, live art and all other types of performances imaginable. We're proud to be Colchester's first ever Fringe Festival!

## Why the Purple Elephant?

The elephant connection to Colchester began around the Roman occupation of Camulodunum in AD43 when Roman reinforcements arrived in town with reserves of arms, provisions...and elephants. It must have been quite a sight for the ancient Britons when they saw these huge animals for the first time. We've adopted a purple elephant as our mascot and hope to bring some of that ancient awe and wonder with it.





# TICKET BOOKING

COLCHESTER  
**FRINGE**

We're really grateful to the Headgate Theatre who are handling our ticket bookings.

You can buy Colchester Fringe Festival tickets in the following ways:

- 1) Online: [www.colchesterfringe.com](http://www.colchesterfringe.com)
- 2) In Person From the Headgate Theatre  
(see map on the back of this brochure)
- 3) At the door of every Fringe venue - (cashless only)
- 4) At our pop-up space The Tent, which will be situated in Lion Walk.  
Here you will be able to pick-up a programme, buy a ticket, grab a drink and watch some free live music.

## Colchester Young Fringers

We're proud to have established our own development programme for local young people - Colchester Young Fringers.

Supported by Arts Council England and accredited by the national Arts Award scheme, Young Fringers will be participating in the festival as reviewers and performers. For our premiere festival we have produced Ghost Therapy, the debut play by 17y/o Colchester Playwright Jaz Skingle which runs for 2 performances at the Headgate Theatre (Main Space).

Our Young Fringer's reviews and more information about the scheme will be posted online on our socials and website over the festival.



Jaz Skingle



COLCHESTER  
FRINGE

# HEADGATE THEATRE

MAIN SPACE



SHOW TITLE: BACK TO THE ROARING 20'S // GENRE: DANCE

Artist/ Company: Movement Space (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Friday 22nd Oct @ 19:00  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 21:00  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 18:00

**Description:** Movement Space presents a theatrical time warp. The year is 2021, we are teched up & tuned in. The pace is fast & the time is now... Or is it? The sands of time slip through the hourglass where prohibition rules. No beeps, 1920's beats.

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Flashing Lights, Smoke & Adult Themes // **Duration:** 30 mins

SHOW TITLE: DRAG BINGO WITH SHAR COOTERIE // GENRE: DRAG

Artist/ Company: Shar Cooterie (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Friday 22nd Oct @ 22:00  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 22:00

**Description:** Join the Queen of the Dell, Shar Cooterie for an hour of the most chaotic bingo this side of that Butlins trip you took! With a few songs and a full game of classic bingo, this show is a sure-fire hit if you're looking for the lead-in to a good night out.

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Strong Language // **Duration:** 60 mins



SHOW TITLE: ENTRÉE // GENRE: MAGIC

Artist/ Company: José Pedro Fortuna (Porto, Portugal)

**Dates/ Times:**

Saturday 23rd Oct @ 16:30  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 13:30

**Description:** He's the master of Ceremonies: tall, dark and handsome. But what happens when the Master's props gain a life of their own? Entrée is a silent solo physical comedy/ magic piece about the journey of an eccentric character through failure and unhelpful magical discoveries.

**Age Suitability:** All Ages // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 45 mins

SHOW TITLE: GHOST THERAPY // GENRE: THEATRE

Artist/ Company: Jaz Skingle

**Dates/ Times:**

Saturday 23rd Oct @ 15:00  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 15:00

**Description:** Ghost therapy explores the ghost world, and more importantly ghost problems... all from the view of ghost therapist Dr Soul. It is a comedic and fun play with a variety of different characters, I mean ghosts. So prepare to die of laughter muhaha!

**Age Suitability:** All Ages // **Audience Warnings:** Flashing Lights // **Duration:** 30 mins



# HEADGATE THEATRE

## MAIN SPACE



**SHOW TITLE:** INK'D // **GENRE:** DANCE

**Artist/ Company:** CTC Dance Company (London, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 20:30  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 18:00  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 19:30

**Description:** CTC Dance Company presents a 40minute contemporary dance theatre show exploring the Identity of a relationship between a Cis-Male and a Transgender Female. The show exposes an audience to the modern trials, tribulations and celebrations a transgender couple may combat within society.

**Age Suitability:** 12+ // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 60 mins

This show includes a 20-25 minute post-show discussion with a Guest facilitator from charity: Gendered Intelligence.

**SHOW TITLE:** LOST DOLLS // **GENRE:** THEATRE

**Artist/ Company:** Headgate Young Company (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Thursday 21st Oct @ 19:00  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 16:30

**Description:** Year 11. Would you do it again? The notorious girls at Harcourt High, might not have a choice. Currently failing their GCSE'S, the girls are given a last chance to salvage their future. A one-week intensive course, scuffling with the "easiest subject" of them all. Drama.

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Strong Language & Flashing Lights // **Duration:** 60 mins



**SHOW TITLE:** THE MINER'S CROW // **GENRE:** THEATRE

**Artist/ Company:** Stage Write (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Thursday 21st Oct @ 20:30  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 19:30  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 21:00

**Description:** Once upon a time there was a boy who grew...and grew... and just didn't stop growing! As if being born in a rain drenched Welsh village wasn't enough, Paul has to negotiate his way through childhood trauma, an abusive father, a burgeoning creativity and a confusing sexual awakening! There's a crow on his shoulder that digs its claws deep, but music offers a way through each crisis. Can The Greatest Single in the History of the World EVER save him? And it might, just might save you too!

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Adult Themes & Strong Language // **Duration:** 60 mins



**SHOW TITLE:** SESKA: BULLINACHINASHOP // **GENRE:** CHILDREN'S

**Artist/ Company:** SESKA (Brighton, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 13:30

**Description:** Entertaining crowds from Mumbai to Trinidad. Do not miss a turbo-charged chaotic comedy magic show for all ages. Kids laugh out loud, dads fart out loud and mums faint at his feet! Buy tickets quick!

**Age Suitability:** All Ages // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 45 mins



COLCHESTER  
FRINGE

# HEADGATE THEATRE

REHEARSAL ROOM



SHOW TITLE: CHASING FAIRY TALES: JAPAN // GENRE: CHILDREN'S

Artist/ Company: The Arts Business (Birmingham, England)

Dates/ Times:  
Saturday 23rd October @ 15:00  
Sunday 24th October @ 13:30

Description: It's time for a bedtime story with a difference. Experience the weird and wonderful world of Japanese Fairytales: see the magic rabbit trick the badger, the old man and his butterfly and the mysterious cloak of invisibility, told with masks and puppets!

Age Suitability: Family // Audience Warnings: N/A // Duration: 45 mins

SHOW TITLE: DRAGON // GENRE: MUSICAL

Artist/ Company: Fizz & Chips Productions (Dublin, Republic of Ireland)

Dates/ Times:  
Thursday 21st Oct @ 20:30  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 19:00  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 19:30

Description: Dragon is a new musical, telling the tale of a young man (but not that young). He is a serial-first-dater, Tinder Wizard, and a fantasy aficionado. As the cafes and girls change, the story he tells remains the same: the mythical tale of an all-powerful dragon.

Age Suitability: 16+ // Audience Warnings: Strong Language // Duration: 60 mins



SHOW TITLE: JUMBO & NUMBER ONE, THE NORTH SEA // GENRE: THEATRE

Artist/ Company: Radio Vision (Colchester, England)

Dates/ Times:  
Thursday 21st Oct @ 19:00  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 16:30  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 18:00

Description: Radio Vision was formed in order to produce audio plays as script in hand, live performances on stage, in front of an audience. With Sound Effects pre-recorded, the plays are best described as almost a hybrid, offering a unique experience for audiences, who get to "see" the audio plays as well as listen to the scripts. The structure means that audiences will often get to see at first-hand, the skills of actors, as they slip seamlessly from one character to another within the same play. The plays are performed with minimal set and maximum atmosphere!

Age Suitability: 16+ // Audience Warnings: Adult Themes // Duration: 60 mins



SHOW TITLE: LET'S TRY GAY // GENRE: THEATRE

Artist/ Company: I Birbanti (Milan, Italy)

Dates/ Times:  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 20:30  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 18:00  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 16:30

Description: Two friends agree to shoot a gay adult movie between two straight guys as an "art project", but they now feel very uncomfortable: the relaxed, goofy situation turns into a deep analysis of human nature.

Age Suitability: 16+ // Audience Warnings: Adult Themes & Strong Language  
// Duration: 45 mins



# THE BULL

SOUNDHOUSE

COLCHESTER  
FRINGE



**SHOW TITLE:** ACCIDENT AVOIDANCE TRAINING FOR CUTLERY USERS // **GENRE:** COMEDY

**Artist/ Company:** Ian Crawford (Sutton Coldfield, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Friday 22nd Oct @ 20:30  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 19:30  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 19:30

**Description:** Do you own a butter knife? Do you know how to minimise injury from an unsupervised fork? Do you have Spoon-Sense? Safety expert Ian Crawford is here to deliver his deadly serious training workshop and to develop your cutlery confidence. What he has to share is deadly serious and you'd be forking mad to miss him.

**Age Suitability:** 12+ // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 50 mins

**SHOW TITLE:** BAD MOVIES // **GENRE:** COMEDY

**Artist/ Company:** Luke Poulton (London, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Thursday 21st Oct @ 19:00  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 19:00  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 18:00

**Description:** After doing his show "You Don't Look Autistic" for the past two years, Luke has decided to move on and do a whole show on one of his favourite things... Bad Movies! Get ready for a journey through the worst movies ever created, find out why Luke loves them so much and discover what is the baddest movie

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Adult Themes & Strong Language // **Duration:** 60 mins



**SHOW TITLE:** FRIENDZY // **GENRE:** MAGIC

**Artist/ Company:** The Underdogs

**Dates/ Times:**

Thursday 21st Oct @ 22:00  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 22:00

**Description:** The Underdogs laugh in the face of danger and death. These fabulous, fearless comedy magicians bring you drunken knife throwing, mind-blowing mindreading, life-threatening tricks, terrible dancing, unexpected lettuce and absurdly cool tricks with a Hoover! Rising stars, go get tickets!

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Strong Language // **Duration:** 50 mins

**SHOW TITLE:** HOW TO GET UP IN THE MORNING // **GENRE:** COMEDY

**Artist/ Company:** Ian Lane (London, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Thursday 21st Oct @ 20:30  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 21:00  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 21:00

**Description:** The average Brit takes 49 minutes to get ready for work in the morning. In this work-in-progress stand-up comedy show, autistic multimedia comedian and retro video game speedrunner Ian Lane investigates how to cut this time down.

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Adult Themes // **Duration:** 45 mins



COLCHESTER  
FRINGE

CODA



**SHOW TITLE:** EVERYTHING I KNOW I LEARNED FROM EUROVISION // **GENRE:** COMEDY

**Artist/ Company:** Jo Fletcher-Cross (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 20:30 (no under-18's allowed)  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 19:30  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 19:30

**Description:** The Eurovision Song Contest is many things to many people. Glitter-fest, serious music competition, camp pop fun, a nonsensical waste of time. To Jo it's where she learned there was a big wide world beyond her grey little corner of Glasgow and made her want to travel to all those exciting places - France, Belgium, the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia... She's taken many important life lessons from Eurovision and wants to help others find their own message from her very favourite televised live event in the world.

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Strong Language // **Duration:** 50 mins

**SHOW TITLE:** LIES, ALIBIS & FILTHY STORIES // **GENRE:** COMEDY

**Artist/ Company:** Paul Merryck (Chelmsford, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Thursday 21st Oct @ 20:30  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 21:00 (no under-18's allowed)  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 18:00

**Description:** Come along for a hilarious lock-in session of top-quality gags, tales and anecdotes from the wrong side of the marshes. Or put more simply...Lies, Alibis and Filthy Stories

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Adult Themes // **Duration:** 50 mins



**SHOW TITLE:** NICE TO MEAT YOU // **GENRE:** DRAG

**Artist/ Company:** Shar Cooterie (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**  
Thursday 21st Oct @ 19:00  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 19:00  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 18:00

**Description:** Join the Queen of the Deli, Shar Cooterie for 45 minutes of chat, songs and the odd game. One of Colchester's leading drag performers and international drag piglet, Shar hopes to see you at their Colchester Fringe debut for a show that promises to leave you full up on Honey Roast Glam!

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Strong Language // **Duration:** 45 mins

## BEST DAYS VINTAGE & THE TENT

COLCHESTER  
FRINGE



**SHOW TITLE:** HYSTERICAL: THE HILARIOUS, HISTORY OF HYSTERIA // **GENRE:** THEATRE

**Artist/ Company:** Rebecca Buckle (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Friday 22nd Oct @ 20:30 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 18:00 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 18:00 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)

**Description:** Hello, my name is Rebecca and I'm a hysterical woman. From Plato to Freud, witches to suffragettes, discover everything you never knew you needed to know about the history of hysteria. In a riotous digital lecture, join Rebecca (along with a puppet or two) for an eye-opening expedition into this fascinating 'diagnosis' and follow her own personal quest to shake off a label that has been placed on women for over 2,500 years.

**Age Suitability:** 16+ // **Audience Warnings:** Adult Themes & Strong Language // **Duration:** 60 mins

**SHOW TITLE:** MISERUS // **GENRE:** THEATRE

**Artist/ Company:** i.e. (Bideford, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Thursday 21st Oct @ 19:00 (this performance will be held in The Tent)  
Friday 22nd Oct @ 19:00 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 19:30 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)

**Description:** Join the blind seer Tiresias and his mostly mute companion Vox Nihilii as they recount a dismal selection of Classical Greek Myths through some traditional storytelling smashed to bits with live music.

**Age Suitability:** 12+ // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 60 mins



**SHOW TITLE:** THE MASQUE OF ANARCHY BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY // **GENRE:** POETRY

**Artist/ Company:** Dr Anthony Roberts (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Thursday 21st Oct @ 20:30 (this performance will be held in The Tent)  
Saturday 23rd Oct @ 21:30 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 19:30 (this performance is being performed at Best Days Vintage)

**Description:** The Masque of Anarchy is a devastating poem, written in 1819 by Percy Bysshe Shelley following the Peterloo Massacre of that year. It is a bristling verse, full of outrage and anger but ultimately it is about strength and hope.

**Age Suitability:** All Ages // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 25 mins



"This is a Pay-What-You-Can-Afford event. All proceeds will be donated to a local charity."

## CULVER SQUARE SHOP

"This is a Pay-What-You-Can-Afford event."

**SHOW TITLE:** DREAMBAG // **GENRE:** INSTALLATION

**Artist/ Company:** Abi Cunliffe (Colchester, England)

**Dates/ Times:**

Saturday 23rd Oct @ 12:00 to 16:40  
Sunday 24th Oct @ 12:00 to 16:40

**Description:** Be Here Now is a gentle one-to-one installation, a collection of thoughts, memories and questions where the individual is taken on a journey via a dialogue through headphones. Participants are invited to add their own touch to a sculpture and to listen to a letter written just to them.

**Age Suitability:** 12+ // **Audience Warnings:** N/A // **Duration:** 20 mins



COLCHESTER  
**FRINGE**

## FRINGE CLUB CODA

**THURSDAY 21ST**  
**(11pm to 2am)**

Late-Night Fringe Cabaret hosted  
by drag sensation Shar Cooterie

**FRIDAY 22ND**  
**(11pm to 2am)**

Live music and Fringe DJ

**SATURDAY 23RD**  
**(11pm to 2am)**

Live music and Fringe Disco

**SUNDAY 24TH**  
**(10pm to 2am)**

Fringe Closing Party

COLCHESTER  
**FRINGE**

FREE

## FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKSHOPS



**TITLE:** A CREATIVE PATH with Eddie Summers

**About:** This workshop will help you to discover, create, design, and live a creative life. Surprise friends and family with your culinary skills, perform a cool mind-reading magic trick for your friends, free your mind to write rap / poetry or doodle a better you. Inclusive light-hearted fun for all ages.

**Where and When?**  
Saturday 23rd October 11am-12pm @  
The Tent



**TITLE:** Drag Workshop

**About:** Benjamin Powell aka Shar Cooterie will guide you through some of the assorted aims and starting points when approaching drag artistry for the first time!

For beginners or those looking to build on existing skills, this workshop aims to leave participants enthused, empowered and, most of all, excited about all that drag can be!

**Where and When?**  
Saturday 23rd October 12pm-1pm @ The Headgate Theatre Studio



**TITLE:** Self- Identity: Inspired Workshop for the LGBTQIA+ Community by CTC Dance Company

**About:** A free 2 hour workshop to young people and young adults that are part of the LGBTQIA+ Community, exploring self-identity, mental health and self-confidence through movement and discussion.

**Where and when?**  
Sunday 24th October at  
The Headgate Theatre  
(Studio) from 11am to 1pm



**TITLE:** Puppet Workshop

**About:** The Arts Business will be running a workshop alongside Chasing Fairytales: Japan where children will be given the opportunity to build puppets from everyday rubbish encouraging a reuse and recycle mentality and showing them how to make something from nothing. They'll also be able to play with their creations in our fully recycled puppet theatre!

**Where and When?**  
Sunday 24th October  
11pm-12pm @ The  
Headgate Theatre  
(Rehearsal Room)



**TITLE:** An Introduction to Magic! with José Pedro Fortuna

**About:** Have you ever wanted to learn magic? This introductory magic workshop will introduce the basic core concepts of magic. You will learn tricks to impress your friends and family with regular objects from a coin to a deck of cards. Open to all ages and skill levels.

