

Theatre company offers opportunity for actor with Down's Syndrome

A Scottish theatre company is embarking on nationwide search to find a talented actor with Down's Syndrome to join them on a three-week Scottish tour this autumn.

Auditions will be held in Edinburgh in early August to find an actor to join the cast of Suzanne Lofthus' play Downs With Love, which has an actor with Down's Syndrome in the leading role.

The successful candidate will understudy leading actor Abigail Brydon and will play the lead role in at least three performances.

Suzanne Lofthus, artistic director of Cutting Edge Theatre, said: "This will a wonderful opportunity for an actor who has Down's Syndrome. The person who picks up this role will probably not be a trained actor, but is likely to be a keen member of an amateur drama group.

"They will join our professional cast and will train to take on a leading role. They need to be able to step in if Abigail is unable to perform, and will also play the lead in the play in three performances.

Lofthus wrote Downs With Love after meeting Abigail Brydon, who has Down's Syndrome, in a drama class she was teaching and

developed the play with her help.

After dates on the Fringe in 2017, it toured to ten venues across Scotland in 2018. Critics described it as “creative, humorous and entertaining” and “a powerful step forward for people with Down’s Syndrome in Scotland”.

Now, the play has secured Creative Scotland funding for a new production which will tour to 14 venues, including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Newcastle. It is also being developed as a script for television.

It follows the story of Beth, a vivacious and capable young woman in her early 30s who falls for the local pub singer. But complications arise when he falls in love with her support worker: can a disabled person really have the same hopes and dreams as everyone else?



Cutting Edge Theatre’s play “Downs with love” on tour.

photographs Alan Peebles

Earlier this year, Cutting Edge Theatre received a major funding award from the ScottishPower Foundation to develop opportunities for disabled people of all ages to train in performing arts.

Cutting Edge launched its Young Company in 2021, offering learning disabled actors aged 18-25 the chance to train with theatre professionals alongside their peers, and Cutting Edge Youth Theatre, for 14-18-year-olds, will launch in the autumn.

Lofthus said: "We need to see more positive representations of disabled people on our stages and screens. To do that, we need to have more disabled actors, and therefore we need more training opportunities.

"Hopefully, we reached a point where we will not see able-bodied actors playing disabled people in films and TV shows because there are disabled actors who can play those roles."

She says things are gradually improving with actors such as Tommy Jessop in *Line of Duty* and Sarah Gordy in *The A Word* gaining higher profiles in the industry. In 2020, American actor Zack Gottsagen, who starred opposite Shia LaBeouf in the film *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, became the first Down's syndrome actor to present an Oscar.

"It is slow, but we have seen a rejection of the idea of able-bodied actors playing disabled people. The industry needs to change and we, along with a number of other organisations, are trying to change our industry in Scotland to make it more accessible to disabled people."

Anyone interested in auditioning for Downs With Love should contact Suzanne Lofthus on cuttingedge21@btinternet.com