Fringe theatre that's far from half-baked

T THIS year's Edinburgh
Festival Fringe, the
world's largest arts
estival, family theatre is more
apportant than ever.

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

At a fund-raising bake sale held in ighbury, Steve Pretty, co-writer and co-oducer of The Big Filling: This Time It's e-sonal, talked about the challenges of riting for children and taking a show to dinburgh.

The Big Filling follows the adventures of lented young piemaker Johnny Pieman, s discovery of a magical trans-pieughification machine that turns laughter pie-filling and what happens when the achine is stolen.

In the playground of Canonbury Primary chool, Canonbury Road, Islington, anding behind a table covered with pies of I shapes and sizes, Pretty describes The ig Filling: "It sits somewhere between a uurder mystery night, a Hitchcock movie nd an episode of Scooby Doo!".

The show blends physical comedy and Im noir and features a live soundtrack, mething that Pretty is very enthusiastic bout. "Live music was always a gnificant element to our [Pretty and corriter Ben James's] vision. We've used usic and sound as another character, reating sound effects as well as providing more traditional soundtrack to the show. ive music has an immediate appeal to ids, something with the power to generate lot of excitement."

Film noir is not a traditionally childriendly medium. I suggest that such rown-up material may go over the heads f kids seeing the show. He admits that this the case to a certain extent but that as a amily show, they have to consider the dults watching too. "Any family show orth its salt will appeal to adults as much schildren and so long as there is a balance f material that appeals to both, it's possible 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"

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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".

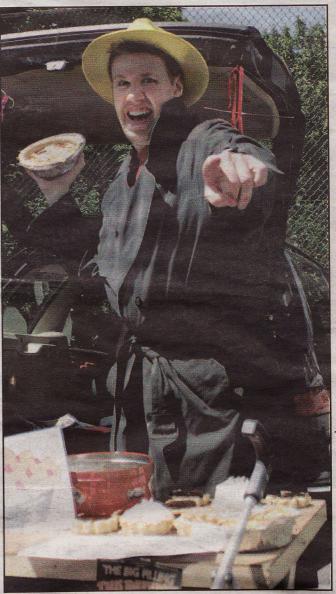
Last month TwoShed-Productions took part in a schools tour organised by the Fringe Office, where an abridged version of the show was performed in 10 Edinburgh primary schools. Following the tour Pretty and James have "significantly redrafted the script and re-worked several elements of the show" in response 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 Piesonal will be running at Underbelly, August 2-27. For more information and tickets visit www.twoshedproductions.co.uk



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