**Where and when?**  
Sunday 24th October 12pm to 1pm @ The Tent





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COLCHESTER  
**FRINGE**

**WHAT'S  
ON**

**THURSDAY 21st OCTOBER**

**HEADGATE (MAIN)**

19:00 // Lost Dolls  
20:30 // The Miner's Crow

**HEADGATE  
(REHEARSAL ROOM)**

19:00 // Jumbo & Number One,  
The North Se  
20:30 // Dragon

**CODA**

19:00 // Nice to Meet You  
20:30 // Lies, Alibis &  
Filthy Stories

**THE BULL  
(SOUNDHOUSE)**

19:00 // Bad Movies  
20:30 // How to get up in  
the Morning  
22:00 // Friendly

**THE TENT**

19:00 // Miserus  
20:30 // The Masque of Anarchy  
by Percy Bysshe Shelley

**FRIDAY 22nd OCTOBER**

**HEADGATE (MAIN)**

19:00 // Back to the Roaring 20's  
20:30 // Ink'd  
22:00 // Drag Bingo

**HEADGATE  
(REHEARSAL ROOM)**

19:00 // Dragon  
20:30 // Let's Try Gay

**CODA**

19:00 // Nice to Meet You  
20:30 // Eurovision

**THE BULL  
(SOUNDHOUSE)**

19:00 // Bad Movies  
20:30 // Accident Avoidance  
Training for Cutlery Users  
22:00 // Friendly

**BEST DAYS VINTAGE**

19:00 // Miserus  
20:30 // Hysterical: The hilarious,  
history of hysteria



# WHAT'S ON

COLCHESTER  
FRINGE

**SATURDAY 23rd OCTOBER**

## HEADGATE (MAIN)

13:30 // // // // // SESKA  
15:00 // // // // // Ghost Therapy  
16:30 // // // // // Entrée  
18:00 // // // // // ink'd  
19:30 // // // // // The Miner's Crow  
21:00 // // // // // Back to the Roaring 20's  
22:00 // // // // // Drag Bingo

## HEADGATE (REHEARSAL ROOM)

15:00 // // // // // Chasing Fairytails  
16:30 // // // // // Jumbo & Number One, The North Se  
18:00 // // // // // Let's Try Gay  
19:30 // // // // // Dragon

## CODA

18:00 // // // // // Nice to Meet You  
19:30 // // // // // Eurovision  
21:00 // // // // // Lies, Alibis & Filthy Stories

## THE BULL (SOUNDHOUSE)

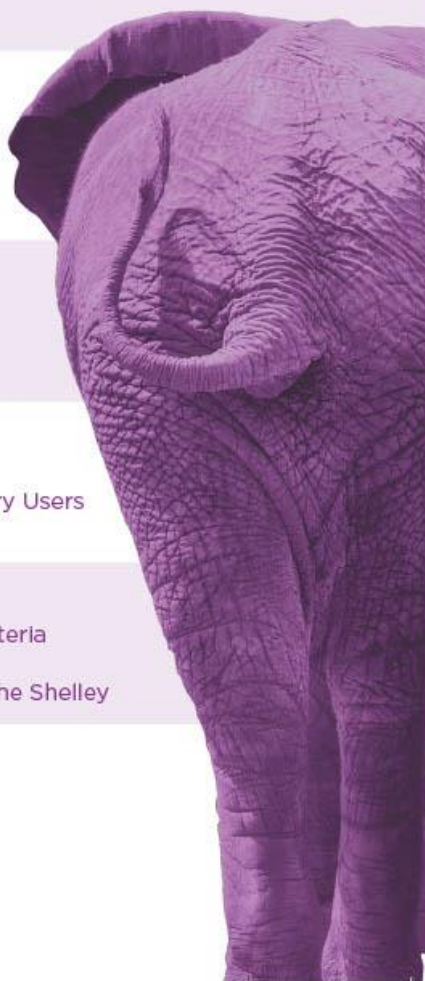
18:00 // // // // // Bad Movies  
19:30 // // // // // Accident Avoidance Training for Cutlery Users  
21:00 // // // // // How to get up in the Morning

## BEST DAYS VINTAGE

18:00 // // // // // Hysterical: The hilarious, history of hysteria  
19:30 // // // // // Miserus  
21:30 // // // // // The Masque of Anarchy by Percy Bysshe Shelley

## CULVER SQ SHOP

12-16:40 // // // // // Dreambag



COLCHESTER  
**FRINGE**

**WHAT'S  
ON**

**SUNDAY 24th OCTOBER**

**HEADGATE (MAIN)**

13:30 // // // // // Entrée  
15:00 // // // // // Ghost Therapy  
16:30 // // // // // Lost Dolls  
18:00 // // // // // Back to the Roaring 20's  
19:30 // // // // // Ink'd  
21:00 // // // // // The Miner's Crow

**HEADGATE (REHEARSAL ROOM)**

15:00 // // // // // Chasing Fairytails  
16:30 // // // // // Let's Try Gay  
18:00 // // // // // Jumbo & Number One, The North Se

**CODA**

18:00 // // // // // Lies, Allbis & Filthy Stories  
19:30 // // // // // Eurovision

**THE BULL (SOUNDHOUSE)**

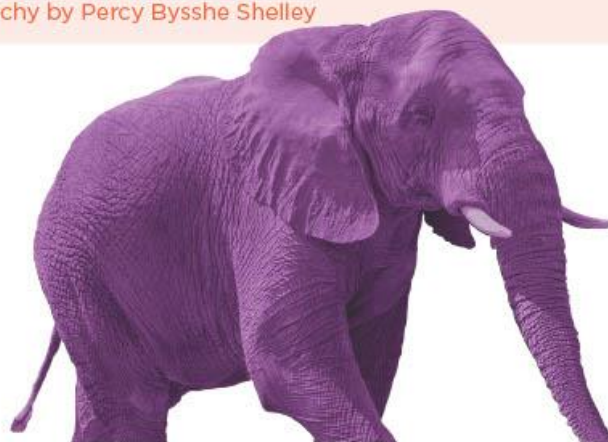
19:30 // // // // // Accident Avoidance Training for Cutlery Users  
21:00 // // // // // How to get up in the Morning

**BEST DAYS VINTAGE**

18:00 // // // // // Hysterical: The hilarious, history of hysteria  
19:30 // // // // // The Masque of Anarchy by Percy Bysshe Shelley

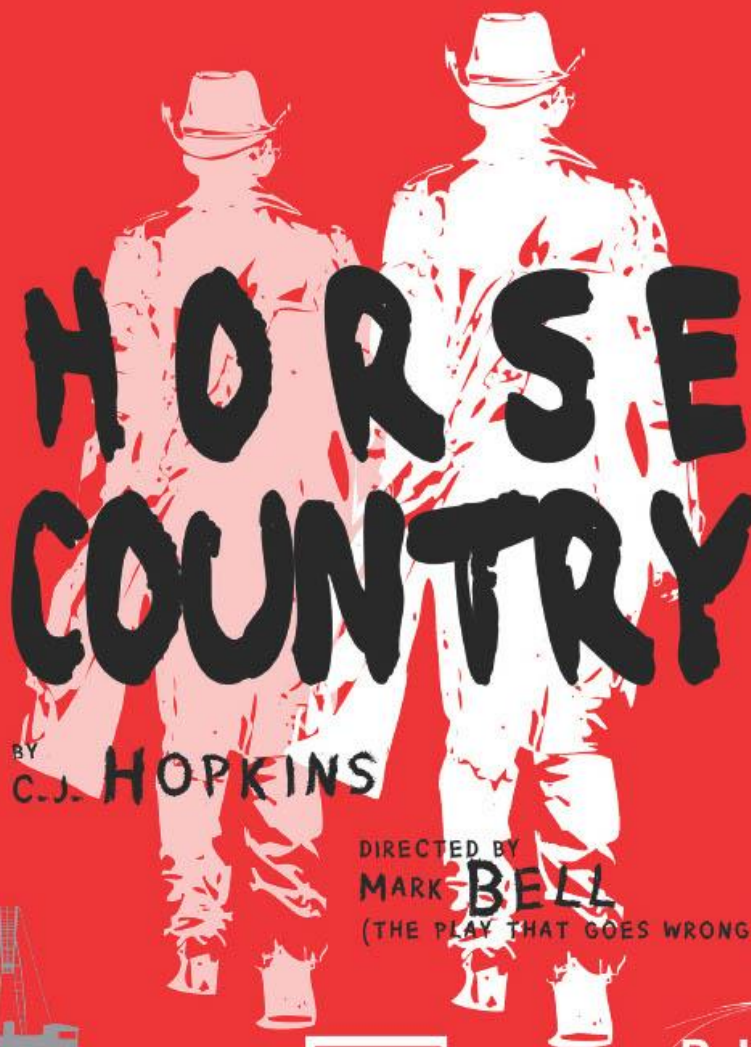
**CULVER SQ SHOP**

12-16:40 // // // // // Dreambag



COLCHESTER FRINGE & THE HEADGATE THEATRE  
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TWO IDIOTS · A GAME OF CARDS · ARMAGEDDON



BY  
C.J. HOPKINS

DIRECTED BY  
MARK BELL  
(THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG)



15th to 19th Feb 2022  
@ The Headgate Theatre





**SAVE THE DATE!**

**22ND - 25TH MAY 2020**



## PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

Hello, I am Cameron Abbott-Betts, the **Interviewer** from the **University of Essex**.

**What is my background?** I am a PhD research student researching the potential benefits of fringe festivals for actors. I am hoping to establish the Colchester Fringe Festival on a regular basis. I have a wealth of professional experience as a deviser, actor and producer. I am also the Co-Founder of the multi-award winning physical theatre company 'Royal Kung Foolery'.

**Do I have to talk to you?** No, not if you don't want to.

**What kinds of subjects might we discuss?** The Interviewer might want to talk to you about your personal experiences in fringe or arts festivals and your opinion on the future for these types of events. If you do agree to speak to the Interviewer, you will be asked to sign a form to show that you understand the conversation is part of their research.

**How will the Interviewer record this conversation?** They might make notes of the conversation and/or record as an audio file. With your express permission the interviewer video sections of the interview. Likewise, you can ask the writer NOT to note down anything you say, but still have a conversation with them.

**Can I see a copy of the interview?** The Interviewer guarantees you the opportunity to receive a copy of the audio files/recording and to view the transcription of any comments he is considering using for his academic research. After your review if there is anything that you would like to be added and/or removed, he will act accordingly.

**Will my name be used anywhere in the writing?** It is up to you. You can inform the Interviewer on the day of the conversation of your choice.

**How will the Interviewer use my conversation?** The conversation is primarily to support academic research into the world of fringe festivals. They might use parts to help them develop their own practice. Equally, they might use things you said word-for-word. The Interviewer will not deliberately misrepresent the conversation.



**What happens to the writing produced?** The hope is that the writing will be available for the public to access either in hard-copy form or as a published reading.

**What happens to the record of our conversation?** It will be made anonymous and then typed up from the Interviewer's notes and stored in a safe, encrypted data file. It will not be accessible to anyone else but the interviewer or his supervisor. Even if you have previously given your permission, you can withdraw your comments at any time up to January 2021 before the submission of the thesis.

**Contact:** If you have any questions or queries in regards to this proposed interview, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

**Concerns and complaints:** If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, in the first instance please contact the principal investigator of the project Annecy Lax, Lecturer at the University of Essex. If are still concerned or you think your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction,) please contact the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager.

### **Sample Interview Questions**

1. What is your definition of fringe?
2. Who is a fringe for?
3. Why did you form a fringe festival?
4. What were the biggest obstacles in producing your Fringe?
5. Does a fringe have to grow in order to improve?
6. Does a fringe sit within the mainstream or outside it?
7. What makes a fringe festival different to an arts festival?
8. Is the artistic content presented at a fringe less professional than that at a more 'traditional' arts festival or within a regional theatre?
9. Do you think that there is a different relationship between audience and performers at a fringe festival?
10. Do you think that the fringe offers a good training ground for actors?
11. What are your thoughts about the Edinburgh Fringe Festival?
12. What is the future for fringe?

## **Interview with Andrew Silverwood**

**(Artist/ Wandsworth Arts Fringe (Venue Manager))**

Wednesday 17th July 2019

Cam: Right, so let's talk about Fragility....

Andrew: So, the first few years at drama school I was extremely keen. I was going to be an actor, I was going to get an agent, I was going to do it this way or that way. But things just never quite turn out how you think they are going to turn out. So, I ended up in my third year devising this piece with a guy I was at drama school with. I was like well if we can just make a company, we could then tour this piece that we had just written. We then started looking at Fringes. So just to backtrack, I was at Rose Bruford and in your second year you have to do a placement abroad. I had gone to Prague and the last week that I was there, the Prague Fringe was going on. It was the 10th year of Prague Fringe and we went as F.O.H Volunteers and I had written while I was in Prague a monologue which was about coffee (of all the weird things). We decided that this monologue would be the basis for 'My First 10 Sexual Failures', which is the show I have basically toured ever since. But I had asked the guy that I had formed my company with if he wanted to come on board and help direct this monologue into a full-hour piece. And I said there is a bit of pressure into it. He asked why and I told him that I had already registered it for Prague Fringe for next year. Also, it was the week before we hand in our dissertation, but that's kind of how we started. We have always just built small-scale touring theatre for fringe audiences, all around the world. We spent four years working on and eventually being able to take it to Australia and getting on that fringe circuit.

Cam: Was that Adelaide?

Andrew: Yeah. So that was Perth and Adelaide. We had a conversation the first year we were in Prague, actually this is really good. We applied for Prague and Stockholm and a number of other festivals. We were rejected from Stockholm and then Adelaide and Stockholm came to see the show in Prague, and both immediately approached us. They were like look; you need to bring this to our festival. They both had different ways of working. Adelaide being open-access and Stockholm is curated. Adam from Stockholm said to me we have made a mistake; we need you to come back next year and you can bring your 'Sexual Failures' show. So that was 2013 sorted. And then Adelaide were like look we will help you find the venues you just have to find your funding. That took us an extra three years. But next year is my fifth year of going to Australia in a row.

Cam: Oh wow. So which Fringes have you been to then?

Andrew: So, Adam from Stockholm Fringe once described me in an interview as 'The Fringe Bike'. Which means all festivals at some point have had a ride. I haven't done any of the American or Canadian ones, I'm really keen to tap that market. But I have done, Adelaide, Perth, Newcastle (Australia), Stockholm, Gothenburg, Barnstaple, Wandsworth, Edinburgh, Limerick and fringe venues around the U.K but not in a festival.

Cam: So, you say you haven't done the Canadian or American ones, but in some ways, you have as Barnstaple has adopted that model.

Andrew: Yes, actually that's correct. One of the things that I was thinking about when I was prepping for this interview is the reason why I do this. Lots of people have different reasons for doing Fringes. For me, at the stage I am at now of my career it is a business. So, it is really important that whenever I do this, as a producer, performer, whether I'm running a venue it has to be a sensible business choice. So, Barnstaple is great because obviously as the performer you stand to make money. In Edinburgh a lot of people do it for exposure and unless I can really see that going somewhere that will make money in the future, I won't jump on board with that. There are a lot of venues in Edinburgh that aren't worth dealing

with as you will never get exposed enough to take you to the next level. 'Free Fringe' which is what I'm doing this year in Edinburgh. I know I'm not getting the exposure. But I do know I'm getting money at the end of it because the overheads were so low. It's 'Pay-What-You-Want' and you only put £100 into the venue upfront, because registration is what £400, you can quite realistically take home money from doing that. So that's the reason why I'm doing that. The Australian system is even better still, because the Australian system is "fuck why don't we make the audience members pay for everything"? They charge decent rates for tickets, you split it between your venue, you split it between the festival, you split it between yourself and everyone makes money. That's a great structure for a business!

Cam: So, would you say that the Australian model, let's say in Adelaide is different to the Edinburgh one?

Andrew: I think the Adelaide model relies a bit more on everyone making money. Also, I think because Australia is so far away. You got to remember that Edinburgh is really good, because to get to Edinburgh you fly to London and everyone fly's to London. But to get to Australia you need to find another country that will fly you there. So, they have to be enticing, especially to international artists. They have to have this thing where it's likely you could make money there. I think the Adelaide Model and the Edinburgh Model are very similar because of their size. But I know, that it's substantially more likely that I'd make money in the Adelaide Model.

Cam: Even including flights and stuff and like that?

Andrew: Oh yeah for sure! So, Australia is a bit behind us in terms of economical stuff. So, they had their economic crash a couple of years ago. But there was a year before that where I was planning on being there for 8 weeks and I made back all of my overheads in the first week. It was amazing. I mean like being given lots of money to do my dream job.

Cam: Yeah. That is amazing. So, do you have to pay for accommodation there like you do in Edinburgh?

Andrew: Yeah. You do and you don't. You can get away with couchsurfing quite a bit. I like couchsurfing, I've done it all over the world. I think if you are going to be on tour, it does you a lot of favours. Because A, it cuts your overheads, B the person you couchsurf with definitely has friends that will fill up some of your shows and C you're not on stage all the time and being on tour can get real lonely. It's quite nice to have someone with a bit of local knowledge who is quite happy to show you around. I've couchsurfed in Adelaide but I have stayed with the same guys now for the last four years. In Perth this year I was put up by the producer, as I was flown in for a show. Festivals like Limerick and Barnstaple obviously find you billets which are free. It's very rare actually that I do pay for accommodation.

Cam: Prague I guess you did?

Andrew: Actually, I did part of my degree in Czech Republic. So, I stayed with friends.

Cam: So, you described the other models. Okay I'm going to call Limerick and Prague's model the European Model. So how would you describe the European Model for you as an artist?

Andrew: I think it's really hard. There's good version of that model and bad versions and I think before I go on any of these tours now, I'm old enough and I've made enough mistakes to know that I need to do a spreadsheet to work out the minimal amount of tickets that I have to sell, and whether that is viable or likely. The Limerick Model.... Or because of the size of Limerick and the amount they charge for tickets and because of what the split is, I know that I can at least break even with that. I'm happy with that. I've struggled a bit more in the Czech Republic in previous years and that is because of the Czech economy. Because the cost of living is so low that actually flights there and because hotels are aimed at tourists (with the

amount of money that they have), it becomes nearly impossible to make money, unless you are selling out.

Cam: Okay that is really cool. It's nice to speak to an artist. I have been speaking to Directors and Producers, but it's great to get your perspective. So, I'm currently doing some research on the Azores Fringe. Do you know much about it?

Andrew: No, I do not.

Cam: So, it's the most remote fringe festival in the world. It runs for a month and the Azores is obviously in the middle on the Atlantic and between Portugal and America. I spoke to him (the Director) and asked him how it worked with the payment and stuff. And he was like "you kind of just turn up and play". I said but what do you mean? And he was like "well if you are in the area..." But to me that was crazy, how can you just be in the area? It's a small island in the middle of nowhere. It's been running for a long time as well.

Andrew: That's mental! I mean for me as an artist that would make zero sense.

Cam: I know. He was basically saying if you are going on holiday here, just bring your stuff and perform.

Andrew: But then it becomes a working holiday. This is what Steve (Gove) has sold Prague to me in the past. "It's kind of like a working holiday" and I was like I don't like working when I'm on holiday. And I don't go to work to rest. They have to be separate. When I'm in Australia now I've got much better at taking regimented days where I don't do work. When I first started, I worried that if I wasn't on the festival site that would be the day that something would happen and I wouldn't be involved in it, and I would miss out on other opportunities and things. So, I've got way better now at going to waterparks and cuddling Kola's.

Cam: Okay. So, what would you describe a good fringe festival to be? The characteristics, the dynamics of the model? What makes a good Fringe for you and for your company?

Andrew: Obviously there needs to be the financial thing, like I need to know that I'm coming home from there with enough money to survive the rest of the year. This is my job. This is my career. But after that the community is really important. I've got a load of little cluster of families that in the successful Fringes, I see at all of them. I have a little Australian family; I see them for the first three months of the year and sometimes they come to Edinburgh. That's about the only redeeming feature of some of the festival venues in Edinburgh Fringe. You know that afterwards you will be surrounded by that community of artists. I think as well its really useful to have a festival that you can feel doing stuff for you. The reason that Adelaide really works they have got an incredible support team. And as a support team it starts six months before the festival, they are in Edinburgh and they are meeting you there, then they are on the end of the phone and sorting out your visa, they will put you in contact with venues, quite often your venues have got a really good support team in as well. And I think as an artist its quite nice to know especially if you're not at the end where you bring you own full production team, it's really nice to have that place. In Adelaide they have a place where artists can go, like an office and you can go work out of it for free every day. I think development as well is really important, I like to know my next steps. Adelaide is really good as they have seminars where they invite of Fringes over to talk about your next steps and where you are going and what you are doing, how you are doing it and who you are doing it with. I think for me that was really good. When I first started doing Prague, it was nice to come out of that Festival and be like right so next August I'm going to Stockholm, then I am going to go to this festival and then I met Bill and Gill and I was like right so now I get this contact back in the U.K for a festival.

Cam: Okay what about stuff like the Fringe Club or awards? That kind of stuff. Is that important to you?

Andrew: So, awards are only important in terms of marketing. Don't get me wrong I fucking love having so many awards after my name in my email signature. But they are only important in terms of 'showing off' and marketing. They don't mean much in the real world. Reviews likewise. I hate them, I really hate reviews. But they are important. The worst thing is being on tour and having to trace through your reviews and not having a good one. That's hard. Especially on the same day you get a good one cause you really over analyse that and it stops you from focusing on the important things. I think another really important thing is a lot of people set up festivals without really working out if there will be an audience for those festivals. I think that was a problem and also, I think people also set up festivals and make them too big for the audiences available. I think that's a real struggle that I've seen in a lot of festivals. I think that was where Prague started getting too big. For me, I started seeing that there were some shows that were doing okay and there were other shows that two or three people were showing up. Because there just wasn't enough people interested in theatre to go to all of the things.

Cam: I found that with Barnstaple as well.

Andrew: Yeah, I would agree as well. I mean I'm very lucky in Barnstaple as I've got quite a loyal group. I have been doing it now for, this was my fourth year (2019) I think. So, I won't be one of the newbies that will struggle. But I think for the safety of their festival it would be good for them to slow down and maybe take stock and know when they have got big enough.

Cam: Yeah, I mean we did okay. But we Volunteered at some of the other artists were having to cancel their shows. It was devastating.

Andrew: Yeah, it's horrible. It's totally horrible. Also, that's a risk of you know business. I cancelled a show in Barnstaple (2019) and I still actually did quite well because all of my other shows smashed it. But I cancelled a show that wasn't in the programme, was at the wrong time and at the wrong venue and it was a cover for another show. So, it was the wrong show. So, I'm not surprised that one failed.



Cam: I'm looking at the Fringe Club. Or Fringe Club(s) sometimes. How important is that? Because for me I try and explain to people it's a place where you can go, where normally you don't get to a chance to speak to the audiences that see your shows in traditional theatre settings. I look at it as a kind of place to network with other artists or producers. I mean how important it is for you when you go to a fringe festival?

