

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2015 – Ferdinand

Turn to nearly any page of the Fringe programme and you will see monsters, madmen, mayhem and destruction; stories of abuse, darkness, loss, anger. This culture of cruelty has become synonymous with the incredibly entitled aesthetic of our modern, anonymous, cyber disenfranchised youth. Bullying is not only on the rise, but our technology is creating new and more pervasive forms every day; it's not just for the playground anymore.

We find solace in comedy, at the expense of others of course, and we wonder why our children are so mean. We practice our acid tipped responses and rejoice when a real stinger draws tears, revelling in the short-lived power rush we feel at having degraded another human being. Or we turn that poison pen on ourselves, preferring a bit of self-deprecation to the constant barrage of cruelty, numb to the pain we see, experience and impart daily.

So what is a kind-hearted soul to do? How do you overcome the "cruel is cool" mentality of our cyber sensibilities? You write a show, a simple tale of a single Dad trying to raise his son on the ideas of kindness and empathy and you scream at the top of your lungs, "Come, see, share. This is important!" You hope that someone hears you. And you believe with all your heart that there is a place in the maelstrom of anguish for a tale of hope.

I set out to write an anti-bullying play, inspired by a beloved children's story from my childhood, The Story of Ferdinand, the story of a little bull who didn't want to fight but just wanted to sit and smell the flowers. I used this metaphor, translated it into a father and son story, the story of a father, bullied by the corporate world and the pressures

of being a single parent, the confusing messages we send to young men about being macho and strong and mean and I peppered it with all the things I have witnessed over a decade of teaching which concern me for our next generation.

I ended up with a beautiful story, a classic tale for the modern age, a conversation starter, and even an homage to all the joyous and challenging moments of parenting. I ended up with a love story, not a romance but the love of a father and husband who is just trying to do right by his son and to honour the memory of his wife. But is there a place for such a story at the Fringe? For the sake of us all, I certainly hope so.

Ferdinand runs at Greenside Venue Nicolson Square, 17-29 August, 12:40 daily (ex Sun). Box office 0131 618 6967 or online at <https://tickets.edfringe.com/whats-on/ferdinand>

Submitted by [Heather Bagnall](#)

