

Top comics stage sign language shows at Fringe



Top stand up comedians Jimeoin and Daniel Sloss will stage four British Sign Language shows at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

The shows will take place at the Edinburgh International Conference (Venue 150) and members of the deaf community will be able to take advantage of the presence of experienced interpreter Catherine King who is renowned for her ability to sign with perfect comic timing.

Catherine will interpret Jimeoin's 7.30pm shows and Daniel's 10pm performances on both Friday 15 and Saturday 23 August.

Earlier today, the Edinburgh Reporter caught up with the trio at the venue and they explained the background to these shows.

Jimeoin said: "Twenty odd years ago I was in an Irish Bar in George Square Glasgow when a couple of Irish guys came approached me. One of the guys was deaf and his pal had been signing for him during the show as he watched it. I didn't realise at the time, but the Irish sign with one hand so he was able to sign with a pint in his other hand.

"My auntie was a social worker who did a lot of work with the deaf and that gave me the idea and I thought why don't we get someone to sign for the audience so we got a guy called Phil Bobbins to sign at my shows. He mainly did court work interpreting for witnesses and accused so he loved doing the shows."

After Jimeoin's interpreter left to work in England, he was introduced at Catherine by a mutual acquaintance and the pair

have been together at the Fringe ever since.



Catherine added: “When I was a teenager, I saw neighbours who were from Northern Ireland and fairly new in the street standing outside signing. In retrospect it was probably a domestic but I stood there like an idiot thinking ‘that’s beautiful.’ That encouraged me but you couldn’t become an interpreter in Scotland at that time as there was no funding for courses up here and you had to go down south but I didn’t have the funds to do that so I went to work in the Scotia Bar in Glasgow. A lot of deaf people used to come in from the social club and I would talk to them so I learned a lot of my stuff in there.

“I went and learned it as a second language and I had the feel for it from these men, but I have had the best teacher that anyone could ever have in Scotland in Rita McDaid and please print that because she is one of the best people I have ever met. She is a deaf person, a native to BSL and so generous and in fact I have often used her as a consultant for shows.

“When Phil (Bobbins) moved down south a gap opened up. I started with four nights at the Pleasance with Adam Hill and expected that would be the end of my comedy career, but the next year I was introduced to Jimmie and we took it from there.

“In Scotland interpreters are trained to do everything but eventually we narrow it down to something we are good at and I was never very good at mental health but I am quite good at comedy for some reason. I am a bit of a geek when it comes to comedy.

“Anyone who wants an interpreter can book us but we are not seeing much comedy outside the Festival being interpreted. The Glasgow Comedy Festival still haven’t picked it up but that’s because it hasn’t crossed their minds so it’s great that we

are talking about it and maybe there will be other comedians out there who will think yeah. I don't understand why every stand up doesn't do it."



Daniel agreed with Catherine's assessment about the reason that so few comedians use the services of interpreters.

He said: "For me it was just ignorance, I just didn't think about it. It never crossed my mind so for a lot of comics they just don't realise that it is an option that it can be translated into BSL and you can entertain a whole group at stand up that you previously couldn't

"The first show I did with Catherine was about four years ago at the Spiegeltent. That was my third show. I swear like a trooper on stage but I am very conscious when Catherine is there. The only times I have noticed deaf people in the audience was in the Spiegelent when a couple in the front row spent their whole time looking at Catherine and concentrating really hard and I thought 'They're not laughing, I'm dying here' but at the end they clapped and I realised how hard it must have been to keep up as I talk very fast and when I looked round Catherine was almost catching fire at the side of the stage trying to keep up. Last year we had a woman in the front row who was shouting and cheering and really loving it but she was about three seconds behind.

EICC Head of Events Karen Wood said: "As a venue we are leaders in accessibility and are delighted that two of our best loved Fringe performers are taking their show to the widest possible audience."