

Supporting Graduate Businesses

The Ruffled Umbrella Company

Overview

The Ruffled Umbrella Company, formed by graduates from Bath Spa University's School for Music & Performing Arts, has won a 15-month residency that will be a foundation for launching their theatre business into a sustainable and profitable future.



Ruffled Umbrella receiving award from Head of School for Music & Performing Arts

About the Project

Bath Spa University's "Launchpad" scheme is a pioneering opportunity in 2009 for two graduate performance companies per year to win a 15-month residency that will lead to the launch of professional theatre companies that are self-sufficient businesses for the longer term. The graduate entrepreneurs will be expected to create and sell their own show for a tour in the South West and to perform it at the Edinburgh Festival in 2010. The graduates are drawn from final year Dance, Drama Studies and Performing Arts students at the University.

The Ruffled Umbrella Company won their residency in competition with six other companies, submitting a strong business plan proposal and making a highly credible presentation to a judging panel of industry experts, senior academics and the Business Support Office.

The Ruffled Umbrella Company is a platform for young actors and directors to produce their own work. It produces fresh and exciting theatre that engages their audience, literally bringing them into the world of their plays. They do this in two main ways - by using event theatre and site specific theatre. The company creates a changing ensemble for each show. It has resident members, who are used to working with each other, and brings in a range of new actors, directors, designers, artists, or writers for each project as required.

Fast Facts

- The Ruffled Umbrella Company is a platform for young actors and directors to produce their own work.
- The Launchpad Scheme is one of the first of its kind for a UK university
- The residency provides support in the form of rehearsal and office space, technical and resource materials, and specialist mentoring and business training.

Benefits

The Ruffled Umbrella Company received, from the University's Business Support Office, a prize of £750 to put towards marketing their business and sponsorship onto Business Link's three day course in starting and running a business.

The residency provides support in the form of rehearsal and office space, technical and resource materials, and specialist mentoring and business training. The package amounts to more than £10,000 of in-kind support. Within this framework the team is able to form the company, create its identity, and make and tour their work.

Outcomes

The Launchpad Scheme is one of the first of its kind for a UK university. It fills a gap in the market, as traditional models of university 'incubation' support for start-up businesses do not lend themselves to the needs of the performing arts or creative businesses.

The Ruffled Umbrella team so impressed one of the judges of the University's Business Plan Competition, that they were offered £250 from her business to spend specifically on their marketing material and PR. Marketing of the business has started with the creation of their website, outlining the team and its repertoire. www.ruffledumbrella.co.uk

The Ruffled Umbrella Company has a production of its new adaptation of 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2009, which they will subsequently be touring. They will also be working on educational projects, as well as launching workshops in 'Audition Techniques for New Actors', which are specifically tailored for drama school auditions and young adults aged 16-18 years.

The company has already begun to build a repertoire of workshops in improvisation, script work, site specific theatre, character work and ensemble building. Additionally, they have been conducting workshops for the Widening Participation department of the University and have been booked to run workshops along with a performance in Kafe, a charity weekend festival at the Chapel Arts Centre in Bath.

The University's Entrepreneur-in-Residence is giving the company free one-to-one sessions to discuss their business development plans in relation to their creative aspirations.

As part of their residency, Ruffled Umbrella will 'giving back' benefits to the University. For example, undergraduate students will be able to act in their productions and will be offered the opportunity to tour with the work, as well as performing and running schools projects. This will give students a great way to experience and practice professional theatre and gain examples for the CV, bridging the gap between final year and entry into the industry after graduation.

Perspective

"I and the other members of the judging panel were thoroughly impressed by the entrepreneurial spirit of all the finalists. The winners presented innovative plans for their companies and we are excited to work with them and help them flourish and grow."

Emma Gersch
Senior Lecturer
Drama & Performing Arts
Bath Spa University

