

# Fringe theatre that's far from half-baked

**A**T THIS year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the world's largest arts festival, family theatre is more important than ever.

One of the Fringe's most innovative and exciting inclusions is from north London's TwoShed Productions.

At a fund-raising bake sale held in Canonbury, Steve Pretty, co-writer and co-producer of *The Big Filling: This Time It's Personal*, talked about the challenges of writing for children and taking a show to Edinburgh.

*The Big Filling* follows the adventures of talented young pie-maker Johnny Pieman, in his discovery of a magical trans-pie-ification machine that turns laughter into pie-filling and what happens when the machine is stolen.

In the playground of Canonbury Primary School, Canonbury Road, Islington, standing behind a table covered with pies of all shapes and sizes, Pretty describes *The Big Filling*: "It sits somewhere between a murder mystery night, a Hitchcock movie and an episode of *Scooby Doo!*".

The show blends physical comedy and film noir and features a live soundtrack, something that Pretty is very enthusiastic about. "Live music was always a significant element to our [Pretty and co-writer Ben James's] vision. We've used music and sound as another character, creating sound effects as well as providing a more traditional soundtrack to the show. Live music has an immediate appeal to kids, something with the power to generate a lot of excitement."

Film noir is not a traditionally child-friendly medium. I suggest that such grown-up material may go over the heads of kids seeing the show. He admits that this is the case to a certain extent but that as a family show, they have to consider the adults watching too. "Any family show worth its salt will appeal to adults as much as children and so long as there is a balance of material that appeals to both, it's possible to make it work."

## theatre

By JO CAIRD

Pretty and James chose film noir as a theme in the first place for the atmosphere it allows them to create for the show. It works as a backdrop to the slapstick comedy and silliness that are a major feature of *The Big Filling*.

"To create a genuine 'whodunit' you need to create real suspense, and the dramatic language of film noir lends itself perfectly to creating this atmosphere."

The audience is asked to help Johnny Pieman decide what to do and the story proceeds as a result. Pretty and James have written several versions of each scene, "meaning that the show is potentially different every time".

Last month TwoShed Productions took part in a schools tour organised by the Fringe Office, where an abridged version of the show was performed in 10 Edinburgh primary schools. Following the tour Pretty and James have "significantly redrafted the script and re-worked several elements of the show" in response to the children's reviews.

However, despite all the optimism surrounding the show, the greatest challenge remains financial.

Pretty explains that they've received significant support from a company called Down to Earth Theatre Productions, but that money is still very much an issue. Which is where the bake sale comes in, a chance to raise some cash and publicise the show. Over 30 pies were on offer, the atmosphere at the sale jovial, with Dave, the actor playing Johnny Pieman, in character and costume to sell his wares.

Pretty's attitude towards writing for children, as well as the Fringe Office's strong support of the show, make me confident about the future of *The Big Filling*. And the pies are pretty good too.

● *The Big Filling: This Time It's Personal* will be running at Underbelly, August 2-27. For more information and tickets visit [www.twoshedproductions.co.uk](http://www.twoshedproductions.co.uk)



■ DAVID Moon, alias Johnny Pieman, gets pie-sonal at the Canonbury Primary School bake sale Picture: Daniel Rea

CAMDEN GAZETTE 18/7/07