

purebuxton

Fringe on top

Event takes on a year-round significance

It started with a handful of entries, a clay pigeon shoot and the blessing of local celebrity Tim Brooke-Taylor.

Thirty-two years on, Buxton Fringe is a recognised platform for burgeoning talent, an established part of the festivals circuit and increasingly a springboard for big names on their way to Edinburgh – last year's acts included Radio 4's Ed Reardon and acclaimed comedian Isy Suttie.

The Fringe has grown massively over the last decade, making it one of the biggest events of its kind in the UK. Music alone mushroomed by 33% last year; other recent additions include the Tattoo and Buxton Arts Trail – set to be a major attraction this year.

Each summer the Fringe moves into action like a well-oiled machine, taking over church halls, pubs and the odd front room as scores of artists and performers head for the hills of Buxton.

And though the festival season is still a few months off, a small band of enthusiastic volunteers is already working furiously behind the scenes to ensure the success of the 2012 event.

Their leader is Stephanie Billen, a freelance journalist who got 'sucked in' to the Fringe when she moved to Buxton in 1998. This is her fourth year as chair and she has managed to recruit husband Dan Osborne too, to design and oversee the organisation's smart new website.

Fringe planning starts in September with a round-the-table debrief. Then various sub-committees take on responsibility for planning the programme, securing venues, organising Fringe Sunday and working on community projects...

Workshops are being organised in schools – last year Buxton Juniors made a giant orange fringe to go around the bandstand – and performers are being encouraged to put on shows in care homes and youth clubs.

Anyone can enter the Fringe: it's an open access festival, with no rules and no censorship

"It's about building up the audience of tomorrow, but there's also an altruistic, nobler thing about getting people to enjoy the arts," says Stephanie.

Anyone can enter an event in the Fringe; it's an open access festival, with no rules and no censorship. The only event that has ever been vetoed was a play about Myra Hindley – turned away by the venue, not the committee.

Prospective performers or exhibition organisers must first find a suitable venue, work out timings and ticket prices and check out insurance and copyright restrictions. Then they simply enter online, pay the fee (£45 - £80, depending on timing) and come up with a 50-word announcement for the programme.

But the Fringe is much bigger than just those showcasing their talents. Others do their bit by joining the committee, becoming a Friend, or reviewing shows to help judge the winners.

"We have such a range of stuff. I defy anyone to look at it and not find something they're interested in," says Stephanie ■

To get involved call (01298) 79351 or visit www.buxtonfringe.org.uk

