Jessica Ruano director of Sappho promotes the show

We spotted Jessica Ruano the other day on the Royal Mile and she has written to us to explain what she was up to. She is promoting her show Sappho, but in a pretty unusual way.

"Right in the middle of the Royal Mile, I spell out the word 'Sappho' or the word 'Lesbian' with the rope we use in the show Sappho…in 9 fragments. And then I park myself behind the word and hold up flyers for the show. When people pass by, many of them reading the word, I smile at them gleefully. If they smile back, I offer them a flyer.

It is most frequently children who read aloud the word, or ask their parents to read it aloud for them. If someone says the word quite loudly, I call back 'Yay!' and pump my fist in the air. Sometimes people sit with me and we have a conversation: I tell them that the show is about Sappho, the first love poet, who lived in Ancient Greece on the island of Lesbos (hence Lesbian with a capital 'L', as, strictly speaking, Sappho was probably bisexual – not that they ever bothered with those labels). I tell them the show is an 'acrobatic love story' and share photos with them.

One man told me he had been to Lesbos and told me I had to visit. Two women holding hands came up to me and told me I had made their day, which, in turn, made my day. Tourists often take photos of me without asking, but I don't mind; I volunteer to pose for them and encourage them to post their photos on Facebook.

I'm choosing this approach to promoting the show, because I'm

finding that people are quickly becoming disillusioned by the Fringe artists who push flyers in their faces, quoting star ratings and reviews, and being generally loud and overwhelming. I'm attempting the quieter method because, this way, people come to me.

Other Fringe artists ask me why I bothered to promote the show so far in advance, since it opens a week into the festival and only plays for three days. I reply that, partly, we haven't received much media coverage for this run of the show (nobody really wants to cover/review a show that is only playing in Edinburgh for three days, when most shows are playing for a month), so I'm doing what I can to get audiences.

But it's more than that: for me, this rope thing has become a performance in itself. I engage with people directly: I make eye contact, I smile, I challenge them in my own subtle way. When they stand in front of the word 'Lesbian' and raise their eyebrows, I say 'How's my handwriting?' as though my calligraphy skills would be at the forefront of their thoughts.

Even though I don't identify as a 'lesbian' (I'm a 'date whoever I want' 'who needs labels' kinda girl), I happily play the role for the sake of publicity — especially because I don't look like a stereotypical lesbian, so that in itself may challenge people's expectations and make them question their assumptions about queer people. 'Is she actually gay…?' they might wonder. Does it matter?

Whether or not these passer-bys decide to see the show, I like to think I'm getting the words 'Sappho' and 'Lesbian' into their heads, normalizing the words, letting them stand on their own without making any real statement about them. They're just there. There they are. They exist, and they become part of our vocabulary, if only for a moment.

I wouldn't be able to do this in Russia. I wouldn't be able to do this in most countries in the world. But here, I feel safe. I don't feel threatened or ostracized or uncomfortable. I haven't experienced even one dirty look about my choice of words. People sometimes laugh or roll their eyes at me, but I just smile back, kindly yet defiantly. And I wouldn't have this privilege everywhere.

I am very lucky. We are all very lucky."

Sappho…in 9 fragments *plays Thursday, August 8th, Friday, August 9th, and Saturday, August 10th at theSpace Venue 45 on Jeffrey Street. For more information and advance tickets:* [*https://www.edfringe.com/whats-on/theatre/sappho-in-9 -fragments*](https://www.edfringe.com/whats-on/theatre/sappho-in-9-fragments)