Andrew: I think you and I might see Fringe Club differently. I know it's different in Prague because they do let the audiences in. In Adelaide there was a massive uproar this year (2019). They started selling tickets to the Fringe Club for general audiences. For me the Fringe Club, because when you go to some of these remote areas in the world, they don't get a lot high quality entertainment. They get cut off from touring schedules from bands and touring schedules from big theatrical productions. So, the Fringe is a celebrity for the year. And actually, it means I go from being able to walk down any street I want in London and I can.... I think I've been recognised in London maybe four or five times in 7 years. In Adelaide, it happens every couple of weeks. Like without fail. And the Fringe Club used to be the place where I could go, and I knew it would just be other artists and it would be a safe place we could go when it gets to 2 am. I remember a couple of years ago, a friend of mine is a comedian and they had a members night in the Fringe Club and this guy came up to us and it was about 2 or 3 in the morning and he went "so what do you guys do"? We were like "we are comedians". He was like "alright cool, sell your show to me. Elevator pitch. Go". I was like FUCK OFF! It's 2am this is my time to not work. But also, through doing that you do network, but you do it in a much more relaxed calm kind of way. The Fringe Club is stupidly important. Actually, I think 'Fringe World' in Perth have nailed it! They had a problem a couple of years ago where you were allowed to bring in a plus one. They ended up with a lot of trouble and they basically shut that down. You could only bring your plus one if it was a week day. Weekends were reserved for artists. It created a space where the community could go and we could chill out and take stock and relax.

Cam: Oh, that's interesting. Okay tell me your journey to Wandsworth Fringe and how you ended up managing a venue?

Andrew: So, we started with Wandsworth Fringe in their fifth year. We were working with a venue which was an old comedy club. We just done Prague Fringe literally.... We were either just going to Prague Fringe or just come back from Prague Fringe. I can't remember which way round it was. But it was one of those years where like we were talking about, it had got too big. And our show old really really well. But like, we had loads of problems. Obviously, Steve (Gove) employs a wide-range of Volunteer's there and the problem with Volunteer's is it's very hard to vet them for their abilities. And also, they are Volunteer's there is only so much you can ask them to do. So, we had a situation there where at the end of the show one night they asked us to sign our ticket statement and the amount of people in the audience did not match what they were asking us to sign for. So, Charlie my business partner was just like "I'm not signing this. This is wrong". It was quite an intense conflict and they were like, "Well we put some comp tickets in". We were like, "Great. Who were they"? They were like, "Oh we don't know". So, Charlie was like did you just give away tickets to our show? We are trying to run a business and they gave away our money. So, they need to account for it, so there was that situation. When we got to this venue in Wandsworth because it was an old comedy club and they had just gone bankrupt, they just left the space. They basically stripped out anything of any value and Charlie lent on an electrical box that was meant to be insulated and covered and it wasn't. He nearly electrocuted himself. We come from this situation where we had gone into a venue that was dangerous, we were at festivals where people were playing games with our money and we were just like look, we run a better, safer space for artists. So, the following year the same venue in Wandsworth approached us again and they were like, "Yeah we would love to work with you. We want you to run the venue, just because you said you could do it better". And we were like, "Fuck yes"! Then they had a change of management which screwed everything up, we were left without a space really last minute. So, we panicked, and we found this small independent pub down by the river....

Cam: What year was this sorry Andrew?

Andrew: This was 2015. The first year I went to Australia. So, we panicked we found this little venue and they were really sceptical of dealing with us. Mainly because 'fringe' comes with a.... I don't know there is a certain stigma for 'fringe', especially in pub theatres. And

unless you do it really right a lot people have done it really wrong. And those people have done some real damage to the industry as a whole. So, the first day of the build Charlie was asking a screwdriver to put some hooks in to hang some 'blacks' and the manager of the venue was like, "Errrr, I will find you a responsible adult to do that". Charlie was like, "Don't worry Bruv, I've built stages for Glastonbury I'm sure I will do it right". But as soon as the audiences started showing up, and on the first weekend we three or four sell-out shows, and they were panicking as they didn't have enough staff. They never had their bar 'three-deep' at the bar before. And it got to the end of that festival and we were like we have managed to create a space where they got increased bar sales. 'd managed to run a venue that the festival was happy with. I'd managed to pay all of the artists, they all a managed to make profit. But most importantly, I had three staff of my pay-roll and all of them had been paid as well. And that is what was most important, was that everyone got rewarded for their work. We curated a lot that first year with people that we knew, I pulled in a lot of favours. All of the audiences left having seen something that they wanted to see. So, everyone won! Except at that point, we realised that although we had made a bit of money the people the people that had really won was the bar, because they had raked in thousands. Charlie and I had put eight months work in for a couple of hundred pounds. So, then we decided we had to expand. We weren't really sure how to do it and we were just hunting for venues everywhere. I remember spending literally every spare moment I had going to South London. We found one venue and we were told that we couldn't have it because it was on the wrong side of the road. It fell into a different borough, so it wasn't part of Wandsworth and we wouldn't get our funding. Eventually.... I don't know how we found.... I generally don't know how we found 'The Archers' as they are so secluded. But they belong to a Church. Technically, they belong to the council, but the Church is caretaking them. They are somewhat abounded flooding docks, underneath the archers at Putney Bridge. We were like this is perfect. The first year that we were there, we actually lost money. So, we ran that, and we ran the 'Cats Back (Pub)'

Cam: What size are they? What size of those venues?

Andrew: The 'Cats Back' has about 35-40 seats, depending how close you want to sit. 'The Archers' can seat 60 but sell it to 50 and then we can put in overflow seating. Because we have learnt as well that artists are not always easy to work with as 'you' and 'I' are. You just

kind of have to 'get' 'fringe'. You have to accept that it's very pop-up, it's built in a hurry. Not everything will run like you're working 'Theatre Royal', because that has been a theatre every day for 300 years and the theatre that we built was rubble on the ground a week ago. We have had artists before who have got a sold-out show, but their Nan showed up, so we need to get their Nan in. I'm like, "What do you want me to do? Do you want me to refund some of your paying customers"? So, we have learnt now to undersell our venues. It is much easier to put seats in than it is to take seats out.

Cam: Okay. So, walk me through your logistical process of your venues. So, let's say my theatre company want to perform. What is the deal?

Andrew: So, if you wanted to perform with us, we get Edinburgh out of the way and I spend the month that I am up there, and Charlie is up there as well.... So, we do an application form, but we also target people. This year we spent a long time working with Elf Lyons and her agent and just getting a load of 'A-List' names in. Because that actually benefits everyone. If you can put some big names in your programme, it makes people pick up the programme and it means the smaller acts get the exposure of other people. We do that and in September, after we've put our little streams out, we do an online form. It's just an application form. But in that you basically tell us everything. You give us a 240-character pitch for your show that we could put on the internet. You give us a longer version that we could put on websites and stuff. You tell us the logistics about your show. What dates you are available. And it doesn't have to be a final promo image, but it does have to be an image that we could use to promote your show. All of that information gets held securely and encrypted and then on the 31st October, we close applications for 1day. We then make our first round of offers. We then open it up again. The reason why we started doing that was because there is a grant scheme from Wandsworth Council which closes in December. So anyone that jumps on that early enough can actually get themselves up to £2,000 for being involved with us. It's amazing! And actually, for a lot of companies that more than the overheads they can amount. So, then we close them again on the 24th December. We make a more offers. Then you have until the first week of January to send us back a signed contract. Then we ask you for fees and we try and keep our fees as low as possible because like I said we want to run this a business where we make money, but it's also really important to us that artists make money.

So, last year's fees were a £40 registration to the festival, that gets you on their website and on all of their programmes. Then there was £30 to us and we use that money for all sorts of marketing related things. We produce an in-house programme, we do massive venue signage, we done all sorts. We've done chalk paint on road floors leading up to venues before. We did a massive poster campaign outside of Clapham Junction Station a couple of years ago. It's amazing what you can do if you are really good at 'blagging'. So, we tend to take £30 from every artist and then I beg the brewery that I work with to give us a couple of hundred pounds and then I get another sponsor to top it up. We tend to spend it on bus adverts, or we had a billboard one year.

Cam: Oh nice. What is your selection-process for your artists?

Andrew: It is entirely on merit! We have targets.... But I really hate.... I understand why it's important, but we get targets of levels of engagement. So, we need to have LGBTQI plus performers, we need to have BAME performers, we need to have groups with disabilities. We get targeted on that. But primarily, I want to fill my venues with the most talented performers. So, although we are mindful of ticking all these boxes. Our primary process that we curate through is whether or not we think you have talent. Or not even just talent, you need to be able to sell us your product. If you can sell it to us, you can sell it to the general public.

Cam: How many shows do your artists usually do?

Andrew: So, a couple of years ago we got broken into and it did us a lot of damage. Then on top of everything else, 'Enable' who run Wandsworth Fringe were demanding that despite the fact we lost four or five grand on the project, we still paid them back over a thousand pounds in registration fees. The private touring funded arts council was really sucking it to the 'little man'. And then they offered us a bail out where they would give us a grant if we run the festival again, but only if we did another one next year (2019). So, we panicked, and we threw together a festival this year that was almost entirely curated. It was the first time that

we have ever done that and we actually somehow managed to turn it around. This year was 25 artists. The year before that was 80 artists. I think we had 45 the year before that and 24 in our first year....

Cam: How many shows do they do each?

Andrew: They would do between two or three. So, we realised with London a lot of people want to be here for a week. Not enough people in London care. Because it is in Zone 2/ Zone 3. You're not asking people to go to the West End. You're not asking people to go somewhere which is easy to get to if you are coming from like North-East London. So, two shows; if you sell that out, we give you a third show and if you sell that out, we give you a fourth show. The only exceptions we have made to that one in the last couple of years, Elf Lyons got three shows 'off the bat'. Because she is the Edinburgh Fringe Comedy Award Winner and because she was doing solo theatre anyway. So, she got offered three shows. 'Drag Syndrome' got offered three shows as well and they have just done Southbank Centre on Friday and they were always too big for our venue. So, they had three shows 'off the bat' as well. But everyone else get two shows unless they sell them out.

Cam: So, would you say then... You have praised Adelaide a lot and in fact Australian Fringes a lot. So, is the Wadsworth Fringe Festival more like the Edinburgh Model or the Adelaide Model?

Andrew: It's interesting because it's too small to be.... It's modelled on the Australian Model and actually some of our artists took home more than they did in Perth last year from working with us this year. But, a lot of our artists will only take home a couple of hundred pounds. So, I think what we have which is very similar to the Adelaide Model is that we want everyone to do well because we enter a box-office split with everyone. They have to pay a certain percentage to a ticketing provider, so that's very Adelaide. I think the general fact that if they don't make money, we as a venue don't make money is the Australian Model. Whereas the Edinburgh Model charges you up-front and then also takes a percentage afterwards....

Cam: Or they say... Whatever happens you will pay 'X' amount of money. Which you are saying Adelaide don't do?

Andrew: Some venues do in Adelaide; it depends on who you work with. But also, in my experience these are much more attainable figures. Also, if you develop a good working relationship with a venue in Adelaide, they are much more personable about it. They will make you much better deals.

Cam: So, what for you makes a show a 'fringe show'?

Andrew: I think it's got to be boundary breaking, it's got to be something you wouldn't be able.... It's weird because more and more now you are seeing 'fringe' artists doing commercial things. 'America's Got Talent' headhunt at a lot of the American fringe festivals. They also headhunt a lot of the Australian fringe festivals. They were over in Australia last year (2018) actively seeking people, that's how they ended up with 'Tape Face' and 'Gingezilla'. So, it's weird because a lot of things I wouldn't class as 'fringe' five years ago are now mainstream. For me, a 'fringe product' needs to be a good product that was struggling to get seen on the mainstream. I mean you could also have other acts that are struggling to get seen on the mainstream, but essentially for me what 'fringe' is those people that have chosen.... It's weird because what the actual definition of 'fringe' is and what it actually is now are very different things. It's meant to be boundary-breaking and an original performance that you wouldn't be able to get anywhere else. But it's no longer that!

Cam: What is it now then?

Andrew: I don't know... There is a lot of debate going on about whether or not Mickey Flanagan doing 600 seats a night is actually a 'fringe' performance. Whether Jimmy Carr

selling-out the EICC is actually part of The Fringe. I remember a couple of years ago Amanda Palmer from the 'Dresden Dolls' doing a show in Adelaide Fringe and charging nearly 60-100 dollars (Aus) a ticket. And 'us' being like that's a real good way of getting people to spend all their budget that they have set aside for Fringe on one show that doesn't really benefit a 'fringe' artist. I think that's open to debate about what 'fringe' is anymore. I mean once people over-step that mark... Yeah, I think like Bill and Gill had it last year they had that guy from 'Vicar of Dibly' doing his book launch as a 'fringe event'. And is it? Is there anything about that that's actually boundary-breaking that you wouldn't be able to get if you just did that at a Waterstones?

Cam: (laughs) Yes, that's very true. Very true, So, I guess what you are saying then is that a 'fringe show' should be hypothetically something that is unconventional? Something that you wouldn't usually get in a 'normal' theatre? Something that is 'wacky' and wonderful....

Andrew: Something that is a little bit more creative. But is.... Like I'm guilty of this as well a lot of my last couple of shows have been a lot safer than the work that came before it. And that's because I started to get real business savvy. I realised that although I want to push the 'boundaries' as much as I can, there is only so much the audiences can take. It's striking that balance between this is 'new' and this is 'weird'.

Cam: I've got one last question I guess, which is something that I have thought about when I was in Barnstaple. You said it earlier and I agree with you, that as an artist you want to be surrounded in that programme by people who are at the top of their game. People who are professionals. People who you would go and pay to see. Because that makes you feel better. And you know that from a business approach people are more likely to come and see your show. However, with the CAFF Model it doesn't do that. It's open-access. And that's what The Fringe was formed from. It was a group of amateur actors who rebelled against the festival. So, is our opinion then that we are not 'fringe' artists? Because we actually want it to be curated a little bit.



Andrew: That's a really good question.

Cam: Because in Barnstaple I was going through this in my head. "Hang on I want to be surrounded by the best artists, but then again no it shouldn't be like that because this is not what 'fringe' is. There is no right, or wrong answer is there?"

Andrew: Do you know what I think there's a thing where I am a 'fringe' artist some of the year, but I'm a professional comedian some of the year... I'm a professional MC some of the year. So, I think there's nothing wrong with saying in this capacity I'm a 'fringe' artist but in this capacity I did do three years of drama school, I do want to be treated with respect and I do want to be surrounded by people that are creating that level of professional work. Because a 'fringe' can be.... Actually, no I was about to sound like a real dictator there.

Cam: No go on say it...

Andrew: I was about to say that although a fringe can be curated. It needs to be curated with things that people want to see. But even with open-access. People who apply for these things need to think am I producing a piece of art that people want to see. Because if they don't do that then those people actually get in the way of my interests. Because people will start associating 'fringe' with that weird stuff that they don't want to see.

Cam: I guess an audience member that went to see something in the CAFF Model that was absolutely rubbish, then they could be less likely to go and see your show. Which I guess, you are less likely to get in a curated model.

Andrew: What is really interesting about the Australian Model is that it's an open-access festival, but every venue curates. Which means what you end up with is an open-access festival but if you go to some of the bigger venues you are guaranteeing a level of quality.

Cam: Which I guess is what you get at Edinburgh as well with 'The Pleasance'?

Andrew: Yeah literally and in Wandsworth as well. Our venue is curated, but the festival is open-access. You can be involved in the festival. But if you come to our venue, I am expecting you to be a certain level of quality.

**Interview with Bill & Gill**  
**(Founders of Fringe Theatre Fest)**

Wednesday 17th July 2019

Cam: So how did you guys meet? Also, tell me more about your theatre company (Multi-Story).

Bill: Well, we were already part of a different company. It was a mid-scale touring company in the South West (England). This administrator sent us out to Fringes in Canada. Partly because towards the end of the line for that company it was under a lot of pressure from the funding bodies and we were having a pretty horrible time finding the funding. We already lost some funding by then. So, she sent us out to Canada as a sought of treat really. We said no we can't possibly, it's not within our 'Arts Council' rebate. We can't use that money to take something out there. But she said it will pay for itself. We frankly didn't believe her. But we allowed ourselves to be pushed into going out there with a two-person show that we already made. We just had such an interesting time out there, that we then agreed to go out the next year with another two-person show. At that point, we said well if it was just the two of us, we could actually make it work as a company. We could then be doing what we wanted to do, rather than jumping through hoops for funding bodies the whole time. So, that led to us setting up as a company. It was because of experience specifically in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Edmonton in 1998/1999 that we set up our company in the year 2000.

Cam: Interesting. How many Fringes have you done to date?

Gill: Well there is the three in Canada....

Bill: Which we did for five years.

Gill: We have done our own Fringe that we set up. We actually performed as well, but don't now. We have played at Prague Fringe. Reading we have done about three times. Stroud Fringe, Plymouth Fringe and Limerick.

Bill: Oh, and Orlando.

Cam: So, you just said that you used to perform at your own Fringe in Barnstaple. What were the reasons for stopping that?

Gill: I think administrating the Fringe and directing the Fringe is a full-time job. When the Fringe got to a size where it needed us to present all the time, it was impossible for us to find a time out. Although, a couple of years ago when we first started working outside in Barnstaple. We felt we ought to do something, so we knew what it felt like and how it worked. So, we just devised a 20 minute 'thing' that we played outside on the street. So, we got a sense of what we were asking people to do. Also, realistically it's not really possible and it's to fair to ask other people to cover for us.

Cam: How did 'Fringe Theatre Fest' start? What was the inspiration?

Bill: What we were experiencing in Canada.... We just loved the model. Although, they were in big cities. We could see they were important things about how they worked, that could benefit Barnstaple. Even in the second year we got a small grant from the tourist bureau that existed then in North Devon to help us spend an extra fortnight in Winnipeg. This was to do some proper research and interviews asking how they set up and also what different stakeholders felt about it. We extended that to Saskatoon particularly, as that as a smaller Fringe and nearer to what we might be able to achieve. We did a little bit of Edmonton as well.

Gill: We did a lot of interviews with people who were at the beginnings of Winnipeg Fringe and how it was set up. We did the same in Saskatoon with the business community there. So, we brought that back and presented it to the tourist board....

Bill: That was in 1999. Also, in the first two or three years we had just set up our own company. So, until that was secure, we couldn't really contemplate doing anything with the Fringe. So, there was then quite a time lag before the first Fringe which was in 2006.

Gill: I think what happened was we went back to Canada three years. Then we spent a year in South America in Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay. That was two tours and they were both 6-8 weeks. It got to 2007 and kind of went it's now or never, because if we don't set-up now, we might miss the boat. So, we just went ahead with it and pushed it through. We had a little bit of support from the local theatre here. They helped us with the technical and box-office side.

Bill: It was very tiny. But also, it was the theatre with a slightly different hat on. Because at that time there was a festival in North Devon, and it was fairly well-established. To be honest, the festival was not much more than an 'umbrella profile' to lots of stuff that was already happening. But that happened throughout the month of June and as far as local support was concerned it was to try and extend the tourist scene into June, rather than just July or August. That's why businesses were supporting it. It already had a Fringe, but that Fringe was entirely music. So 'Barnstaple Fringe' was entirely music. That's why we are called 'Fringe Theatre Fest'.

Cam: So, are you both from Barnstaple originally?

Gill: No, not at all. I came down here 40 years ago. After I left college, I came down here as a drama teacher.

Bill: I came down here about 30 years ago to take over as Artistic Director of the other company that I was talking about. Which was already an established company. So, the first Fringe in 2007 was just in one location. It was in a warehouse on an industrial estate that the local college had taken over at that time to house some of the performing arts work. Mostly music. But it was essentially just a big industrial unit. We were in partnership with the college and theatres. Between them both they kitted out a stage and a pretty comprehensive lighting rig. We also had another room out-front, where in-between shows there was music entertainment. We had eight companies. Over the three-days they did two shows. So, it was tiny really. But the idea was to road test it and to find out for ourselves what was needed. But also, to get a core group of people who were experiencing what.... It sounds silly really because although it was only 16 shows and the music, it was more kind of compact than any other element of the festival. It was the fact that there was a lot happening that we really loved about the festival. We did a lot at Glastonbury (with Orchard Theatre) and we felt that the same thing was happening in Canada that was at Glastonbury. That you enter an alternative reality and that every now and then you kind of come up for air. But in a positive way in this short-term bubble. Actually, the building that we used was great for that as you went through this rather unpromising door. It was like Aladdin's cave, so people did get that feeling going into this alternative reality for three days. Seeing stuff that they might not of otherwise have seen.

