

Report to the Committee Administering the Lorna Stirling Estate Fund

By Peter Van Der Merwe, Alex McQueen, Alex Aldrich and Richard Pettifer
(c/o White Whale Theatre)

This document is submitted as a collective report by the students of the University of Melbourne (named above) who participated in White Whale Theatre's production of *Macbeth Rearisen* at the Edinburgh Fringe festival from 4th – 28th July 2006 with the aid of a grant from the Lorna Stirling Foundation.

1. Highlights of the Edinburgh Fringe Experience

Living theatre for the entirety of the festival was arguably the highlight for us. This included living cheek by jowl with fellow cast members and crew, seeing diverse theatre, dance, art and music performances from all over the world every day for the duration of the festival, networking with other performers, doing our own promotion work and learning about other performances by word of mouth all amounted to a total immersion in theatre. This environment exposed us to multiple acting and theatrical styles and levels of professionalism. Producing our own show was hugely challenging, but was ultimately deeply satisfying and instructive. Being in Scotland and living in Edinburgh for six weeks as performers was a fantastic way of experiencing the culture of the country and city.

2. Difficulties of the Edinburgh Experience

We all had to contend with significant financial difficulties. It cost a huge amount of money to get to the UK and to live there without employment or an income for six weeks. The cost of living was very high for us due to the unfavourable exchange rate of the Australian Dollar with the British Pound. Our lack of funds meant that we were living in extremely cramped conditions. This was stressful at times, as we had to maintain our artistic commitment and work ethic under conditions of a lack of privacy and personal space.

The schedule of life at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival is extremely gruelling. We worked very hard at rehearsing, promoting, and performing. In addition to this we would try and see at least one or two shows per day, as well as take care of living arrangements like shopping, cooking, cleaning and laundry. The combination of our timeslot being very late, the social and networking opportunities in Edinburgh being irresistible, and a gruelling performance and promotion schedule meant most of us were constantly exhausted and strained, with many of us becoming sick during the course of our twenty-one show season.

3. Personal Skills Gained

We experienced significant professional and personal development during the course of the production. For almost all of us, this was the longest season we had ever performed in and necessitated an unprecedented level of professionalism and

dedication to our craft. The exposure to a wide variety of acting styles at the festival was also very stimulating and thought provoking.

Our living arrangements were very challenging. Living at extremely close quarters with so many colleagues necessitated the development of high levels of tolerance and co-operation, but will have afforded us a more realistic view of realities of life as a performing artist

Promoting our play – usually in the form of flyering in the streets – necessitated the acquisition of new skills and a very direct and charming style to attract patrons.

4. Theatre Skills Gained and how it will affect Future Projects

For all of us this is the largest production we have ever been involved in and consequently the greatest amount of work in everything from rehearsing, to costume and set production, to performance and promotion. Participating in all this was a significant and challenging learning experience. We all had to take our acting skills to new levels of professionalism as the Edinburgh environment is very unforgiving. Dealing with this level of pressure was an important skill which will enable us to approach future projects with a higher degree of confidence and professionalism. The fact that we all had to assist with the production work also meant that we were exposed to another aspect of theatre, and not just to our craft as actors. Richard shot and produced a trailer for our show, which allowed him to exercise and develop a new set of skills.

5. How we will Share our Experience with the Greater Student Community

We will continue to be involved with theatre at the University of Melbourne and in Melbourne and Australia more broadly. In this way the skills and experiences we have gained in Edinburgh will percolate through the entire student body. We will submit an article to Farrago late this year (to be published either in the last edition for 2006 or the first edition of 2007) detailing our experiences and inspiring others who are thinking of undertaking a similar project. We will continue to offer our services to Union House Theatre as sources of information or to collaborate in others' projects. We will also widely acknowledge the supportive roles of both the University of Melbourne and the Lorna Stirling Foundation to the broader student body.