

Scottish play at The Studio challenges perceptions on matters of love and disability

Powerful play will challenge audience perceptions. Actor with Down's Syndrome stars in a play coming to Edinburgh next week.

A young Scottish actor who has Down's Syndrome takes the starring role in a play about love and diversity which begins a tour of Scotland this week.

Abigail Brydon, 28, from Fife plays the leading role in Downs With Love, a moving play which challenges perceptions about disability and relationships.

The production, by Edinburgh-based Cutting Edge Theatre and supported by Creative Scotland, opens on Wednesday at Craignish Village Hall in Argyll, before travelling the length and breadth of Scotland in the next three weeks with a performance at The Studio on 19th.

Abigail plays Beth, a happy, confident young woman who quickly takes a shine to Mark (Calum Barbour) a singer in the local pub. But Mark is already falling for Tracy (Rachel Still), Beth's support worker.

Now Beth loves Mark loves Tracy, and everything is getting complicated. But surely everyone has the right to fall in love?

Writer and director of *Downs With Love*, Suzanne Lofthus, said: "I want to challenge perceptions about disability. Can we accept a couple, one of whom has Down's and one does not, and if not, why does that make us uncomfortable?"

Touring during Down's Syndrome Awareness Month, the play comes at a time when issues around disability and relationships are being aired on prime time TV in the new drama series 'Ralph and Katie' on BBC1.

The show stars Leon Harrop and Sarah Gordy, both professional actors with Down's Syndrome, as a young couple beginning their life together.

Suzanne worked with Abigail on *Downs With Love* to incorporate some of her life experiences, from the discrimination she faced at an amateur drama group to her love of *Coronation Street* and the musical 'Phantom of the Opera'.



Abigail said: "Parts of the show are based on my experience. It's important to show people what it's like for someone with

a disability because the same things might happen to other people.”

Abigail studied Acting and Performance at Fife College, and met Suzanne after joining the INSPIRE programme, created by Cutting Edge Theatre to offer drama training to young disabled adults.

On this tour, Abigail is joined by Alexandra Bald, 18, who also has Down’s Syndrome, making her professional acting debut. She will understudy the role of Beth and take the lead in three performances.

Alexandra said: “We are representing people with Down’s in the play. It’s about what it’s like to live with Down’s. There are a lot of lines to learn but I’m really enjoying it.”



Since launching its INSPIRE programme ten years ago, Cutting Edge Theatre has pioneered projects to help learning disabled people access drama training. Earlier this year, the company received a major grant from the ScottishPower Foundation to

develop their work.

Cutting Edge Young Company was launched last August, for young learning disabled adults aged 18-25, following this year by Cutting Edge Youth Theatre, for learning disabled young people aged 14-18. There are also drop-in classes for adults and under-12s.

Suzanne Lofthus said: "Things are better than they used to be but there's still a long way to go. We need to see more positive representation of learning disabled people on our stages and screens – but we can't just talk about it, we have to do it.

"Abigail and Alexandra are out there doing just that, telling a real life story, challenging the audience about their perceptions and also showing the world what they can do."

Downs With Love includes integrated BSL interpretation in every performance with actor and BSL interpreter Rachel Amey joining the cast to play Julie, Beth's confidant. Audio files to help visually impaired audience members are available on the Cutting Edge Theatre [website](#).

**Wednesday 19 October – The Studio,
Edinburgh Festival Theatre at 7.30pm**