Gill: What was clear just from that year, was that we were attractive people in out of curiosity. It wasn't what it was all about. But it was significant enough to feel the following year that we could go to three venues. I think we had 18 shows that year. We had a lot of people learning from scratch on how to advertise it in different ways. We are still learning, as you know the needs for adverting changed with the introduction of digital media. So, the learning curve has been huge for us. But gradually, we brought really interesting people on board with us. It became clear that we needed somebody to really help oversee the technical side of things. We also had somebody who had lots of experience with volunteer's who came on board. So, we began to create a cohort of around 14 people that understood what it was

about and could offer help in-kind. Very soon it became clear that it had to be people who really wanted to make this thing happen.

Bill: So, there was a guy who at that time who ran 'The Golden Tap' and I think he just saw in the paper that we were looking to expand. So, he offered it (venue). He was a very willing partner for three years. Slowly, the theatre became more and more involved in it. To begin with, it was proving technicians and equipment. But at that point the technicians were all paid. That was important to us as a founding principle and it is something that if we found the way to do it finically, it would be the first thing that we would do. Because the quality of technical backup in Canada, is completely of the scale in terms of what happens in this country. At Brighton Fringe, although we were playing in an established venue and paying a fair amount of money for it and extra for the technician... The quality of what was on offer was bollocks. We are just used to that in this country. Prague is different. In Prague you do pay quite a lot of the venue and the 'tech', but it's good! They are proper equipped theatres as you know with technicians who know what they are doing. Whereas, we feel that we have compromised now as we've grown. Because we simply we don't have access to that level of expertise. We used to....

Gill: The college used to have a course for this. But it's something we want to address over the next few years. We are very conscious of that. If we didn't have the two people that came over from Ireland this year then I think we would had really struggled. So, it's something we have to address. I don't know how we are going to address it. But we have to try and do something. We are meeting some theatres on Friday, so maybe we can mention it then...

Bill: Yeah, we want their technical 'know-how' more than their buildings. So, after about five years the theatres that were already imbedded in it, then came completely on board as we lost the 'Golden Lion Tap'. It crashed in March.

Gill: We had already programmed everything. So, we went to the theatres and said we don't quite know what to do. Then they converted the bar upstairs into a small 60-seat theatre.

Bill: As well as using the main auditorium downstairs.

Gill: It worked so well, and the theatre was pleased with it that they said we will keep this. In fact, we then added a third venue in the theatre which was a little function room that could seat about 20 people. For little tiny shows that would run two or three times a day.

Bill: For a while, the theatre became the hub. They turned downstairs, which was just an empty space usually into a café area. That became a nicely/ grungy well-populated hub for those four days. It then reverted back to what it was for the rest of the year.

Gill: And they provided the box-office...

Bill: Allied to that importantly, what that meant was that we didn't exist as an official body at all. So, things like insurance and PRS and all that kind of stuff was all done through the theatre. In the name of the theatre. That happened until three years ago. Now the good thing about that was that we spent a quarter of the time that we now spend running it. We basically did the programming and the P.R. The downside was that they could only go as big as their organisation could manage. So, what happened a few years ago was the theatre went bust. We had already parted company, because they got a new Director in who didn't know at all what he was doing. We could see it was a dangerous place to be. So, we were going to be compromised. Either he was going to try and 'own' 'Fringe Theatre Fest' or as happened the place (theatre) was going to fail. And it did fail....

Gill: In that time when it suddenly failed, we had a meeting with a very good friend of ours said set up as an unincorporated association. You need a committee, but you don't need all the extra things that a charity would have to have. You can apply for various sought of funding. In fact, there is was particular set of funding that had just come online that was a



one-off.... We thought maybe we would go dark for a year and regroup. We got a small committee together that all wanted it to carry on. Or the option was to go large. We weighed both options up and we thought let's go large.

Bill: So, we doubled (size).

Gill: Just because Barnstaple needed some theatre. The theatre went dark and was a huge outcry about that. And if we went dark as well, I think the wrong signals would had been sent out. We applied for this funding to help us to have a bigger presence around the town. The flags, the banners all those marketing aids. We rebranded ourselves with the orange logo, to make ourselves as visible as we could. And sent out as many messages as we could to get things out onto the street. We worked very hard to make sure that there would be a huge visible presence on the street. We were pretty successful that year and all of sudden it took off and went into another dimension. In so much, everybody knew about the Fringe. You couldn't miss it. We had the tent and the signage up.... People who hadn't realised that it had been there for 10 years suddenly knew about it. Now, the street element we are still trying to keep going. It was a bit down this year. But it was probably the best thing we could had ever done. However, we hadn't realised was the added administrator kind of things. So, taking on public liability, PRS and licensing issues. It is huge! We are still learning that and how much we need to do or not do. One of the biggest things that happened is that the people who have come on board as committee members are really (for the most part) starting to really flex their muscles too and see how much they really want to help. One of our committee members who was our first chair, took over the reform of our website to make life easier.

Bill: It's not the stuff that you can see on the website.

Cam: I actually thought as an artist your website was very easy to access. It was really great that I could get everything I needed from the one website. It was very easy.

Bill: There is also lots of stuff that you can't access that it does. It gives us financial reports. It has a ticketing system. Not one that we've brought in. He has created one. So, in terms of reporting he can add functionality there the whole time. What he has done this year was set it up so that all volunteers shifts can be accessed. Volunteers can access it and choose their own shift. It's not finished. He will continue to use it as a tool that makes administration easier. That's his background.

Cam: You 'CAFF Model' is very unique in the U.K. Other than 'Stroud Theatre Festival' I can't think of another fringe festival that uses it.

Gill: Outside of Canada?

Cam: Well, in America yes. But in the U.K I can't think of another fringe festival that uses it. Which, I think is great! I've performed in America, so I'm used to the 'CAFF Model'. So, when you first decided that you wanted to make a Fringe.... Was that the decision right at the start? "We want to make a 'CAFF Model'".

Gill: Yeah! Absolutely. Right from the word go. It was because of what we said when we first went to Canada. And it was because how those communities owned those Fringes. They weren't exclusive anywhere. They were owned by the whole community. So, that was a huge influence for us.

Bill: It was a political decision as much as an artistic one. The 'CAFF Model' and Canada together, actually show a model how we as people can/could work together. That the British system doesn't. The British fringe model reflects Britain. Its class written and its money driven. You don't really become aware of that until you step-outside of Britain and see that there is a world elsewhere. You see that there are actually other ways to model. When we were in Winnipeg over the extra fortnight that we talked about, they then had one of their other festivals. Because as you know, every fortnight there is the folk festival and their

cultural festival after. So, all around Winnipeg were these different people from the different sub-cultures. It's something that is easier to happen at a younger country. The reason that we set-up in this way is to set-up something that is also a challenge to how arts are usually set up in this country. The way that it reflects the class divisions in this country. But, also to give a vision of a better world. We are making the explicit to you. But we probably wouldn't make it explicit to probably most of our stakeholders. Because the moment we make it explicit it becomes 'worthy'. It has to be lived! In a way that we lived it and experienced it when we went over there. People have to discover things for themselves. Then they are powerful!

Cam: I agree. You can't read about fringe festivals. You have to go and be in one.

Bill: I think also you can't tell people what they should get out of a 'fringe' experience, it is different for everyone. And that actually is part of the crucial joy of it. That they belong to everyone. Wherever they are coming from. Even if they are coming from to one show you, go out and don't make any other contact with the Fringe.

Gill: Or even if its someone on the street and they happen to see somebody juggling with some rings as they walk past. That is their contribution to 'fringe' and being part of it.

Cam: So, you would say then that 'Fringe Theatre Fest' is for everyone. It's not artist centric or community centric. It's for everyone?

Gill: That's our aim. Whether we achieve that. But it's what we are aiming for.

Cam: Have you had any contact with 'CAFF' directly?

Bill: No. They are the people that we would most like to contact I suppose. I mean there is 'World Fringe (WFN)'. But they cover so many different varieties of what fringe means, so in some ways it doesn't mean anything.

Cam: Whereas 'CAFF' has trademarked 'fringe' in Canada.

Bill: Yeah. I love that! It does make things clearer. It makes the contract between the Fringe and the audience quite clear as well.

Gill: It does institutionalise as well by doing that. But because it gives 100% back to the artists, it puts them at the heart of it. That is important, particularly nowadays where there is very little small-scale theatre. When I came down here 40 years ago you could see a piece of small-scale theatre twice a week. That isn't the case now. So, for people trying to make a new piece of work and put it in front of an audience to see how it plays... Where do you go now? So 'fringe' is hugely important for that side of things too. But also, for audiences that idea of dipping into something because it's there on your doorstep is hugely important. It's okay for people who can afford to nip up to London, Exeter or Plymouth to see something. But very few people now have the kind of ready money on them.

Cam: I have got two more questions. My first one is, a lot of 'CAFF Models' have awards at the end. But your Fringe doesn't....

Bill: We get very uncomfortable. Because.... I mean again hypocrisy here because we were on the group of hidden people who were asked their opinion. To therefore, influence the decision. But, if a Fringe is giving out an award, then one way or another it's saying, "this is a proper 'fringe' show". The moment we start saying that to us you completely undermine what 'fringe' is about.

Gill: The 'CAFF Model' as you know is about who gets pull out of the hat and then the audience make their mind up themselves. So, it's important for us that it's the way it happens. Not somebody else saying that, "this is the best 'fringe' show". Because there is a danger there that you get everybody trying to model themselves one sort of piece of theatre in order to get an award.

Bill: There also has to be the question, what gives the person/people the right to make those judgements?

Gill: Which is why right from the beginning we have fought with the theatre about whether or not we should draw the names out of a hat. It was the one thing that came up every year when we had our relationship with the theatre. This thing called 'quality control'. We would say no! We are giving the power to the audience to make that decision. It's up to them about what they like and what they don't like. As soon as we start to make those decisions then we should be paying people, shouldn't we? Because we are saying that's quality. You want that one... Therefore, you pay people.

Cam: To finish things of, can I ask for your definition of 'fringe'.

Gill: What I can tell you is one of the moments I had most joy from was a few years ago. It was late in the evening. There was a group of people in the foyer at the 'Queens Theatre'. It consisted of artists, audience members and some volunteers. They were sat in this massive circle about 30 or 40 strong. I remember turning to Bill and saying, "My work is done". It just thrilled me that they were sitting there talking about theatre.

## **Interview with Heather Croall**

**(Director & CEO of Adelaide Fringe)**

Monday 30th September 2019

Cam: So, you started working at Adelaide Fringe a few years ago? Is that right?

Heather: As the Director, yes. As the Director I've been here for four Fringes. But I did work at the Adelaide Fringe like 30 years ago. I ran events. I also managed a venue. So, I've been involved in the Adelaide Fringe for a long time. But as the Director I've been here for four years.

Cam: What was your first experience of 'fringe'? Was it at Adelaide?

Heather: Yeah. So, my first experience of 'fringe' was in Adelaide. It's an open-access festival. Everybody is welcome to register whatever they want, and I registered an event actually ran for about 10 years. It was called Shoot the Fringe. It was a 'super 8' film festival. We used to give out rolls of 'super 8' to people and they used to shoot at the Fringe. They would then give us back the film, we would then develop it and project it on the walls at the final weekend on the Fringe. I did that for many years. I was also working at the Fringe in many different ways. I managed a venue called 'Star Club'. That was a big venue in 1992. It had people like Stomp and Lily Savage in it. It was a great venue. The Fringe started out in Adelaide as truly open-access and we have remained in that spirit. Even though next year we are sixty years old. We haven't changed our model. We've stayed true to that open-access model. So, my first experience was taking advantage of that model. So, what I'm here to do as Director is to make sure that the open-access model is working and that we set up the best opportunities for artists and venues to have a successful Fringe season. Lots of bums on seats and selling lots of tickets. Our whole focus is on how to make peoples Fringe season as successful as possible and meeting the needs of all of the stakeholders.

Cam: That's interesting. So, I read that you personally set-up a partnership with Edinburgh. Is that right?

Heather: I mean Adelaide Fringe has had a relationship with Edinburgh for many years. Being the director of the Fringe means you are just the guardian of it for now. You will move on and then someone else will take it. So, you hope you will leave it in a better state than you arrived. You hope that you improve things as you are here. So, a number of directors before me have had relationships with Edinburgh Fringe. I believe that the first intention to have a memorandum of understanding between Edinburgh and Adelaide was about 15 years ago. You know discussions began. We were able to form and formalise a memorandum of understanding in 2016 or 2017. It basically talks about how we want to share knowledge with each other, to improve the outcomes for artists. For example, Edinburgh and Adelaide are the two biggest Fringes in the world. Edinburgh is the biggest and the oldest and we are the second biggest and oldest. One of the things that we both do that no one else really does is have huge industry derivate numbers. So, massive marketplace activity is going on behind the scenes. So, in the open-access model of Adelaide Fringes; artists register, venues register. We help them find each other and they put on their shows. Then we devote huge amount of energy to providing a brilliant ticketing service. A blanket marketing campaign across the city, that hopefully insures huge ticket growth. That's where we really care about growth. It's in our ticket sales. We don't have any targets at all on programme size or anything like that. Our growth targets are purely selling more tickets, so artists earn more money. But the one thing that Edinburgh and Adelaide have behind the scenes we have these industry marketplaces....

Cam: That's Honeypot?

Heather: Well Honeypot is one element of the marketplace. But yeah. So, the marketplace helps artists build connections with future bookings. Millions of dollars of deals are signed in the marketplace in Adelaide and Edinburgh. So, in our 'MoU' that is one of things that we are very committed to sharing. We know that's a way that we can help artists not just during the month of the Fringe. But actually, help them go on tour and go around the world. So, we

have hundreds of industry delegates descending into Adelaide and in Edinburgh and their industry there. But that activity is not really a 'public-facing' activity. It's more behind the scenes. You don't know who you are sitting next to in the audience in Edinburgh or Adelaide. You might be sitting next to the programmer of a festival in Germany or a big theatre in Taiwan. You just don't know who you are sitting next to. So, they actually might be at that show to decide if they are going to book it for the future. So, Edinburgh and Adelaide I guess have got that in common. That's why it makes sense to have a 'MoU' in a formal way as we are two festivals on the calendar that are really launch pads for artists to find ways to build a sustainable living through future bookings, tours and things like that. It's interesting the marketplace in our festivals have grown so much now they include people who are programming for cruise ships or spotting for America's Got Talent. So, it's not just the obvious things. It's not just other festival directors that are there. It's across the board.

Cam: So, I have always believed that the Adelaide and Edinburgh model are the same. Even up until 6 months ago I would have argued there is the 'Edinburgh Model'. The Canadian Model'. And the 'European Model', which is very different to everything else...

Heather: You think that the Edinburgh and Adelaide model are different?

Cam: A little bit. From what you have said and also a previous conversation I had with an artist that has performed at the Adelaide Fringe.

Heather: What were the differences that they said?

Cam: They said that it's more 'artist friendly'.

Heather: In Adelaide?



Cam: Yeah. He said that you are looked after from the moment you apply and that it's very different from an Edinburgh experience.

Heather: That's interesting. It's something that you have to hear from artists, not from me. Our models are very similar. But the services that we provide might be a little bit different. The matchmaking services in 'Honeypot' I think is unique. I think that our artist services are also... We have a team that delivers above and beyond and wants to make sure that as soon as an artist begins a registration on our system, that they are really well looked after right to from when they are here. One thing that's different is we have a thing called 'The Fringe Club'. The Adelaide Fringe runs the club and it's for the artists, as well as everyone else participating. So, venues, sponsors and so on. Everyone who is participating in the Fringe. So, that is something that we probably have that's different because in in Edinburgh the 'artist bars' are connected to the venues. The Assembly. Underbelly and things like that. Whereas in Adelaide, we have this one club and it's where everybody meets. They use it as a business centre during the day and then they use it as their place to gather at night. It's also where 'The Honeypot' happens. We also have industry talk sessions. So, in a way it a little bit like what they do at 'Fringe Central' in Edinburgh. Except that its open every night till three in the morning. So, it's where people gather at night as well as day.

Cam: There was a bit of controversy recently wasn't there? About stakeholders were going in. I was told that there was a big discussion going on about how audience members shouldn't be allowed in (to the Fringe Club). But, to me as an artist I've always been surrounded by audience members at Fringe Clubs because it's a good place to sell tickets.

Heather: Yes. It's interesting. I think people have different angles on it. We are 60 years old next year, so we have been reading through all our fringe guides of the old days. Because I worked at the Fringe in the 90's I also remember the club from those days. So, in the 80's and 90's the adverts in the public fringe guides say that the Fringe Club is open to everyone and it costs \$5 or \$10 (Aus) to get in. Fast forward to now, people have this idea that the Fringe

Club has always been only for artists. But in fact, it has never been only for artists! It's been a place for artists to come and hang out. But, it's never exclusively for artists. I mean some artists I know have talked to our sponsors in the Fringe Club and actually managed to get them to sponsor them...

Cam: It just seemed crazy to me that an artist wouldn't want potential stakeholders to interact with at night-time. It just seemed crazy, because you would do....

Heather: Also, I think 'The Fringe Club' (Adelaide) was born in the late 70's. So, it's been a great tradition we have managed to hold on to. But you know it's been in so many places as well. It has been in little pop-up buildings, established nightclubs, attics, parklands. It's been indoors. It's been outdoors. I mean last year the council said we couldn't have it in the park anymore till three o'clock in the morning. The residents don't want it. But okay... The 'Fringe Club' evolves every few years into something else. So, we moved on to another lovely venue that has an indoor and an outdoor space. They are very 'fringe-friendly' people, who were willing to make it... For someone to shut their doors for Fringe access only.... Only people with passes to the club could come in. It means that their regulars aren't coming in. So, they were very 'fringe-friendly' and said that they would do that. There is a pass system in the 'Fringe Club' and that's been around since probably the last 90's or 2000's. But, before that the general public used to pay to get in. So, the 'Fringe Club' as never been for only artists.

Cam: So, what has changed for you from the 90's to now? It's probably got bigger right?

Heather: Yeah. In the 90's we were selling probably around 80,000 tickets a year. This year (2019) we sold 800,000 tickets.

Cam: Wow!

Heather: As I said, our ticket growth is the focus of our life. People always say do you want more shows? We don't mind, it's open access. We don't dictate how many shows, because we wait and see who registers. You register by your own choice, its not compulsory. You don't have to register (laughs)... You don't have to do a 'fringe show'.

Cam: Right (laughs).

