

SHONNI Doulton is taking her two-hander children's show, *Puss In Boots*, to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe this month.

A Kentish Town resident for the past 25 years, she has spent her life producing acting and singing since training at the London College of Music.

She began creating children's theatre in order to continue her acting career when her two sons were small.

"I would take them with me – so that was easy. Then, when they started school, I was always there to pick them up in the evening."

Her theatrical upbringing – Doulton was acting from the age of two – made her aware of how much children gain from drama.

She loves children and relishes the opportunity to entertain them in an intelligent way.

"I have an affinity with children, I would say. They like me because I'm small – they can identify with me. So it goes both ways."

Puss In Boots is the second in a trilogy of children's shows that Doulton plans to produce.

She adapts traditional stories, adding nursery rhymes and audience interaction, then performs in the shows herself.

Her target age group is three to seven-year-olds and Doulton makes sure the children learn something from the plays.

"There's always a moral somewhere. They've got to get something out of it – it feeds into their education."

Her first venture was an adaptation of *Rumpelstiltskin*, called *The Miller's Daughters*, which she has taken to schools across London, including Christ Church Junior in Hampstead and St Joseph's, Highgate. It sparked enthusiastic responses from teachers and pupils alike.

In *Puss In Boots*, Doulton and fellow actress Noelle R Jones play 12 different characters, frequently changing costumes to tell the well-known fairy tale.

The story is adapted to fit particular familiar songs.

"There's a rabbit in the original but I didn't know a rabbit song that the children might know. I've found a sheep instead so they can sing *Baa Baa Black Sheep*."

Doulton also makes all the costumes herself including the most recent addition to the character list – a bee.

It's no surprise then that the children at St Dominic's RC Primary in Kentish Town, where



Shonni Doulton (Cat) and Noelle R Jones (Lion and King).

Picture by Nigel Sutton

Shonni's the cat that got the cream

An actress who takes her productions into schools and nursing homes is heading to the Edinburgh Fringe, writes **Joanna Caird**

Doulton and Jones did a one-off performance at Christmas, "loved it". "They all sang along," she adds.

But the Edinburgh Fringe is a different prospect.

Doulton says she's very excited about the festival. "I've always wanted to do Edinburgh – either as a punter or perform there. It's the furthest I've ever been with a show."

Zoo Venues, *Puss's* home for the 10 days of the run, has reassured her that "children's shows go down well".

So Doulton is feeling reasonably confident – although she knows she is unlikely to do more than cover her costs.

In addition to her work for children, Doulton has an adult

play in her repertoire called *Silver Threads*, which she takes to nursing homes.

It is a "wander down memory lane" with songs. This is not exactly a money-spinner either – but that is not the point.

The important thing for the writer is that she continues to work creatively, doing what she loves.

"I could go into an office and not be poor and get builders to do my house and pay my mortgage and all the rest of it. But I'd rather be poor and do the work I want to."

□ *Puss In Boots* runs at Zoo South Side, Edinburgh, 3-11 August. For further information, visit www.zoofestival.co.uk.



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