

The atmosphere in the Storytelling Centre is fizzing with tension and excitement, but it's not my arrival for my work placement that everyone is excited about, for this is performance day at Strange Town. This brilliant theatre company for young people, from ages 8 to 18, gives you the chance to work in a professional theatre company and perform in professional venues, in original plays written by extremely talented young writers and often devised by the cast themselves. I was looking for a work placement that wasn't deskbound or requiring the role of runner to Starbucks. My sister, always overlooked in school drama productions, had joined Strange Town a few years ago and has loved every minute of it. No-one here is a bit player or a chorus member; everyone has a role to play.

First, there was a technical run-through of one of the 11 –14 years old shows. Methodical and necessary, all the young actors patiently took part. Then came the dress rehearsal where the play truly came to life. I was impressed with how smooth and well rehearsed everything was; months of preparation had clearly gone into today's work.

I took photos of the entire process and continued as the next group arrived and the rehearsals for the next play took place. It's an intense process, the atmosphere good humoured but serious. By 7pm, it's been a long day, but now families and ticket-holders arrive and the tension mounts as the realisation that this is real theatre hits everybody. At the beginning of each play, the Strange Town logo appears and the theme tune (from *The Magnificent Seven* as I later found out) booms out to yells of applause from the audience. It's clear that despite a lack of funding, this organisation is faithfully supported and encouraged. The plays are funny and thought provoking. Something special happens here, something transformative and important to everyone involved.

Saturday's performance day is more relaxed with the first performance in the bag. The actors can enjoy their second performance on a sunny Saturday evening. But drama occurs backstage as well as onstage as two hours before curtain up, a main cast member of one of the plays pulls out and another cast member has to adapt her lines as well as learn new lines. Taught by theatre professionals, she does brilliantly.

Sunday is a real surprise. I arrive at 10am and I'm amazed to find the 8 – 10 year old cast members setting up the props and the stage without anyone telling them and preparing for their performance. They do team exercises to get everyone in the performance zone. The play is entertaining, hilariously funny and brilliantly acted. How encouraging it is to see these young children with a real knowledge and love of the theatre. This is the knowledge and passion imparted by Strange Town. More encouraging still is that people from the 18 year old group are there to help out. On Sunday evening, there is a sadness that this is all over for another season, but you can bet that everyone involved will be back next season.

The final two days of my placement are very different and are based at Strange Town's office in Out of the Blue, Drill Hall – an arts centre in Leith. Which houses various creative businesses with a café and rehearsal space. It's a very jolly place where there's always something happening. The Strange Town office itself is

relatively small consisting of only a few small rooms, one of which is an equipment room filled with props which have been used in previous plays, including some marvelously detailed handmade items which must have taken someone days to make. My first job here is to help tidy up after all the shows that have been recently happening and to go and pick up a few things that Strange Town had ordered for a show that takes place in the next few days. This is all part of the preparation that goes into every performance. It's not all about the excitement of the show, there's a lot of groundwork involved too.

On my final day here at Strange Town I've been tasked with sorting through all the photos that I took during the technical and dress rehearsals at the weekend. I also help to paint the stage set for the final play of the season, which the oldest group would be performing later that week.

Intensive, pressured, eventful, I've thoroughly enjoyed my time working with Strange Town. It felt good to mix with others from schools across Edinburgh and I'm full of admiration for the young people who have given their time to be involved in this process, and inspired by Steve, Ruth and everyone from Strange Town who are totally committed to bringing out the best that the young people have to offer. Strange Town is a good place to be, pay a visit to one of their performances and see for yourself...

Oliver Quinn, 16

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