Heather: So, in the 70's, 80's or 90's if you wanted to register you actually filled in a paper form and you dropped it off at the office, or you posted it. If you wanted to buy tickets, you filled in a form on a back of the programme and you posted a cheque. Or you went to a box-office and bought the ticket there and then, which was at the office actually. Nowadays, we have box-offices in as many places as we can across town. In the late 90's, Adelaide Fringe had its first website. It had a very early version of an application form for shows. They then began online ticketing some years after that. When I arrived in late 2015, we embarked on the biggest digital transformation of Adelaide Fringe ever. We'd been told that the ticketing platform was really the biggest risk, as it was falling apart. It was crashing and artists were very cross about it. Everyone was frustrated, it had lived its life. It had been around for about 15 years. It was quite a long time for a digital platform. So, we had to embark on... No just a little plaster. But brain surgery on our organisation. We built a brand-new artist and venue registration platform. The tools we have on there now and totally driven by listening to the artists and venues. We asked what they wanted on the platform and how they wanted to find each other. Now they can find each other on the platform so they are not reliant on knowing about a venue. Hundreds and hundreds of venues fill in their details and talk about their capacity and what sort of shows would suit their venue. Then an artist can come in a register and say, "I've got a cabaret show that would suit a 70-seater venue. I need a stage and I need this tech..." Then using filters and search functions our venue will finder will show them only the venues that match what they are looking for. So, we've built a much better platform that services our artists and venues. It's quite sophisticated about what it can do. We have also put a digital department 'in-house', who constantly improve the platform every day of the week. We listen to what functions everyone wants and prioritise building them. We can't

build everything all at once. But we have a big long list. So, we have a major digital team now. We also in the same moment, went through a whole new much more sophisticated build on our 'front-end' of our website. So, amazing search functions that we have built for audiences that find the programme overwhelming. We just say why don't you put in what you are looking for. Day. Time. Genre. Area. Then instead of seeing 15,00 shows they only see the 10 or 5 shows that suit what they are looking for. That has directly been responsible for the ticket sales growth. So, when I took over the Fringe it was selling about 500,000 tickets. Four years later, we sold 820,000. I mean I set a target of a million tickets a year. It was sought of ambitious and a bit of a stretched target. Everyone didn't think we would make it. But we are not far away from and we will make it in the next year or two. So, finding ways to help audiences.... As soon as an audience member is looking for a show and they can't find what they are looking for... They go oh stuff it, we will go and have dinner instead. So, we have built our whole front-end of our website to make sure that they find the show and buy the ticket, before they even realise. It's so easy! That's our focus and digital user journeys is something we spend a lot of time on. Perth Fringe is even using our artist and venue registration platform now as well. They are loving all the features we build. But the artists just love it, they can't believe how good it is. So again, that's in tune with what you were saying before artists feeling looked after. Yeah, face-to-face we try and look after them. But, we also try and look after them in the services that we offer online. We also plugged in with 'Red 61' (ticketing system). The digital transformation was three layers... So, those three elements a huge focus of my time. Another thing that has been a big focus of mine has been the growth of 'The Honeypot'. When I arrived, it had been a similar size for about 10 years or so.... I'd come from building marketplaces in film festivals. That was my real specialty that I had worked on. So, my aim was to quadruple at least, the size of 'The Honeypot'. So, we moved from having about 50 industry delegates to this year (2019), where we had 270. Next year we are really hoping to get about 300 and beyond. We have also been tracking the outcomes that happen there... The year before I came we had about \$70,000 (aus) of deals and this year (2019) we had about \$4,00000 (aus) of deals. So, we are just trying to make sure that we do it. We don't just talk about it. We do actually measure it as well. Because, if you don't measure it.... How are you going to know if it's happening and how are you going to make it better? That's one area, but also the philanthropic area has been a big focus as well. We've long had a charity status at Fringe, but we haven't really made the most of it or promoted it. So, in the last few years we have really promoted that and we have been accepting donations within our donor circle. We then give that money out to artists

(Australian) in the form of grants via application. Small grants to help them put their 'fringe shows' on. We also use the money to buy tickets for disadvantaged communities, who otherwise might not be able to afford to come to Fringe. So, that's really great. We work with charities to bring in aboriginal kids or other kids at risk, single mums and all sorts of different groups. That's been really successful as well. So, it's a good incentive for people to give knowing that it's helping people come and see 'fringe shows', that probably might not otherwise come along. I mean the other thing we have done in the last few years is we have really worked hard to reduce the charges that come out of the ticket for the artists. Anyone can register a show. Some people sell a lot of tickets. Some people don't sell any. They only earn money if they sell tickets. But there is also 'clips' (charges) that come out of the tickets. So, one of the things that I have tried to reduce when I came was the inside charges that were around about 10% before. Now the inside charges are 0% under \$35 (aus) and 4% above \$35 (aus). So, the bigger shows are helping subsidise the smaller shows. We actually couldn't afford to do that, as our running costs and running the ticketing system with staff, box-offices, website and all the details that it takes to do that is an expensive exercise. So, we had to earn money of the ticket 'clips' to pay for that. But we went to the government and said would you consider off-setting this money because it reduces the pressure on the artists. So, that was a really great thing... We had to go to the treasury and get that money. I mean, our funding is about... Well, it depends if you bring in the box-office or not. Our box-office is about 18 million (aus dollars) and most of that goes out to the artists and the venues. We keep a booking fee and we keep that inside charge of 0% or 4% over \$35 (aus). So, that means that we are injecting 17 million dollars into the arts community, which is direct from audiences pockets into the artists and venues pocket. Of course, Edinburgh Fringe is way more than that... I'm not even sure what theirs is. So, we try to minimise how much we take, so people have the most fruitful season that they can possible have. But then in terms of our money, if you remove the box-office money that we give to artists because we are just talking about how much it costs to run and all that. So, about 18% of our money comes from the government. So, we have to raise 82% every year. It's a big mountain that we have to climb. We do that with sponsorship, advertising and booking fees that I talked about. But you know, we are not-for-profit. So, we are not trying to make a profit out of that. It's like we start with nothing and we end with nothing. Then we start with nothing and then we end with nothing... So, people can be rest assured that all those booking fees we make are not giving us a profit. They are running the ticketing system and the services. If they can be cheaper then we will reduce our fees too. That's my intention.

Cam: You have given me such a headache. Because you have really put a 'spanner-in-the-works'. Before this interview, I maybe came in with too many preconceived ideas about your model. But now, I guess... I always ask this question as it's quite important, but lots of fringe directors would say, well I will tell you what they say. The question I ask, is who is your model for? They always say, "For everyone". But I would argue that it's impossible to do it for everyone. I mean, you can't make a Fringe which benefits, artists, an audience and a location. It would be very subjective to say that. But I guess I'm leaning towards the idea that your model is for artists at the moment? Would you agree?

Heather: We try to make sure that we put the 'artist lens' on everything we do. So, what can we do to get the artists as fulfilled as possible by the end of their Fringe season. Whether it is in box-office or if it's in meetings in 'The Honey Pot' and the marketplace. We just try and make sure we put the 'artist lens' on. It's interesting we draw your stakeholders up as wheel or however you want to draw them. Your stakeholders are artists, venues, audiences, sponsors, councils and your venues. There are so many people to serve (laughs). I mean, I don't know it's interesting with Fringe... See, we always want to try and make sure it's affordable for the audience. But, at the same time we don't want artists to price themselves so cheap that they are not going to make any money....

Cam: The relationship is really interesting isn't it because for an artist to have a positive experience you need the audience to be satisfied as well.

Heather: And also, we sell 800,000 tickets. We also have an age demographic that goes from 2 to 92. Not many festivals have that. Most festivals are all 80 years old, if it's opera. But music festivals might be more... It's not even just music festivals. There are about 300 fringe festivals in the world now. Most of them are only about 10 years old. If you go to those ones that are 10 years old, their audiences are 25-30 years old. Whereas, because we are 60 (years old) we have had an audience that has accumulated since 1960. But also, they don't seem to leave. They don't seem to think that they are too old for Fringe. They all seem to stay. Then

they bring their grandchildren. Even the artists have learnt that as they get older that they have kids... They are like I can make a 'fringe show' for kids. So, because the ticket price has remained affordable. I mean obviously it has gone over the years. If you look at the old Fringe programme guides it was like \$5 a ticket. Then it's \$10. Then \$20. Then \$40. But our average ticket price now is like \$35, I think. That's why we set that bar as well of lowering the inside fees and so on. Anyway, so the cumulative nature of our audience is amazing as the people who have grown up with the Fringe here... They might be 80. The first fringe might have been when they were 20 and they are still coming! Something else that is kind of unique about Adelaide Fringe is that around about 80% of our audience is from Adelaide. So, we are fighting hard to increase our tourism numbers as we know that the potential if more tourists would come is just huge. Also, our programme is around about 40% from South Australia. Then about 30% interstate and 30% overseas. So a big big percentage of South Australian and Australian. We have got huge potential to grow our audiences in terms of our tourist numbers. Adelaide only has about a million population. If you came here pretty any other time of the year.. It's pretty quiet town. But when you come here you will see that there are people everywhere. It's like walking through Glastonbury in the city. It's like, what is going on! The whole of Adelaide virtually comes out. It's really amazing.

Cam: I guess it's a great business opportunity for the local community. All those artists coming. The bars and restaurants will be busier....

Heather: Although, some are cross because their particular area is not... Because the hubs do sort of congregate around... You will see when you get here. There are some areas which are overflowing and some areas that aren't. I'm trying hard to stimulate some new areas. So that traders in those areas can benefit as well.

Cam: Are the areas walking distance from each other?

Heather: Yes. Well, there are 500 venues so some of them are out in the suburbs and some of them on their own. But what happens is, there are these two very big outdoor areas that are in

the parks. Like 10 or 12 big tents in each one. In fact, we were the first really to have the outdoor. To put the tents under the trees and things like that. That was long before George Square (Edinburgh). So, I think because of our weather... Adelaide Fringe pioneered that sort of outdoor. How many venues will you use?

Cam: Including the Fringe Club, we have got 7 in total.

Heather: Is it open access?

Cam: We call it an open-access juried festival. It's kind of like the 'Prague Model', I guess. Anyone can apply. I mean Colchester a very white working/ middle classed area. I would eventually like to have a completely open-access festival. But to encourage audiences and that whole kind of thing about 'quality control' and how stakeholders might.... It's a hard one.

Heather: Oh yeah! I mean it's different for us. Ours grew over many decades. I do think it's a very different environment now for people starting Fringes in the last 10 years or so. Fringes like Adelaide and Edinburgh and not many others really... Because not many others are that old. Even like in the 80's there was probably only like 10 or 15 fringe festivals. But those ones that did start out in the 60's and 70's were in an environment that was extremely experimental for artists. Audiences were taking risks and things like that. So, I think it's a different world now. We were already 40 or 50 years old by the time people were coming up with the idea of 'quality control'. We were just like, "We're Fringe. Everything goes". Adelaide people are so willing to take a risk because they have had the Fringe for so long. You know what I mean? They are like it's only an hour....

Cam: Exactly that. So, I guess what we are going to try and do over time is introduce that (open-access model) more and more. We have made this model where it's near enough free



for selected artists. They pay a small fee of £50. That's it. Their venue hire is nothing. They get the majority of ticket sales.

Heather: It's also because you do need a combination... You need entrepreneurial venues to come onboard and take a risk. There is a whole bunch of stuff that has to line up. We take over everything. If we hadn't existed and were just going to start it now and ask the council to take over the whole city. Well clearly, they would say no (laughs). It's a bit unfair as the council loves the Fringe. They literally love it. The growth that happened pretty much loves the Fringe. We are very lucky.

Cam: Last question, what is your favourite 'fringe' memory?

Heather: Oh my god. I've got so many amazing fringe memories (laughs). I love it when I see artists come and do their very first show in the Fringe. Fast Forward a few years, we realise not only did that lead them to travelling the world and doing their show all over the world, but they have continued to come back where they began at Adelaide Fringe. That is one of the main reasons that I do what I do. I think well, Adelaide Fringe is a launching pad for artists. But it's not just that. It's in the hearts of artists and they keep coming back. Even when you think they don't need the Fringe. To hear the stories from people who have great journeys and see Adelaide Fringe as an important steppingstone was one of the things that started them off. I guess for me that is one of things that I want to create in my time as the director of the Fringe. To make sure I create a festival that is as much for artists to have a good experience and come back.

## **Interview with Kevin Patterson**

**(Founder/ CEO of San Diego International Fringe Festival)**

Thursday 25th July 2019

Cam: I guess we can start with... I would love to know... I don't think you have ever told me this... How did the SDIF form? Where did you get the idea from? And how did it all happen?

Kevin: Well I don't even know if you do the story or not. You might. I got in a car accident. At the time I owned my own studio, which was a performing arts studio. That had several thousand students registered. I was teaching dance and also was choreographing projects, and that was how I was making a living. Then all of a sudden, a get a car accident. I break my hip and the doctor says, "You are going to have to figure out what to do. You're not going to be able to teach dance anymore. Everything you have been doing is not going to be possible anymore". So, what am I supposed to do? And that's how I ended up starting the Fringe. It was out of desperation to have something that I would be able to turn my energy towards. And the thing that's exciting with 'fringe' is that it's something that can help so many other creatives, and instead of it being a project that focuses on 'my' creation, it's something that helps facilitate others. And I actually find it more satisfying to help other than to do my own productions. So, it's like my car accident has ended up... I've been able to take tragedy and turn it into triumph.

Cam: Sure. What was your first experience of 'fringe'? Did you go to Fringes before you started one? Or did you just know about them?

Kevin: No. I contacted Holly (WFN) and said we are going to start one in San Diego and this is only from recommendations from one of my former students. That said, "I have an idea. If you have a non-profit maybe you should do a fringe festival. It would be good as it has all genres". But I hadn't ever been! So, because of my status in our community. I was like oh shit I better do a lot of research and not do these 'half-assed'. So, I contacted Holly and

registered to go to the WFN Congress in 2012. My very first Fringe ever was Edinburgh and I was like.... WHAT THE FUCK WAS I THINKING! You walk around the city and you go... OH HELL NO! But I meet all the directors of all these different festivals at the World Fringe Congress and I was thinking, oh my god every single one of them has one of these. Like all running Edinburgh Fringe equivalents, same size and everything... But as the days go on from being there, I realise that there are different sizes. But still, it's so hard to compete. Because you still have the visual mindset of what you are experiencing in Edinburgh. So, my next festival was San Francisco. It takes place in basically one building. The year I was there, there were two other sites, but not nearly as much activity going on. So, it was just so small. With no signage or anything. It was an eye-opener. Then after that I went to Santa Cruz maybe. Then to O'ahu. New Orleans. All of those were so so much smaller. I'm not sure how many you have done in North America now?

Cam: Three. Indianapolis. Yours (SDIF) and Chicago.

Kevin: All small.

Cam: I mean Orlando is big isn't it?

Kevin: Not necessarily no. I think of Orlando... The footprint is so small that it's hard to relate that or the correlation to what Edinburgh is. It has maybe 200 productions. But I guess in North American standards that's one of the bigger ones.

Cam: Yeah, I was going to say... I can't think of one in the USA which even comes close to Edinburgh. I mean, Edmonton in Canada maybe. But is still much smaller. But that's the biggest in North America, right? Edmonton?

Kevin: Yeah, I think Edmonton. Have you been?

Cam: I haven't. But I know lots of people that have, and they love it. They absolutely love it!

Kevin: One of the things with Edmonton is that it's so old with such an established audience that it's easy for the popular things to sell-out. People are already there, and they are like, "Oh fuck it. We'll go over to this". So, there is way more trickle of audiences there, than most other places that I have been.

Cam: That's interesting. So, I'm just going back in time. You went to all these festivals.... Tell me about the first year. How did it go? What went wrong? What went well? What did you learn from? All of that kind of stuff...

Kevin: I think one of the nicest things for us in San Diego was that... I still had my school at this point. Was drawing from so many assets and connections that I had through the years, that it made it really easy to get participants. Also, after travelling all over the place we were able to also get some probably more applicants than the average festival 'getting started'.

Cam: How many did you have? How many participants did you have in the first year?

Kevin: We only had 50. But we turned down many. 50 was like the perfect size for the first year. I think the second year we immediately went to 100. I'm not sure. But I think so. And still turned some artists away. One of the things for the newer festivals that's really important is making sure that the festival doesn't get too big too fast. Because you start to learn that you can't count on Volunteer's. They aren't always going to show up. You think you have someone that's going to work in the box-office in the beginning of the day. You better think again, because so many times Volunteer's don't show up. So, I think one of the biggest lessons was that you need to have some paid staff, that are doing some of the key 'grunt work' in the beginning. Or at least they are there just in case. So, paying a house manager

that can jump in if a box-office person doesn't show up. I would say the biggest lesson is having a back-up plan.

Cam: Were you part of 'CAFF' (Canadian Association of Fringe Festivals) straight away? Or did you take your time joining them?

Kevin: No. I went to their conference after we had our first festival.

Cam: I ask because 'CAFF' is very unique to you guys as it's the 'Canadian Model'. I think we only have one fringe in Europe which adopts the same model as you guys. That's the Barnstaple Fringe. With the lottery and the 100% ticket sales etc....

Kevin: Wow....

Cam: I just performed there. But it's the only one in Europe that I can think of that's a fringe festival which has adopted this model. So, I have done a bit of research on it and saw that in Canada the word 'fringe' is actually trademarked. You can't call yourself a fringe festival unless you have adopted the 'CAFF' model. Did you know that?

Kevin: Yes.

Cam: So, is that the same in America?

Kevin: No. Because the 'United States Association of Fringe Festivals' formed 15 years ago or something. I should know and I don't. But it is very loose and if you end up actually doing your festival, I would say it doesn't hurt coming to the United States conference too.

Cam: That's really interesting. I've kind of defined already that there are three models. The 'Edinburgh Model', which Adelaide use and the other big ones use. Then you have the 'CAFF Model' which is what you guys use. But then you have this 'European Model' which no one has really claimed or said, "This is ours", and that is what Prague and Amsterdam use. So, it's really interesting to take different aspects of each model and put it into a new one. Because I'm not sure... I think the 'CAFF Model' is definitely for the artist. It exists to want to serve the artist. Would you agree with that?

Kevin: Yes. I would say that the 'CAFF Model' the best in my opinion. Because things can't run out of control. For the way things are run now, they are commercial beasts when you look at the really 'big' festivals. I mean there only a couple of really BIG festivals. Which in my eyes, are Adelaide, Edinburgh and kind of 'Fringe World' in Perth. Have you ever been to the Australian festivals?

Cam: No. But I'm planning to go in February with you (World Fringe Congress).

Kevin: Well, when we get there you will see that Adelaide can be one of the most inspiring from what it looks like and the experience for audiences. But the thing that they have in common (Adelaide and Edinburgh) is the big, huge hubs. They seem even bigger in Adelaide. Picture this, a whole park taken over by a hub. Think of it as a corporation that is running the whole park. It's multiple venues, with multiple vendors, carnival rides and big bars in a pop-up bar/club. The corporation is just a bank. So, they don't want some shitty new 'fringe production'. They want some definitely proven and will sell tickets for them. So, that is a huge difference from 'CAFF'. Because in Canada it will be, "Everybody is the same. And everybody has the same chances for getting in". So, when you look at the 'commercial beast' vs the whole 'Canadian Model' it's really hard to say that the 'commercial beasts' are out to help the artists. To me, it doesn't look like it.

Cam: No. I agree. I think they are out to help the audiences. They solely exist to audiences and the 'CAFF' solely exists for artists....

Kevin: No. Hmm... The 'commercial beasts'.... I understand what you are saying but I feel like with the 'commercial beasts' it's not even so great for the audiences. The mandate for Canada is to make it accessible for audiences too. So, there are also factoring that in. Prices don't get out of control. We have to also submit what our prices will be to the 'Canadian Association' and if said that I was going to charge \$35 for 'Royal Kung Foolery' they would say, "That's awfully expensive".

Cam: They obviously don't know us...

Kevin: (Laughs)

Cam: That's really interesting. I can see that point definitely. So, in America what is the feeling like with Fringes such as the Philly Fringe (Philadelphia) and the New York Frigid Fringe? Because you must have completely different mindsets. I mean the Philly Fringe this year has another Fringe going off it. Have you heard about this?

Kevin: Yeah. It's because they wanted to make sure that there was an 'open' element and not the curated part. I say, if I had been involved and knew about 'CAFF' and was there when they were forming the 'United States Association of Fringe Festivals', I would tell them it doesn't work. But mostly it was just New York. Actually, no Philly too I take it back. But Philly has never been a member of the 'United States Association'. I would say to them, "You guys are doing a theatre festival". Just run a theatre festival!

Cam: Yeah. Why do they even need to call it a Fringe?

Kevin: Yeah. I was trying to think of somewhere else I've been. Oh, Dublin too. Going to Dublin Fringe. I would just go around the festival and be like this is not 'fringe'. This is a theatre festival.

Cam: I had a similar experience in Paris actually. We arrived and we didn't meet anyone from the fringe festival. People who worked there or artists. We were there for three days. We arrived. Put in a venue. Performed. Then went home. That was it. You and I both consider 'fringe' to be much more than that. It's the experience. The conversations you have. It's going to 'fringe club' after the show. And I guess that kind of brings me my next question. You have done something which many Fringes struggle to do, Prague do it as well. In 2016, you created the most amazing 'fringe club'. So, what do you think the importance of the 'fringe club' is within a fringe festival?

Kevin: Huge! You say ours is amazing, but for me its way way way underperforming for my expectations. But, I'm so happy to hear people say that they love it.

Cam: Do you know why I loved it though? Because it was intimate. I was able to have conversations with audiences and other artists. I wasn't lost. I wasn't in a massive venue, like in Edinburgh where I wouldn't be able to have these conversations. It was in one place. We all knew where to go and that the structure of it worked. It was great!

Kevin: Well I lectured at the 'United States Association' and I said that the most important thing that I've learnt from all my travels has been how important a club is. Because nothing would be more horrendous than showing up to a festival and not meeting anybody. The organisers or the artists. I think that is key to the operations of fringe festivals. That is one of the elements that makes the whole event special. It's the networking possibilities. Finally getting a 'press' that you wouldn't have gotten on your own.



