

A Fringe under your nose... The Bodgers!

by Moray Hunter



From top:- Pete
Baikie, Gordon
Kennedy, John
Docherty and Moray
Hunter

In August 1980, Bjorn Borg had not long secured his fifth Wimbledon title, John Lennon was alive, nobody had heard of personal computers or mobile phones and moustaches were popular. At the same time, nine Edinburgh hopefuls were preparing for their first ever show on The Edinburgh Fringe. In truth, we weren't even hopeful, we were just having a laugh; the bug didn't strike until later. These are my recollections, albeit now somewhat foggy, of that first fringe venture.

Martin Hall and David Robertson, two guys I knew vaguely, had decided they wanted to do a show on the fringe. They'd been two years below me at school and were stalwarts of that year's Sixth Form end of year revue. They recruited their mate Gordon Wilson, who in turn recruited Pete Baikie, Gordon Kennedy and me. Then we nabbed my younger brother Ross and the even younger John Docherty, now known as Jack for security reasons, and finally we remembered there were women on the planet and asked our friend Elaine Buist if she'd join us, whilst trying to assure her she wasn't in any way "token".

So we were nine in all and Hall, Robertson, Docherty and myself set about writing some sketches while Baikie worked on the songs. We were still of the opinion that you needed a stirring song to open and finish the show – preferably with

people down on one knee, bouncing merrily and smiling inanely and all ending with the girl being held aloft as if she was Marilyn Monroe. It was all rather “It Ain’t Half Hot, Mum” to be honest.

We managed to muster about £800, mainly through all handing over about £80 for the privilege, and I don’t know where the rest came from. Do we owe someone?

We managed to get free rehearsal space in our local church hall which, with hindsight, was very generous of them indeed. We didn’t have a director, it was a team effort, or shambles, if you prefer. And then we checked out venues, hired the main hall in Infirmary Street Primary School, borrowed some screens from our old school and hired a couple of lights from somewhere.

Things came together somehow but the main excitement was getting ourselves some T-shirts. Having gone for the name ‘The Bodgers’ for reasons which nobody can remember, we all wandered around proudly with the name emblazoned in bright red on the front and the show title, “Bodging for Beginners” on the reverse. Back then, designing your own T-shirt was (or felt like it was) a pretty cool thing to do.

We decided on one costume for everyone to save expense and went for collarless shirts and baggy trousers with braces, which most of us had anyway, with the possible exception of Elaine. Any other costumes and props were begged or borrowed from home or friends.

Fliers and posters were designed and printed and we spent a lot of time asking local shopkeepers to put them up, and then even more time making sure we would pass our health and safety tests at the venue. Some things haven’t changed. Backdrops had to be fireproofed, a bucket of sand had to be kept backstage (and NOT be used as an ashtray) and the seats had to be tied together – presumably in case one seat made a run for it in

the event of a fire – whilst exit signs, oh bloody exit signs, had to be made.

Our first night was postponed owing to some technical difficulty, probably for laughing out loud at the fire officer's attempts to light our drapes with his lighter, but anyway, another day's rehearsal didn't do any harm, nor did it help having said that, and the crowds somehow managed to hang on for another 24 hours.

On the eventual opening night, we had a late panic about ticket sales and everyone was sent out of the building, with an hour to go to show time, to run up and down the South Bridge and Chambers street shouting "The Bodgers are coming" and hand out yet more fliers to all and sundry. Not a recognised theatrical practice but, I suppose, a warm-up of sorts.



From the top down:
John Docherty Barry
Kinghorn (lights)
Moray Hunter Gordon
Wilson Ross Hunter
Tonya Macari Pete
Baikie Gordon Kennedy

And, thankfully, all and sundry came along; well some and sundry at least. I've no idea what the exact numbers were but we had enough local support to get us through the run. It felt like a relative success, we got our money back at least, although looking at it now, in fact, even a year later, it was a rather sub-standard show. We had one sketch, a quick version of Macbeth including an exact rewind of the piece at the end, which to our surprise, initially at least, regularly brought the house down and did stand the test of time. Otherwise, those sketches were never seen again.

And nobody bothered to crit us, despite our hopeful late night

trips down to Market Street to devour The Scotsman first editions. I'm pretty sure (but not absolutely certain!) it was Joyce McMillan who informed us, years later at a Perrier Award do, that she had in fact seen our first show and decided, for reasons of clemency, not to write up her crit.

So thank you to Joyce for sparing us and thank you to Martin and David. Although they decided not to take part the following year, their curiosity having been satisfied, they started us off.

The Bodgers were indeed coming.

And they have gone on to even greater things in the fullness of the last 30 years....

Jack Docherty – most recently produced The Old Guys for BBC1.

Moray Hunter – most recently co-wrote and produced a sitcom pilot for BBC Scotland, entitled Freedom, starring David Kay.

Pete Baikie – most recently co-wrote and produced a series called X for BBC Wales, starring John Sparkes and very recently “Huw Pugh Election Special” and “Doug Strong’s Special Places”.

Gordon Kennedy – most recently seen as Little John from Robin Hood on BBC1.

Ross Hunter – working as a solicitor in Peebles.

Gordon Wilson.- theatre director based in Brussels.

Tonya Macari – was a presenter for Radio Forth. Current whereabouts unknown.

Elaine Buist, David Robertson and Martin Hall – we simply don't know.