Cam: Yeah. It's one of our favourite things. At every Fringe we got to, we make sure we spend a lot of time there. Okay, so you do something that no one else does in the whole world. You know what I'm going to say I'm sure. You do the 'Bi-national Fringe'. Which is amazing and I'm actually writing a case-study on it separately. Because I think it's so unique....

Kevin: There is actually another 'Bi-national Fringe'. It's in Cyprus.

Cam: Oh really? The 'Buffer Fringe'?

Kevin: Yes. It's in Cyprus on the island. Half of Cyprus is Turkey and the other half is Greece. So, in the middle wherever the line is, is where the festival takes place. It's to get the two cultures to interact. But it just doesn't feel the same. As, our country (USA) is so huge! Especially, when there is political up-evil, to still have gone through and had the festival until this last year. This year we said we're not doing anything. So, what was you going to say about it?

Cam: I was going to say one of my biggest regrets is not performing in Mexico. I can't believe we didn't do it. You talk about the political reasons right now, which are so important. In a way, I'm going to kind of ask the question in my PhD: Can a fringe festival break down a metaphorical wall between two nations before it's been built? Because San Diego is perfectly able to do that because of where you are geographically speaking. But what was your reason to start the 'Bi-National Fringe'?

Kevin: It was to, instead of building walls, building bridges. A bridge between our arts communities. To yield more opportunities. There are many artists in San Diego that haven't met artists that are in Mexico. We are so close, why not collaborate? Why not join our forces? Interestingly enough, I think when you were here, we might have been in the cultural centre there. Which is the largest performing arts centre in all of Mexico, I think. It

ginormous. Multiple venues under one roof. Multiple galleries. My reason for bringing this up is that it was this huge institution that brought us in. As they thought it was so important. They just opened their doors. So, we have the largest venues in San Diego and the largest venues in Mexico. That is fucking freaky! To get the largest venues is any of the festivals in North America would be really difficult.

Cam: The biggest in San Diego being Spreckels (Theatre)?

Kevin: Yeah and the Lyceum (Theatre). There is bigger. One block away there is the 3,000-seater for the Broadway national trade venues. But the Excitative Director of that even came over and said she wants to be involved, can we put a circus tent outside of the 3,000-seater.

Cam: Wow. Did you say that you were stopping the 'Bi-National Fringe'?

Kevin: We didn't do it this year (2019). The only way did anything was going to an orphanage and we provided programming with the New Zealand Fringe winners. So, we sent those artists down to do a circus performance for the kids at the orphanage.

Cam: What is the future for it? Are you going to try and get it back to what it started as? Or, is it impossible?

Kevin: No, we have to! It's too huge, with too much potential and is way too important. It is one of the reasons why I put this together is to help artists build a portfolio. Well, the 'Bi-National' aspect is major! You brought up something... I can't remember how you put it.... About how our platform tackles the political unrest as well. Well, we could have done more engagement with artists on 'that side of the border' (Mexico) to do something next to the wall. It could be a sit-specific performance of dancers and completely 'outside the box' with a mix of performance art. And this could make a statement. Like nothing can hold down art.

Cam: That would be amazing! I did a bit of research, but I can't remember the numbers off the top of my head so I will put these figures in later. But the population of San Diego has a very large percentage of Mexicans living there isn't it?

Kevin: Yeah!

Cam: Because they also work there (San Diego) and then they travel back, is that right?

Kevin: Lot's do travel back but it's completely mixed. Look at it this way, the indigenous were here first. Then will colonisation 'they' come in and say, "This is our land now and we are going to put some borders up". Well, despite these dividers going up, there are families and friend that still live on both sides a couple of hundred years later. Which is not very long!

Cam: It really is shocking! But I think what you are doing over there is amazing. It's a great advert for how things should be done. So, this year am I right in saying that you downsized this year?

Kevin: Totally! In a huge way and it was because moved from downtown to Balboa Park. But here is one of the key things that I was very aware of when we first started the festival. We were getting donated venue, after donated venue.... But don't get completely used to this! Because at any time we could end up having to go somewhere else. Well, the owner of Spreckels Theatre died. So, when she passed away the family ended up turning around and saying we need to generate more revenue. Where our box-office was in the Spreckels building, where the club was and the Jeffery (Theatre) was.... All of that was donated and was only being used by us for five years. That's really valuable space, because they are on a major street in one of the biggest cities in the country and are not generating revenue for the building. So, we ended up losing that and then I found that the Lyceum (Theatre) booked

some of the dates that would have been Fringe dates. So, I was like fuck it! This is a sign. Let's go ahead and try Balboa Park. If we do it there we will be in the largest cultural park in the United States and there are so many venues within the park. There is also infrastructure in place like all the way down to having a tram that goes through the park. Well, it would be so expensive to get that tram to take people from one venue to another. But, if it's already there, that's amazing! There is free parking, we didn't have free parking downtown. So, if this major gallery and this major venue is all chipping into the park and they are all advertising at the same time, it's kind of like a 'no-brainer' for the future. So, let's go ahead and move up there. But have a smaller impact in the beginning just to try everything out and see how things work. If we had gone in with 100 productions, it would have been way more difficult because it wouldn't have been so small. So, it was all strategic planning. The reason why I use the word 'strategic' is so important, because when you go to funders you have to tell them there weren't any shortcomings or failure, it was because we were doing this on purpose. So, with us being strategic we were able to see what worked and what didn't to have a more substantial festival for the future. It also helps when you go to get grants. You say we are taking every measure possible to have the most successful festival ever and to help the artists the most.

Cam: So, how many artists were there this year (2019)?

Kevin: I think there was 24.

Cam: You have your own tram going from one venue to another? That is amazing. I love it! How many venues did you have?

Kevin: We had three fringe managed venues and we also had the central library for that 24-hour thing. It feels so separate to the festival because it's off-site, but it incorporates so many writers, directors and actors to put together plays in 24 hours.

Cam: So, the 'Starlight Bowl' that's a passion project. You wanted to save it, am I correct?

Kevin: Yeah.

Cam: That was part of the Fringe this year?

Kevin: Yes. I'm on the board though. I'm not the one who started it.

Cam: So, next year are you planning on using Balboa Park again and get bigger? Or are you looking to move back downtown?

Kevin: I think that it will be in our best interest to take advantage of everything that Balboa Park has to offer. It's the best fit possible.

Cam: I mean we did some promotion there it's beautiful!

Kevin: Oh yeah! I can totally see pictures in my head of you guys at that beautiful stage in the middle of the park.

Cam: It was such a lovely day. We did love it there. You have the weather. We couldn't have our fringe festival in a park because it would rain. So, the you have the Californian sun as your friend.

Kevin: It's different though. Edinburgh have rain all the time, but you just can't do certain programming. That's why there is way less site-specific stuff, than other places.

Cam: Okay. I have two more questions and then I will let you go. What is your definition of 'fringe'?

Kevin: I think it's an amazing platform for artists, audiences and community. A unifying platform. I was performing professionally since I was 17 years old, but in my whole life would say 'fringe' is one of the most amazing things I was introduced to. I've done everything from performing in New Zealand to major European tours. But never has anything been as impactful and fulfilling as 'fringe'.

Cam: Have you got a favourite moment from a San Diego Fringe. Maybe, one moment which will stick with you forever?

Kevin: There's a couple. The first thing that popped into my head was when David and Amica (A Little Bit Off) won the award to go to New Zealand. It was the first year we had it as an award and to know that they were going to the other side of the world was so exciting for me. But also, the way they shitted their pants on stage. That was amazing! You aren't a good example as you travel all over the fucking place....

Cam: (laughs) So do you!

Kevin: I do too! I'm not a good example either (laughs). But, for our friends that we've known when we were growing up that never really left home. That all of sudden they get an opportunity like that. I mean they would have liked to, but they didn't have the money or the opportunity. I think these two would never have afforded to go! So, it's that much more wonderful! Also, there was a woman who ended up being homeless. She is a performing artist and she has her degree. She is from a middle-income family. She had a show in the festival, and she pulled me aside and she says, "Thank you so much for creating something

like this in San Diego. If the Fringe didn't exist, I would never have been able to get my work on stage. When you let that soak in. You are going to be creating a platform like that for artists, where they would never been able to get otherwise. She got me crying! This last festival, she put a show in again and she got all this critical praise as we were doing this strategic year. If it was a regular year, I'm not sure that she would have gotten all the press, because there would have been more for them to choose from. Anyway, she got all this amazing press and stuff and she sold-out. So, I gave her an award to go to Stockholm Fringe in Sweden. For her that was incredible. But, what a gift for me too!

Cam: So, with these other Fringes do you have these deals where you would pay for 'her' to go to Stockholm and then they would pay for someone to come to you. Is that right?

Kevin: We are paying for her to go. I also made arrangements for the festivals to provide billeting. So, if they send anyone to us, we will get them billeting, but only as long as you do the same. Also, if you send someone to us, we will waive their production fees and give 100% of ticket sales. This is difficult for some other countries. Is your website up yet?

Cam: No. We are going to launch it in September after Edinburgh Fringe.

Kevin: I would do this if I was you, I would get something out there now that says, 'coming soon'. So that you have the presence there. It solidifies your..... That it's for real! Because otherwise it's all bullshit.

**Interview with Steve Gove**  
**(Founder/ Director of Prague Fringe)**

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019

Cam: So, my first question really is, what is your definition of ‘fringe’? I know it’s a hard one to start with.

Steve: Oh, it’s incredibly difficult. I think the ultimate definition of ‘fringe’ has to go back to Edinburgh, to the roots of it starting, to it becoming very grass roots and literally outside of the main festival programme. So, it was the ‘fringe’ of that festival in that first year. So, I mean that in a way really is the definition of ‘fringe’ for me. It is an event that is organic, that it almost sought of rebels against the ‘norm’ and whatever. But, that’s the routes of it. But I mean, branching out on in terms of what it means for each of the individual festivals; when we wanted to start a Fringe here in Prague, we basically wanted to create a slice of the Edinburgh action and the Edinburgh vibe and place it in the heart of Prague. So, for us we are not an open-arts event that anyone can apply to and nobody will be turned away from. That’s not how our festival works. Instead, ours is open to anyone to apply, but we curate it, to keep it the size that it is.

Cam: Yes. And obviously I know that, and I have experienced both sides of the festival now. But, what I would say to you now then, is it just the size then that scares you about having it open-access festival like Edinburgh? Or is it the quality of work in the programme as well and your duty as a festival Director to produce good quality and a high standard of work within Prague?

Steve: I think when we started the Fringe, we honestly didn’t know which direction we were going to go in. Going back to then. 20 years ago. There were only 30 Fringes in the world.



They were all the big ones. There was Edinburgh, Brighton and a bunch of other smaller ones. But there were only 30. And actually, I would probably say if I looked back at research that I did then, that a lot of those festivals did start organically and did grow to the size and were still growing year on year. So, every year they were getting bigger. Every year there were more shows. So, there wasn't kind of a Prague style model to go actually this is kind of where we want to go. So, we didn't think we wanted to stick at a certain size, or it want to make it sought of a taste of Edinburgh or a taste of how a Fringe works. Although, I think because there weren't other types of models to look to. Yeah...

Cam: Because I would argue that there are three models now. There's the 'Edinburgh Model' which is what also Adelaide and Brighton use. Then there's the 'Canadian Model' which is what some American ones use and Barnstaple use. But then there is the 'European Model' which now a few Fringes are using, such as yourself. But no one has really claimed it. No one has said "this is our model" or "this is the way that it should be done" ....

Steve: Yeah that's right. I think after the first couple of years just making the festival happen. And maybe into the fifth or sixth year, we kind of quite liked the size where we were at. And people complimented that fact that our festival was sought of manageable. A pleasant size in terms of geographically and moving around easily. Not having to get public transport to places and all that thing. And then I think in another few years we actually just thought, why don't we just stick at this? And around about that time, there was a bit of a dissatisfaction brewing in the 'artists circles' about how big Edinburgh was and how big Adelaide was. And there has been a lot of that in the last few years. I love all the Fringes that I visit and I as a Fringe Director, but also with a member of the public hat on, there is things that I love about all of them. But there has been and there continues to be a lot of dissatisfaction with artists for the sought of the sense of how these festivals are out of control perhaps; if you want to use the negative terminology. That artists go to try and earn some money from ticket sales, but then they might have only two or three people in the audiences. There was a lot of articles written in the Australian newspapers a few years ago about this. I think it started in Adelaide and then Perth got it, and there was real suspense bubbling right over in terms of it becoming quite public that it's all very well for these festivals that are huge to be proud of the fact that they are growing every year. But it is another thing to then publicly announce the worth of

these festivals to the city, the economic impacts to 'wherever' is X millions of 'whatever'. That really hurts the artists who have paid lots of money to get there and perhaps naively understood that they would sell lots of tickets and make lots of money. In these festivals you can be successful; you can have financial success or success in terms of getting awards or being picked up and booked/ paid to go and play at other festivals. These things do happen. But there is also a lot of other things happening that are not pleasant for the artist's experience. So as time went on with us, we just thought, no we are absolutely not going there; we really like the size that we are at. More and more as this sense of dissatisfaction was bubbling around the world with artists, artists were saying to us this is amazing what an absolute beautiful experience to come here and perform. They knew they weren't going to earn a lot from their ticket sales; they may not cover all of their costs. But the fact is its very artist driven; we have chosen to create details that make it more friendly for the artists. In terms of keeping the festival small, keeping it intimate, taking lots of care of the artists; there is a lot of personal emails that go back and forwards. So, by the time that the artists come to Prague they have a sense that they have connected with the organisers of the festival. When they are in Prague the fact that they are one of a very small handful of people here and often that all of the festival organisers, team members and volunteers have come to see their show and are supporting them. You know that is now my job. I feel as the founder of this festival, is to see the work that the artists have mad the effort to bring to the festival. But that's not always possible at festivals to spread yourself around. You know I saw 47 out of the 50 whatever shows this year (2019). I spoke to all the artists whose shows I saw, or at least most of them. Anyway, and about three or four years ago Jim Haynes who is a festival and fringe legend, came to Prague for the first time and at the end of the festival I said come on Jim give me a quote and he closed his eyes for a second and he said "Prague Fringe is like Edinburgh in the 60's; Intimate, fun and friendly". And I thought wow! That is absolute gold! Here is a guy, who has lived in Edinburgh since the early 50's, he saw the Fringe at its very early stages. He set up a box-office; The first central box-office of Edinburgh Fringe in his book shop. The cellar of his book shop was a venue, which was completely radical is those days, it probably didn't have seats in it. So, for him to have gone through all of that before it was ever invented anywhere else, before anyone had ever thought of it, it was just all happening grass roots in Edinburgh. And he says to me, "This is like Edinburgh in the 60's". To me that was just like wow! So, all these thoughts and all these senses of keep this small, small is the new big. You don't need to have a festival that has got a gazillion venues. You know I love Edinburgh, I love going. I love the atmosphere, the buzz and the networking opportunities. I

love Perth and I love Adelaide for similar reasons. But I love what we (Prague) do, because it isn't that. It's the opposite of that.

Cam: That's really interesting what you said about Jim Haynes, it is gold dust to get that kind of comment from a legend like him.

Steve: Oh for sure! I mean some people don't know who Jim Haynes is, but that is less important than somebody who's clearly old enough to remember Edinburgh in the 60's saying this is like Edinburgh in the 60's.

Cam: Yeah that must have been great for your marketing and development. I don't really know what your background is Steve? I don't think we have ever had this conversation. Are you from Edinburgh?

Steve: Well I'm actually from a small town called Montrose (Scotland) just up the east coast. Not a million miles from Edinburgh. So when I was at school I wanted to be an actor and all that jazz. You know 'bladey blah'. So I applied for a few colleges for different type of drama courses and stuff and I ended up getting onto a course in Aberdeen which was a teaching course actually. But it was a brilliant course (it doesn't exist anymore), you studied production, acting, there was teaching as well obviously. It was a four-year course and at the end of it I thought you know well I've learnt a lot, but I don't want to necessarily become a teacher; I will just see what happens. I then fell into some supply teaching work, which was extremely well paid, and I sought of continued to do that. I really loved it. I was teaching primary school and secondary school. Then to cut a long story short, I ended up getting a permanent job at a school in Aberdeen. I worked there for four years. So in total I was teaching in the North East up in Aberdeen and some of the schools outside of Aberdeen for six years. I was head of department for a year in that school, I was covering the previous head of department that was away. So, when he came back, I thought I need to get out here. I either need to apply for a 'proper' job somewhere else or just go. So after a lot of deliberation, I made the decision to resign. People around me said, "Wow" and that I was

finally taking a leap of faith and leaving teaching, “so what’s your plan”? I said well I’m going to the Fringe in Edinburgh. And they were like, “But what’s the plan”? And I said, “Well that is the plan”. I didn’t have a job. I didn’t have anything. I was just going to Edinburgh. It’s kind of weird that all these years later this ends up being what my reality is. So anyway, I went to Edinburgh...

Cam: As an actor? Or as a stakeholder?

Steve: No I just went to try and get some work. I went down a month before and I was going round all the theatres, cafes and things. I honestly just wanted to be there. So I was happy to do anything. So I was probably 27 at the time and I think I got a job in a café. They said, “Oh yeah you can come and work here and whatever”. Then someone gave me a tip-off that they were hiring people at the Assembly Rooms on George Street. So I set myself up with an interview there. It was to be a venue manager, like running the front of house department. Well actually that wasn’t the job. The job was to work front of house. So I got there to the interview and I said to the guy look I don’t want to be a front of house person. But I am happy to run the front of house. And he said, “Great, you can start the job in a month when the festival starts”. So that was it, I moved down to Edinburgh (1996). I worked at the festival at the Assembly. At that time, you can imagine that the Fringe was a lot smaller. It didn’t have the sought of ‘wow factor’. I mean it was still pretty busy and you noticed at the end of the festival the city was quieter. But Assembly Rooms didn’t have any other satellite venues, it was just Assembly Rooms. I think Underbelly hadn’t even got started yet. Pleasance was going, but it was just at the two venues. The Gilded Balloon was there and there were lots and lots of standalone venues, like little places that had one or two theatres rather than a massive of selection of spaces. It was just a buzz. So anyway, then I transferred to Glasgow; I did some more supply teaching. The next year I went back to Edinburgh; I worked at the Fringe again. But during that year in Glasgow I met somebody who got a job in Prague. So at the end of the festival in 1997 he moved out here (Prague). He was also Scottish but he moved here and I followed him a couple of weeks later. I had no clue what Prague was all about. I had no clue where it was. Where is this place? Nobody talked about it. It was really one of these Eastern European mysteries that even though you knew about Czechoslovakia and you knew about all the fall of communism and the Berlin Wall. You remember all those stories

coming out in the news, but you didn't really know where all the places were or how to get there. It was quite exotic. So, he got a job here as a school teacher and I followed him two weeks later. I had no job, no ideas and no clue whatsoever at all. It cost an absolute arm and a leg to get out there in those days. There was no internet, nobody had mobile phones, I might as well have moved to the moon. But I loved the place right from the start. It was a complete mystery and an enigma. It had only come out of communism in 1990. Then a year later Czechoslovakia split into Czech Republic and Slovakia. So, the country had been through all of this turmoil five or so years prior to me getting there. So things were very different. There was no Starbucks and you couldn't really buy sandwiches in shops. So, in terms of anyone wanting to do anything in those days. If you had a business idea, you could just come over and get on with it and do it. There were so many gaps in the market. So, I was teaching English, just to earn a little bit of cash, and then I set up a little business licence, so the following year I was able to send invoices and gather my own clients as such. Then I get to the more interesting bit, so I thought this is fine I am earning money now and I am enjoying Prague. But the relationship fell to pieces in 2000 and I suppose at that point I thought what the hell am I doing? Do I go back to Scotland? Or do I stay here? But I had been going to Edinburgh every single year (since 1996) and I just had this idea that it would be quite cool to take some Czech theatre shows to Edinburgh. But then I was actually like no that isn't going to work. It's going to be far too expensive. Why don't I try and take a bit of Edinburgh to Prague. And that is how it sought of rolled really.

Cam: Wow. That's amazing. Thank you for that. So I guess I kind of want to know really... I agree with you when you said that Prague is 'artist centric' and I think the Edinburgh model is not very very kind to artists as well. So I agree with you. I know it varies, but what is the selection criteria for your artists? Is it to do with the local conditions that Prague presents? Because I know you have English-speaking companies or non-verbal.

Steve: The idea of taking shows to Edinburgh was obviously not going to happen. But the idea of bringing Edinburgh to Prague was inspired by the fact that actually there was almost no English language theatre here, there was maybe like one show a year by a semi-amateur production company. I didn't understand as loads of Czechs were speaking English, when you went the cinema it was all subtitled. So I couldn't understand why there wasn't any live

theatre. So, the original idea, after abounding taking shows to Edinburgh was actually to start a festival of English language theatre. We were trying to come up with a name and of course it was just a disaster. 'The Prague International Festival of English Language Theatre' wasn't really going to cut it. So, we just thought why don't we just start a Fringe, it could be like Edinburgh. But the thing was, again in those days there were not that many Fringes going around. There was only like 30 of them. I only knew about Edinburgh. So, I started to do research and I thought, shit there is actually quite a few of them. I didn't even realise that Edinburgh was the oldest and original one. So this was incredible. Imagine this Scottish person who is going to bring a bit of the Edinburgh Fringe to Prague, but we are going to keep it English language and that is going to be our thing. It's going to be the English language festival in the Czech Republic. Which to this day is the only one that exists. So that was kind of the reasoning behind that. There was also a German theatre festival here, which still exists. You know Prague is surrounded by German speaking Germany and Austria and for a long time had been a German speaking country. So there is a whole German language culture here underneath everything. This festival was quite successful. It had been running for 10 years or something like that. So I thought if there is a German theatre festival there could be an English one. I mean if you were a tourist coming to Prague you could go to the ballet or the opera, but it was very difficult to find anything that was more accessible or not so 'highbrow', that was a theatrical experience for tourists. Apart from the 'Black Light Theatre', which was advertised everywhere. Every travel guide had 'Black Light Theatre' adverts and there were posters up. But I thought how come these trashy theatre shows that overcharge the tourists the kind of only thing tourists can come and enjoy, if they are visiting the Czech Republic. So, I was kind of rebelling against all of that in a sense, by deciding to do something different, to do a fringe festival. So coming back to the original question, that's what makes our Fringe a Fringe because it was an alternative to 'what's on offer' and its absolutely 'fringey' to a foreign language festival in any country is quite abstract.

Cam: No I agree. I agree. Do you receive much funding from local bodies or is it very minimal?

Steve: Not really no. We get city council funding, about £6,000. We get just over £1,000 from would you believe 'Prague One District', and that's about it.

Cam: And has that been a long process to get that? Or were they completely behind it at the start?

Steve: They actually were funnily enough. I went to a friend who started a film festival here and she connected me with a woman at the city council who was one of the administrators. She sought of advised me on how to apply for the grant and we went to the head of whoever it was making the decisions at the time and presented the case to her. They all thought it was absolutely nuts! It was totally different to anything that had ever been proposed before. But they felt somehow that it would actually work. They thought that this sounds like it could work. So they gave us a real chance. We got about, well it was a different exchange rate then, but it was probably about £10,000 in the first year from the city council. It was a huge amount of funding that we got and that was in the very first year. It was pretty amazing.

Cam: How do you pick your venues? I mean I love your spaces so much. To me venues in a Fringe have got to have charisma, they have to possess character and they have to be raw. All of your spaces have that, in some way. So, I was wondering, do they change every year? Because I went to Prague the previous year (2018) as a stakeholder and I went to every single venue this year as I did in 2018. So, do you have a good relationship with the venues? And if so, how was that trust built?

Steve: Originally, we weren't in that part of town. We did loads of research in the first year of all the theatres that were available, and we ended up choosing a couple that were far too big. Then there was a venue that came to our attention in the second year, it was 'Rubin' in fact. Which was an underground small venue. So, we started to focus on that kind of size of venue. Then another year or two down the line there was another theatre that came to our attention which was the Kampa theatre. It has had several managers over the years, but at that time the people that managed it also had a theatre tent, which we rented from them and we had performances in there. And then we kind of thought that this is really nice being over in Mala Strana. It's very central, but very large parts of it clearly have tourists in them but aren't

overwhelmed by tourists, like the old town square or the castle. So, we started to focus on that really and then we went to see Beseda, which was about 15 years ago now and it was a real smoky, crumbling venue. But they were like, “Oh yeah this sounds amazing”. The next year it closed down for five years and it was reconstructed from top to bottom. So, we didn’t have that at all for a long time. So, it’s just been a gradual process. After getting two, three or four venues we thought that this is the kind of area that we wanted to be in. Although it does create problems, in a sense that it’s not one of the ‘trendy’ or ‘cool’ parts of Prague. There are other areas of Prague that aren’t very far away where all the ‘cool’ young people hang out and they go to the theatres and cinemas in those areas. These areas have a similar atmosphere to our venues, but the area doesn’t connect to what Mala Strana is. For a lot of young Czech people, Mala Strana would be a sought of overly-priced place for only tourists. So that has been a really hard thing for us. As although we liked it in the early but didn’t really get the fact that it didn’t really connect with young Czechs. We liked it enough to keep building that area. But all the places that we go to are ‘cool’ spots. I mean there is a very vibrant theatre scene in Rubin all year round. Misenka has only been open like two or three years, but they do lots of gigs in their cellar space. Kampa has got a bit of ‘hippie’ vibe to it. There is a lot of yoga and things go on there and children s theatre. The guy who runs it (the owner) is a very well-respected Czech film actor, who started off in fringe theatre. So that has a very good vibe to it and ‘normal’ people would visit that space during the year. Beseda is a bit different it’s kind of an older crowd. It’s maybe people in their 50’s and 60’s would go to gigs there. It’s not got a young ‘cool’ vibe to it. But it is a very well-respected space and has an incredible history. So, we like where the festival is, we like the venues, but we know it takes a lot of work to attract new young audiences down there. But once they find it and they realise that Rubin is quite cool or Misenka’s great and we aren’t getting ripped off, they come back. It’s just getting them in there in the first place that can sometimes be difficult.

Cam: I mean statistically what are the demographics of your audiences? Are they mainly young Czechs? Or are they tourists?

Steve: I would need to look back at the research that was last done about three or four years ago. But I think it’s only about 15% expats now, about 25% Czech and the rest are actually tourists. Which is a huge percentage of tourists.



Cam: Yes. Because I met quite a few audience members that come over to Prague every year just for the Prague Fringe.

Steve: Exactly! There are tens and tens of them, and they are the ones who tend to buy 20, 30, 40 or 50 tickets. So yeah, it's definitely very interesting for tourists.

Cam: This has just reminded me of something. I know previously that you were able to buy 5 for 4 ticket passes....

Steve: Ahh we cancelled that last year.

Cam: Yeah. So, I was just wondering why?

Steve: So, those passes worked quite well. But we were wanting to try and push the 'friend of the fringe' scheme a bit more. So, we did a lot of Excel table maths trying to work out the best for us. We were considering about doing a 25% discount for 'friends'. But we got to a point where we were quite comfortable at 18%. It was a nice generous discount and in fact when we did research on who had bought most of those passes; 'Wonder Passes' as they were laterally called, it ended being the same people or the same type of person that bought the 'friendships' (F.O.T.F). And when you buy a sufficient enough of tickets, I think its 30-40, you make your money back that the pass costs you on the discount. So, it kind of ended up being the same I think.

Cam: I was going to say as well; my first experience of Prague Fringe was two years ago. I was in Slovakia and I decided to get on a bus to Prague. When I arrived, I walked into Beseda for the Fringe Club and I have never ever experienced a Fringe Club atmosphere like it....

Steve: Oh wow!

Cam: It was the 'music bingo' night.

Steve: Oh, he was wonderful!

Cam: Yeah. I remember sitting there with my friend. And we are regular 'fringe-goers' and performers and I said to him, "This is unbelievable. What is this place"? We were just not expecting it at all. So, I was just wondering because I've kind of taken that on for the Colchester Fringe. I have somewhat announced the Fringe Club as the heart and soul of the festival. I mean it has the key elements to it. A Fringe Club can be a place where artists go to talk and network with each other. But equally, it's a place where they can go speak to audiences about their show. Which is a conversation that never happens in a traditional theatre setting, because after the show people go home.

Steve: Never! That's right and I say that all the time, to the Czech media and stuff. You know this isn't a night at the theatre where you go to see something, then there's an interval, then you say, "Oh that was good" and that's all the conversation and then you go home. This is not what this is about! It's about coming to see a show and then maybe going to have a drink, then going to another show where you are sitting next to the person that was in the show that you just saw earlier and you say hi to him or her and tell them that you really liked their show. And then you go to see two more shows and similar things happen and you start to recognise audience members that you met before at other venues and you say, "Oh hi. Where are you from"? And then you go to the bar and everyone is in the bar together having a laugh, a drink and whatever else. Actually, I just remembered something that Morna Burden (Artist in 2019) wrote to me. She said, "Hi Steve, this is just to say thank you so much for such a wonderful experience. I think I've facebooked you, but I just wanted to be in touch directly to say thank you so much to you and the team for all the work and support. I am just so grateful

to have been part of it. I met such wonderful people, just so good to be amongst the vagabonds and dreamers and for all of us to be so well supported in that. It was just so joyful, and it all felt so generous and is much appreciated”.

Cam: Wow!

Steve: And that is very strong sense of how the artists feel about the festival.

Cam: I know it's true and you can see it at the end of the festival as well. The previous year I wasn't there for Saturday night, I went home on the Friday. But I was obviously there for the Saturday this year. And on Charles Bridge for the sunrise, when everyone is together, singing and embracing each other and knowing the festival has come to an end. I don't know how that happened Steve but don't ever change that, because it is just the most magical moment that I think I have ever experienced at a fringe festival (laughs). I mean I know we were all a little bit merry, but I don't think I have ever felt quite as happy.

Steve: How funny! Well, it just.... Yeah. It's good, it's good. It's the core of it really, I guess. It's like your thing with the 'music bingo', everyone in that room was Volunteers, audience members and artists. That was the point of that. I think just to caveat on everything, when we get to the point of doing the settlement sheets and things and paying out the artists their ticket revenues. Every year we are very mindful of the fact that actually it's not lucrative in terms of the money that we pay out to the artists. You know they have already paid for flights, accommodation, they have paid a participation fee to take part and then they might have paid for posters or a technician. So, something we know will add even more joy to all of this joy is if we could actually increase our pay-outs. By paying out not just 60%, but maybe 70, 80, 90 or in a dream world it would be amazing to pay out 100% of the ticket revenue. Which in many cases still wouldn't cover the costs of what the artists have put into it... But to be able to do that, would be something that we would feel good about. It's not possible under the current funding scheme and we know how much it costs for us to add on 10% every single time. And that's a huge missing gap in our budget, if we were to pay that 40% back out. So,

it's something that we are working on constantly to try and make an even more positive experience for the artists. And if we add into our budget, which is minuscule now, all these costs that the artists put up, we would need raise about four times more than we currently have. But then again, let's go back to the thing. The fact that the festival is so special, and everybody says these wonderful things about it. Is it because everyone wants to be there and wants to make it happen? And it's not about the money, it's not about having to raise the money through ticket revenue. Is it that they have already got a grant somehow through their own countries? I don't know, in some cases it is true. If we started paying the Volunteers would the festival take on a different atmosphere? It's another thing... It's special because of what it is right now.

Cam: So, in some ways you pay with 'experience'?

Steve: Yes exactly!

Cam: I mean I can speak for the Volunteer's because I was one this year. And yeah, people come from very far away to volunteer. And there is no hiding from that fact and that's because they have heard it's amazing. But you are also very lucky, you are in a beautiful city.

Steve: And this might a nice way to end this on. It's Prague! I mean a lot of it of course is how we manage the 'thing'. But a tremendous amount of it is Prague. Because Prague is so special. It makes you feel special when you are here. It is so beautiful, so gentle, its cheap and the beers are cheap. So, the feel-good factor is very high in terms of that. I mean it's not as cheap as it used to be, but it's still cheap to get a beer. It's like two or three quid. You can enjoy your night in the Fringe Club without spending a lot of money and there is a definite feel-good factor to that. So, a lot of it is Prague. And if you have been, you just want to come back.

Cam: Well look thank you so much Steve. This was so helpful!

Steve: Don't feel like you can't touch base again. Honestly, if you need anything else, please do just call. I get asked to contribute to a lot of these kind of things, and as a team we contribute to varying degrees. But I think what excited me about your ideas, was the fact that your kind about the age that I was when I wanted to start the Fringe here. And that's exciting for me. I can sought of almost see myself in you a little bit. It's different in a way because there are now so many Fringes around the world. And as I said there wasn't when we started. There were just the big models, the big festivals. So yeah, it's all very exciting.

**Interview with Steve Gove 2**  
**(Founder/ Director of Prague Fringe)**

Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020

Cam: So, someone told me the other day that ours (Prague & CFF) and Brighton were the only ones that are going to reschedule this year. Which I don't think is true.

Steve: I haven't heard of anyone other ones. Although, I did hear about Melbourne. It has got different dates in November. But the problem is... Well, we are all waiting to hear the official announcement from Edinburgh tomorrow. I mean that will definitely need to be rescheduled I'm sure. That is going to hit like a tone of bricks. It's going to be awful. Just a sense of... That is kind of it for so many people. Whether they are theatre-makers, members of the public, fringe directors who have been inspired to make their own events, like ourselves. It's like your Grandad has died. Do you know what I mean? It's awful! Of course, we all knew it was going to happen. But reading it earlier today for the first time in the pre-announcement... It was like a punch in the guts. I think it's going to be awful tomorrow to read it officially from them. Awful You know it's like all roads lead to Edinburgh for all of us in the fringe world. It's almost like if it survives then we will all be okay, somehow.

Cam: We might have read the same article. But some of the venues believe that they could find artists and curate it very quickly anyway. So, they might close the main festival but there might still be stuff going on in August.

Steve: Well, that's right! I mean world travel I'm sure will not be back to normal by August. That is pretty sure to say. But then it might then become a Fringe that is a bit more like it was in the 60's and 70's.

Cam: That's a good point! It might need it to be honest. It was getting bigger and bigger. So, maybe it will have to be scaled down because of the circumstances and maybe they will realise that.... I feel sorry for the artists. I mean to think how much money that they are going to lose.

Steve: Or on the flipside, how much money they are not going to lose (*Laughs*).

Cam: Well, yeah!

Steve: I don't know. I mean by August... I think it's tight. I mean I'm nervous about October being tight for us.

Cam: We are November now.

Steve: What dates?

Cam: 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Steve: Originally, I was look at November and then when Brighton suggested... I was in touch with Julian (Cassidy) the day before he officially announced. Then Rosie said that as well, so we are kind of dovetailing with them which is what we usually do. But you know, 70% of acts are from home (U.K) from either Scotland or England. It's going to be super weird. The Schengen Zone might start to open up a bit. But if England is 2 to 3 weeks behind the rest of us over here that bit of might not be open till October. I think things over here might start to feel more normal by the end of April. Maybe might start being able to go to bars. That is obviously stage 1. The border is opening is stage 2. That might be a Schengen thing. So, like Slovakia, Poland and Germany. But, the bigger picture... The whole world, I

think that is going to be much longer. And even if it does by September, how much are we going to be paying for like flights and stuff? Our airport is even shut!

Cam: The Czech Republic were on of the first or Poland?

Steve: It was the first after Italy. Which is why we were crapping it. It actually made BBC News. So, we like oh my god everyone is going to be hearing this that Czech Republic has closed its borders. It was like oh shit! But super quickly we realised it was just a knock-on effect. The dominoes just started to fall. But it was kind of weird for us as we were pretty much first, as in terms of our circle it drew attention to us. People were like oh god we aren't even going to get to Prague. But, little did they know that two days down the line you weren't even going to get to leave your house.

Cam: I mean I had a lot of emails from artists, even when I was in Australia. Companies were asking me what is happening. I was like, "oh god, I don't know. I'm halfway across the world". I held off for as long as possible before I got home.

Steve: Well, we did that. It was a two-month window and then it was like it kind of has to be now. As, there is probably a cancelation policy anyway with Air BnB and such like. Even if the borders were then reopened again, which of course they aren't going to be now as we know. It is just very odd. I think it was a very frightening decision to make at that 11<sup>th</sup> hour. It was like the Matrix... Blue pill or red pill you know? You launch the tickets, or do you cancel the festival. It was pretty clear by that point that by no miracle were things going to be back to normal by the end of May. Even if they were, who would have wanted to have dropped out by that point anyway...

Cam: Also, it looks bad....



Steve: Well, that's right. So, at the beginning when we first lockdown it was like bars are closing at 8pm and no events more than 30 (people). So, our first email to artists was like yes I know that this was news today, but we are still allowed to proceed with events that are no more than 30. Most of our venues are not much bigger than that anyway. So, it was all positive. Then the next day it was something else. So, you couldn't really write an email quick enough before the actual information was out of date. So, we just thought this is mental! Then by the end of that first full week, the three of us said we can't do it. I don't think it's possible. I mean you never have a meeting where you say what would happen if the whole thing had to cancel if.... You would start laughing at people. Okay, what would happen if one theatre burnt down? Well, you would have to go and find another theatre. You would do something! You come up with these fantastical imaginative scenarios that you try to troubleshoot. But you never could have imagined this. Even if you had, what would the plan be? You can't make the plan! So, it was such a shock!

Cam: So, were you in two minds to cancel or postpone? Was that a conversation? I mean if you cancelled, how would that have affected you? Some of the Fringes that were talking the other day (during a meeting) were saying it would ruin them!

Steve: So, we run on a shoestring budget anyway. None of us are paid half of what we should be getting paid, even a quarter. By choice, that's just how we make it happen! But I did three versions of the budget. One was cancelling completely. The other was postponing, with a smaller festival. The other was postponing the festival with the same size. Just to try and work out what if a 1/3 of the acts couldn't do it and all of these kind of things. We looked at all the options and to cancel the festival, everyone is out of a job and there is no income. So, it ends with no hope ever doing another one. So, we thought how much it cost to keep things going and the organisation running for a year. So, we came up with a sum for that which in the grand scheme of things isn't even half of a normal salary in England. So, we thought well maybe we could fundraise to raise that money in the worst-case scenario. The other option was, what would happen if we did cancel under the exceptional circumstances would we have to give all of our funding back. We got city council money that came into the bank and our main partners. So, what happens to that? It is unlikely that they say just keep the money it's fine. There might be a certain way to obtain some of it or maybe the festival wouldn't have

happened in the future. So, we had all of these things going around in our head and it was a bit scary to be honest. But then we thought we actually after all these years working with city that there might be some special compensation for this year. They were talking about employees getting some of their wages payed or whatever. So, the worst-case scenario is somewhere in the middle where we don't get to keep all the funding and we have to raise some money to keep the office going until next year. But then we said actually let's just try and do it in October. It shows willing to our artists and supporters! And obviously, it's more exciting for us to keep it going! But, the other thing was these participation fees that all of these artists had paid. That comes to a massive amount of money, which we would definitely have to pay back if we cancelled. So, artists coming in October we hold on to their fees. All the other ones are paid back. If, the October festival doesn't happen all that money goes back to the artists. We will then try and raise other money to keep the office open... So, there is about 10 different versions between now and then. I was saying to Rosie and Elena on the phone. This is amazing as we now have this contingency plan for worst-case scenario that could ever happen in the future!

Cam: I mean we have also booked dates in April, just in case. So, if we have to cancel November, we will have it then. If, we don't have to cancel we won't do the next one then as it's not enough time.

Steve: When would the next one be?

Cam: We would be doing it in July next year. Now we have to. May is too soon for us. Or if it worked really well in November, who knows. But, I want a summer festival.

**Interview with Jill Roszell****(Administrator of CAFF/ Former Executive Director of Edmonton Fringe)**Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020

Cam: So, not many Fringes have done what we've done (postpone). Prague have, until October. Brighton have. But other than that, I don't know any that have. Everyone has just cancelled.

Jill: We're mixed actually. It's interesting! We've had a couple right at the very beginning (of the season) that have postpone until the fall. Then everyone else has just dropped. So, you know how the CAFF circuit works. We go April all the way down till October. So, it's just been this rippling effect. So basically, we are now cancelled up until all the way till the end of June. Then we will see. Toronto starts literally on July 1<sup>st</sup>. So, we will see what they do. But what the bigger festivals are talking about is that they may cancel the festival 'proper', but they might smaller local things. Because all of them are their own organisations right! So, it's easy for the bigger ones to be able to move something to a different time. Then work with their local artists. Because again, most of them are about 60% local. It really messes up the international artists...

Cam: I mean this is going to be a 'knock-on' effect for a long time. If all the CAFF festivals cancel for internationals. This is a guess, but what will happen is the festivals will go "but you can have a place next year".

Jill: That's exactly what is going on!

Cam: So, then the new crop of artists won't be able to get in for another two years. So, it's going to be a two-year thing. Globally. It's not just you, it's everyone!

Jill: I mean with Edinburgh cancelling, I completely understand why they have to do it. It's 100% the right call. But I think that is going to have a ripple effect everywhere!

Cam: I agree. I was expecting the decision to come sooner to be honest. I couldn't believe how long it took. It's just such a shitty situation. It's been interesting to other festivals. Prague were similar to us. I just felt a duty to our international artists to hold on as long as possible. They've paid for flights. If we cancel and the airline doesn't, they lose that money. So, I was kind of hoping that the airline would cancel before we would! But that didn't happen. So, we just had to do it. It's crazy! So, how did you get involved with CAFF?

Jill: So, I'm actually the former director of the Edmonton Fringe.

Cam: For 3 or 4 years?

Jill: That was for 3 years yeah. About 5 years ago. I actually did 4 festivals. Then prior to that I've been working in the Edmonton theatre scene for about 20 years. So, I know the festival well. That's pretty much how I got into it. Then because of the relationship with particularly Edmonton. Edmonton being the biggest festival and the one that kind of started it in Canada. Well, North America really. As, Orlando came to Edmonton and took the idea back down to Orlando. So, both of those festivals are kind of anchors. When Edmonton started, it was one of those back of the napkin's kind of ideas. Based out of a theatre company, that did kids work. Then how the festival came about was they were again feeding into our big regional theatre, which literally had British artistic directors and were doing classic British plays with no room for anything was Canadian or Edmonton artists. So, they were looking for a place for local artists being able to show their work. It was a summer programme, that fell through the Alberta Department of Culture that had this money, that they earmarked for a different project.... That project fell through and so they basically said how fast can you get an application in to start a new event. So, there was about four or five festivals that actually

came out of that. The Fringe being one of them, came out of a theatre company. Edmonton is weird in the theatre ecology if you look at the city because you wouldn't think that Edmonton given its size, would be as big as it is. But it is actually the western Canadian hotbed for theatre. So, between the National Theatre school in Montreal and the University of Alberta here, those are the two big schools for training. For the longest time we had more theatres in Canada per capita. I think it's changed now. So, you had all these new-grads, very strong theatre department looking for places to do work.

Cam: Sure. So, where did the link between the word 'fringe' and Edmonton come into play? Were people visiting Edinburgh?

Jill: Yes? So, Brian Paisley was the one that literally wrote the grant. It was a whim, right? This is what they are doing in Edinburgh. I don't know if he had actually been to Edinburgh. But it was the model, the idea that just everybody bringing a show. And the idea of it being 'fringe' and not part of a mainstream theatre idea. Because the branding of it, is where I think he got it from. Then the 100% box-office was his idea.

Cam: So, that was set-up right at the start? The foundations of CAFF, were at the beginning in Edmonton?

Jill: Yes.

Cam: So, you said Orlando set one up a few years after?

Jill: It was a few years after. They were the first Americans. There were actually more Canadians that came out. Montreal was going to celebrate 30 years this year. Toronto is kind of in the same boat. Winnipeg just did 30 years a couple of years ago. Edmonton will be 40

next year. So, it actually spread across Canada first. Orlando has been a huge CAFF member. Orlando and San Francisco have been long time CAFF members.

Cam: San Francisco is an interesting one. Am I right in saying for a long time it was just one venue?

Jill: Yeah. It still is! In their space though, they actually have two or three actual theatre spaces in that theatre. So, it is a multi-spaced venue.

Cam: So, are you from Edmonton originally?

Jill: Not originally. But I came here for school.

Cam: So, you've been going to the Fringe for a long time? Before you came Executive Director at Edmonton?

Jill: Oh yeah! Well, that's the relationship with theatre companies. We have a big regional theatre company here. Then we have a layer of smaller professional theatres. Then we have this layer of independent theatres, that happens all over the year. Then we have Fringe. So, we have this very established ecology. So, we have professional theatre companies still in Edmonton that are doing work part of the Fringe. So, they have always done that. That professional community have always embraced the Fringe. Whether or not, it was an actual production company or professional actors doing a side-project. So, the theatre company that I work for right now is 'Theatre Network'. So, I was the general manager for them. Then I went to the Fringe. But I got pulled back a couple of years ago, because the venue that we had burnt down. So, the job that I'm doing with them right now is literally been raising the money and helping them build a new theatre.

Cam: When you say professionals are performing at the Fringe.... Are they still applying through the lottery like everyone else?

Jill: Yes. Or, they are doing BYOV. So, that is the part of the model that is kind of an interesting one to keep watching. Like watch BYOV's in the next 10 years.

Cam: Because that's the curated part?

Jill: Yes. So, Julie Lawrence who came after Brian Paisley in terms of Directors. She was the one that coined the phrase in Edmonton BYOV.

Cam: It's really interesting for me, as I would argue on record that Canada probably has the second biggest 'fringe buzz' after Edinburgh. People seem to love it in Canada. I've never been. But everyone I meet tells me Canada is the place to go.

Jill: Yes.

Cam: So, you've been around 'fringe' for a long time. Let's talk about your time as the Director of Edmonton. What was the size of the festival then? How many companies were you having in the programme?

Jill: About 120. Last year they had 250.

Cam: In how many venues?

Jill: 13 lottery. Then about 20/30 BYOV.

Cam: Am I right in saying that in Edmonton, artists set their own ticket prices?

Jill: To a maximum. That's an interesting phenomenon with it. There are actually two things with BYOV's. Edmonton has the most BYOV's. Places like Orlando and Toronto really curate their BYOV's. They only allow a certain number of them; they actually restrict them. Most, CAFF festivals don't have a BYOV system. Which is really interesting. So, the lottery venues and the support system that CAFF is known for is consistent across the way. But Edmonton is actually the one where we have more shows in BYOV's than we do in lottery venues. Which is why it will be interesting what will happen in the next 10 years. Because our local artists figured out if they have their own venue, which they can get here because it's local right... That I can book more shows! I can maximise my ticket price. You see where this is going... But, the maximum the ticket price... Because the CAFF principle of being accessible is also considered being affordable. So, all the ticket prices are under \$20.

Cam: So, do you have to buy a button as an audience member?

Jill: Some festivals work that way, some don't. The buttons were devised as a fundraising mechanism. Because we give 100% of the box-office, and yes, we do have to take off box-office fees and credit card fees. Which makes it contentious as it's really not 100%. But the button is the fundraising to the festival. But the maximum ticket price has meant that the 'big fringe shows' that go touring have not come to Canada.

Cam: Well, you've had shows like Red Bastard come!



Jill: Yes!

Cam: So, you do get some big acts.

Jill: Well, we get big acts but here is the thing. So, even on a \$20 ticket, if he is in a 500-seater venue and he is selling out 12 or 13 shows in 10-days. You see where this going... There is no reason that he can't take home 40 grand.

Cam: So, what about the smaller shows? Because everyone is going to see 'that' show. I putting this into context for a smaller Fringe. So, if our audiences will all go and see that one show at that time, then I would worry about the other shows.

Jill: It depends. Because the succus that we've seen with that. Is if you are already coming to the 'big show', now try another one. So, if you can capture them at that show. If you can flyer them and keep them there. If the show happens at 7 and you can keep in a beer tent and then offer them a 10 o'clock show that they can go and see. There is often some spin-off. Then the other beautiful thing about the 'smaller festivals' is that often that the bigger name will hang-out with the other artists. So, depending on the artists of then these 'big names' will go and see a smaller show just because they are interested in it and then promote the smaller show.

Cam: So, with CAFF and the trademark of 'fringe'. Now Adam (STOFF), told me that he's done it as well. But he hasn't worked. He said, that he can't trademark that word because it's been invented somewhere else. So, I will talk about some other festivals from other studies, that have adopted the word 'fringe'... These are American and there's been a bit of dismay about the fact that they have done this. Philadelphia and New York are the two that come to mind. So, have festivals in Canada before tried to call themselves a Fringe, and then you've said that's not going to work unless you are going to adopt these rules? I mean, how often does that happen?

Jill: Probably two or three a year. I think it only works as they did this 20 years ago. So, basically is you have all these Fringes popping up. They are start getting together formally every year to talk about Fringe. They all start using the same model and realised that you have a group of people that really do think the same way. They had the same mindset about how to support the artists and having accessible ticket prices. And supporting the artists with 100% box-office. Providing a venue. We are going to do everything to support the artists. They show up with a show. They take the box-office. This is the support mechanism that we can do really give them a level up. Especially for emerging work. So, because they were all likeminded, they wanted to make sure that there wasn't another festival that came up and called themselves a Fringe, that was not treating their artists that way. So, all those principles are about how you treat your artists. Then we built it into a brand. We get letters about this all the time. Where artists feel like they signed up for this type of treatment, and if they didn't get that kind of treatment, they will let us know. So, we've had a couple of issues with festivals... Two festivals in the last 5 years where we've had to step in a go guys...

Cam: So, you are Canadian equity of Fringe basically...

Jill: Yeah. Sometimes we are just like pick another word. This is not how we run these festivals. Often, in a lot of cases people will.... They don't know its trademarked so we will reach out to them and we actually physically give them a cease and assist letter. But often, it then starts the conversation... Do you actually want to do a Fringe? Because this is how we do it... It has led to new members.

Cam: How often do you review the policy? I know it doesn't change that much because you have the very key ethos and foundations of what you are. Because it must change over time?

Jill: It does change over time. So, every year we do our conference and AGM. So, it's a standing thing to look at it every year. There is an interesting shift that is happening...

Because it's reaction to other things going on in the world. So, I've actually now been involved with CAFF for 10 years. When I started, this was not a 'thing'... But what is happening over the last couple of years is that artists are starting to look at them as rules. But we look at them as values. We realised that we actually clarify that a little bit more. They are not rules, they are values. So, that is actually on the agenda for this year to have that conversation...

Cam: Are you in charge of a maximum a Fringe can charge for their venues? I mean the production fees. For example, if you are giving artists five performances you can charge a maximum of X amount.

Jill: Well no, but we've actually been talking about that. Because the flip side of that too is the actual registration fee. Then how much of a % a ticket fee can you take out. You are not giving 100% box-office if 50% of that is going to fees. So, they are two of the conversations we are having a lot. The performance registration fee... We share that information and right now we don't have a rule about it. Because at the end of the day, we classified as a national arts service organisation. The services is a key word in that. Even just what is going on with COVID-19 we are there to help each other out and to assist as we move along. Work through the touring lottery, and to suggest best practices. But I can't as a CAFF mandate what is happening at every festival. Because every festival is different. So, there is kind of the rationale behind the service fees for the artists. We don't want to say well \$800 is the maximum you can charge, because in a festival like Edmonton they are getting thousands of dollars back in box-office right! It's very different than a tiny little Fringe in Northern Ontario that has 12 acts and goes over a weekend... So, we couldn't really mandate that. But what has happened organically with registration fees is that we share them... So, everybody kind of knows. So, it's like oh that's a little high. You know Michelle from Calgary, tried to jump it up too much the other year and got such a backlash from the artists... Yeah. She was heartbroken. So, the artists will basically tell us where that threshold is.

Cam: Would you agree then that a Fringe is unique to its environment? There couldn't be one fee for every Fringe... There couldn't be one size for a Fringe. You couldn't have an Edmonton in every single city of town, because it just wouldn't work.

Jill: That's right!

Cam: I don't know if you know this. But there are a couple of CAFF models in the England. Barnstaple is one. And Bill and Gill have been on the 'fringe circuit' for years. But they told me that they haven't contacted you guys. I said why? They have performed in Canada as well. The reason that they go their idea is they went to Canadian Fringes, loved it and brought it back to their little town in Devon in the U.K. I guess what I'm trying to get at here, is does CAFF have room for an international membership outside of North America?

Jill: Yes!

Cam: I mean for them it would just make sense!

Jill: So, this is the thing. It's interesting working with Holly (World Fringe) and CAFF as she came to CAFF conferences, figured out what CAFF was doing as an association, and then was like we have to do this for everybody! But, your friends in Devon should definitely get hold of us. If, they subscribe to the CAFF Model that is the only criteria we have for membership. We have 11 U.S members. Our membership fee for a small festival is \$150. So, that is what... £50?

Cam: So, you have different levels of fees?

Jill: We do... That is just to sustain the association. But then with that they get access to our conference, which is a big professional development. You end up in an entire room with people very likeminded. Because even the American festivals are subscribing to the same model. So, they are coming from that place from artist support. So, the conversation already has that understanding. We do professional development webinars and we have a whole mentorship programme that we do, because we are a national service organisation right. So, any new membership you have to do an application form and it goes through a committee and you have to ask questions and everything else. Then, we set you up with a buddy that helps you go through your first festivals, if you are a brand-new festival. If you are an established festival already then, we just pull you in to this mentorship idea. We also give travel bursaries. We will give you a travel bursary to go and visit another festival. We will help you link with a similar sized festival that is having similar issues. We call it the lifecycles. We need to put buddies that are of similar size and lifecycle. If you are emerging festival that is 3 years old in a small town... Devon is going to be very similar to some of festivals here. In terms of size and how they are working with their community... Yeah.

Cam: I've been to IndyFringe. It has that vibe completely. It has a real community feel to it, which is beautiful. It's a real nice fringe festival. But it is bizarre performing at a CAFF Fringe in the U.K. It's because the audiences are so different. British audiences are notoriously... You know when you were talking about the Artistic Director in Edmonton who was putting on British plays... Well, British people love that (laughs). They don't want to take a risk and its outside of London. But Barnstaple have begun to do this work and it's took years to encourage people to go and see other stuff and take risks.

Jill: Honestly, we could accept them as full members.

Cam: So, let's talk about model then. So, are CAFF Model Fringes primarily for the artists?

Jill: I think it supports all three (Artists, Audiences and Location). So, I envision that if each festival in CAFF had a pie chart, all CAFF festivals would have all three of those. In what

just shift a little bit in terms of how big each slice of the pie is. The touring artists have a thing in Canada, where the best festival to go to as an artist is Winnipeg and the festival to make your money is Edmonton.

Cam: Why's that?

Jill: So, Winnipeg... They are in proper theatres, all in the same area in the exchange district. They do a bit of an outdoor component. But people are there to see the theatre. So, audiences are really 'theatre-trained'. They have tapped into that regular theatre going thing... The way that they have create the support mechanism for artists... Because it's a big festival, the second biggest. Edmonton is number one, and Winnipeg is number two. So, it has the critical mass where everybody is there. They have been able to create really good spaces for artists to hang out and for the artists to be together. Really supported in great venues and really strong connection with the audience, as they are there to see shows. In Edmonton, its way more competitive. Partially because half the festival is BYOV's. It has a bigger feel to it. A big chunk of the outdoor component, there is a lot of people in Edmonton that just come for the outdoor component and wont actually go and see a show.

Cam: The outdoor component being street-artists?

Jill: Yes. Street artists, beer tents, vendors... It's a giant street party.

Cam: Yes, I see. I said to Kevin (SDIFF), your 'fringe club' is one of the best that I've ever been too. It literally is a place for everyone to go and talk, and the best place to sell tickets for your show. But, in Adelaide and Edinburgh... They don't let audiences interact with artists in the 'fringe club', they keep in separate. Which I think is absolutely crazy. I just could not believe it. But CAFF Fringes don't do that. Because like you said, the social areas are for everyone. They aren't just for artists.

Jill: That's the thing in Edmonton that people love! People love being able to see a show and then go and talk to the artists afterwards in the beer tent. That is actually part of the attraction of coming and being part of Fringe. When Edmonton went to online sales and they (audiences) didn't have to line-up for ever in the box-office... They used to do up all-door sales which means people would be standing in a line for over an hour. They would be queuing up forever and it was a big social thing. So, a lot of the 'old-fringers' really miss the loss of the line-up. But our ticket sales when they went online just exploded.

Cam: So, how many programmes does Edmonton print a year?

Jill: It's been going down. When I was there it was about 10,000. But it's be going down and down. The printed programme is now all going onto apps.

Cam: To make Fringes sustainable as CAFF are you looking at ways of doing everything on apps... Going digital... Because Orlando have got one of the best in the world?

Jill: Yeah! Well, a number of years ago we tried to do a CAFF app... We worked with an app company that would work with all of our festivals. But we found that everybody's box-office was different, so that didn't work. We are in a different situation now, as that was almost 10 years ago. So, we might be able to come around back to it again. We will see. But this is going to be a big topic of our conference.

Cam: Is CAFF an organisation where you elect someone every few years? Or, is it set until someone leaves?

Jill: No... It is an official association, so we have an AGM, bi-laws and all of that stuff. Basically, the board is an executive its four representatives. We look at that every year. But the current slate of membership has been doing it for 2 or 3 years. But everybody is really happy with the job they are doing, and no one has stepped up.

Cam: And you are administrator is that right?

Jill: I am the administrator. I am technically a contracted staff person, so I actually get paid by the association. The position started in 2016, as that was the year, we held the WFC in Montreal. So, I actually started as the person that put the WFC together in Montreal. That was the contract. Then there were two things that happened with that. We were trying to get a staff person for CAFF for a while, just to keep it all together. To keep the committees moving, to build the resources, keep the website up-to-date and help navigate the touring lottery. There is not a lot of work there, but someone needs to have it top on mind. So, what happened they realised because I was doing that anyway for CAFF... Then the other part of it was they were finally able to get funding from Canadian Heritage which is our big national funder. So, then we were basically able to get into the pot for the national service organisations. So, that level of funding basically covers the contract that I do. So, it was kind of a two-fold thing that happened there. It really made the organisation, which was very organic and very 'volunteer'.... It forced the organisation to level-up. To be more formal and to actually be able to report as a service organisation. We were heading that way anyway and the demands that were coming from new members and artists, were asking us to be more sophisticated and fourth right in how were working. So, it all kind of aligned together.

Cam: Are you in contact at all with the USAFF?

Jill: Yes!

Cam: Because not all those members are CAFF.



Jill: I would say half are not. The American ones are mostly doing European Model.

Cam: So, do you go around approaching Fringes to join?

Jill: Our focus is Canadian first. But like your friends in the U.K. If they were to come to us, we would probably accept them immediately. But we aren't looking for them. Maybe we should be...

Cam: That leads me into my last question nicely really. Which is about the CAFF touring network. I know what it is. But, talk me through the logistical terms and maybe talk about the possibility of an international CAFF touring network (outside of America). Could it be a global thing? Are artists more likely to get in that way, then by applying to Fringe separately?

Jill: No... Basically, we have between 180 and 200 applications every year. We can take between 15 and 20 people.

Cam: So, is part of the pledge in joining CAFF is you have to make yourself available for that lottery?

Jill: No... It depends entirely on your festival. This is also why we have American members. Right? So, the American members are also there to be part of the lottery. It didn't happen, but we added Tampa Bay and Fort Myers. Which are right beside Orlando. So, we are trying to get a Florida tour going. To do that, April and May are too early for Canada... But to be able to offer like a full month and a bit down there is great for the artists coming down.

Cam: Interesting! So, are you talking with your Fringes in CAFF for a policy in regard to COVID-19? Or is it up to the Fringes completely? Are you saying we advise you to do this...? Or, is it up to them?

Jill: Oh no. We are meeting weekly. What we did is we made a policy for the touring lottery. But we are suggesting that all of our festivals if they can do it, do the same thing as the touring lottery.

Cam: Okay...

Jill: We do that quite a bit actually.

Cam: Which would be for local artists to perform, rather than international?

Jill: Well yeah... Basically, what we did with the touring lottery is that they can withdraw completely and get a spot for next year. But they are going to have to redo their choices. So, the artists basically choose what their first and second preferences are, then the festivals come forward and say I have these many slots. We then match. So, they have to redo their choices, but they have secured slot in the lottery next year. Right now, all of the fees that we've collected for the touring lottery this year have already gone to the festivals, so all the refunds have to go through the festivals. But basically, what we are doing right now, is if you want to a spot for 2021, we can hold your spot, but we aren't going to refund your fee. Or, you can drop out and we will refund you your fee. So, that is what we've been recommending for best practice, with some exceptions.

Cam: Well, thank you so much Jill!

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