

# Move on the Cha-Cha's

Written & Performed  
by Diane Ripstein



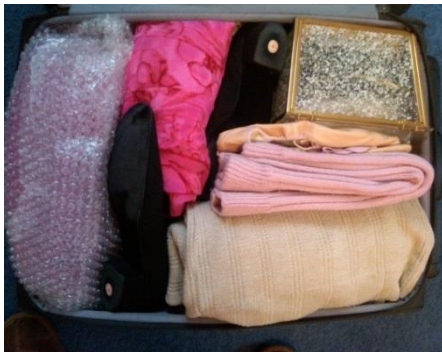
July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 leaving from Boston's Logan Airport to fly to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe via Amsterdam. Nervous, anxious and with no voice. Don't let the smile fool you. I was desperately hoping my laryngitis of several weeks would clear up before the show opened (it did).



My first glimpse of the Edinburgh venue where I was to perform, TheSpace@Surgeons' Hall, was the lineup of 79 different show posters stapled onto the iron trellis fence along the sidewalk outside. And there I was! Ta-daah. The iron garbage receptacle was, sadly, not movable. After every heavy rain (there were many), the posters disintegrated and had to be stapled up all over again by the intrepid production crew at Surgeons' Hall. There was a fair amount of lobbying for the best spots.



Four theaters were carved out of the various rooms at Surgeons' Hall. All the pipe and drape, seats, lights, and sound equipment is trucked in to create hundreds of venues like this around the city for the three-week festival. Then it is all struck and disappears. This is Theatre 3, a small black-box and my home away from home, from 13:00-14:00 (1-2 pm) daily. That's my late Father's sweater draped over the chair center stage and my first ballet tutu stage right. Cozy and intimate.



I took the bus from Penicuik, where I was staying, into Edinburgh daily (about a one-hour commute) bringing everything I needed for the show packed in a small, wheeled suitcase on which I tied a large, pink, tulle bow. It all had to fit in: shoes, props, costume bits, lights for backstage, etc. Worried that I might forget something, I printed out this picture and kept it in the suitcase, packing everything in exactly the same spot every day. Organization was key, as there was only a 5-minute window to set up (the “get-in”) for each performance!



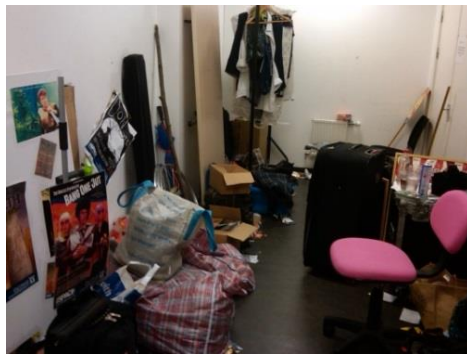
Each show that used Theatre 3 was given a small area of storage space in the wings, marked off with white tape on the floor. After our forty-minute tech rehearsal, in which we got into the venue for the first time, set all the cues for lights and sound, and I tried to figure out how best to arrange my teeny-tiny “backstage” area... it was show time. Here’s a ticket stub from the very first day.



And here’s the look of relief after I completed that first show. Lots more posters were displayed here in the lobby. There was also a huge table where shows could put out piles of flyers (same as the posters, only smaller). Space was always at a premium; we zealously guarded and replenished our piles of flyers at venues all around the city.



The daily box office returns were called “takings,” and you were given your takings in a wee small envelope, hopefully enough to buy lunch. This was my first packet, which actually was quite substantial, representing a few days’ performances.



Four theatres each running shows all day long meant a lot of performers with a lot of stuff. Musical instruments, oversized papier-mâché animal heads, boxes of flyers, raincoats, boots, costumes and actors in varying stages of dress and undress. We all squeezed into and out of this one space, known as the Cloakroom, which quickly began to smell like your favorite high school locker room. Did I mention that it rained every day?



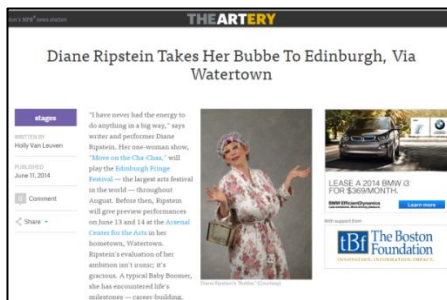
With the intensity of competition to get bodies into the seats (3200 different shows, all doing multiple performances), marketing and social media was an everyday effort. My brilliant 20-year-old stage manager, Marysa, created a quickie video on her iPad. The Bubbe had incredible fun taking to the streets of Edinburgh, where she was a natural. People didn’t bat an eye.



Fringe flyers are the most important marketing tool, and distributing them by “flying” was another part of daily life. Walking the streets in full Bubbe garb, I interacted with anyone and everyone I could, trying to engage in quickie conversations while handing out this flyer. Most people were really good sports about it all, in the spirit of the Fringe. The Bubbe did draw the line, however, at flying in the rain.



The Royal Mile, closed to traffic, and thronged with huge crowds of visitors, was like a giant street fair, times a thousand. A cappella singing groups, bagpipe players, living statues, mimes, men in kilts on stilts, fire eaters, hula-hoopers, buskers, hawkers, performers doing monologues, and thousands of flyers.



I was very grateful to receive some fun press from unlikely places. This interview article on **WBUR's The ARtery** website (WBUR is Boston's National Public Radio station) ran before my preview performances at the Watertown Arsenal Center for the Arts in June. “From youth to mid-age, the rhythm of life keeps pulling me back to the dance floor.” You can read the full article [here](#).



And in Edinburgh, I was interviewed by the **The Jewish Telegraph UK**, a British-style tabloid with Jewish content! They threw everything into the piece, including “Diane attended a Conservative shul growing up in Montreal and went to Hebrew School.” The sweetest thing was a few elderly Jewish couples who came to meet me and see the show, with the torn-out newspaper article in their hands.



My Edinburgh adventure was filled with history. There are performances in every imaginable nook and cranny of the city: municipal buildings, university buildings, hotels, restaurants, bars. At this magnificent University of Edinburgh Library (first built in 1642), I saw [Exhibit B](#), a brilliant, disturbing and wildly controversial installation piece.



And I discovered a piece of my personal history, as well. While researching how to properly spell “Les Feux-Follets,” a Canadian dance company I danced with when I was a young ‘un, I found this video clip of me performing on the Ed Sullivan Show (thanks, YouTube). I had never seen this before! You can watch the video [here](#). (green hair ribbon and red shawl over blue top).



I met the most diverse and fascinating people, including the fabulous Miriam Margolyes, grand dame of British Theatre, award-winning veteran of stage and screen (and Professor Sprout in the Harry Potter movies). “Move on the Cha-Cha’s” was one of the shows Miriam picked to see and she told me, “You made me laugh and you made me cry and the work you did on your father was brilliant.” Wow. Miriam was generous and direct, we shared conversation and tea, met up to attend another show, she told others about my performance, introduced me to colleagues and friends. I admit it: I was stage struck!



On August 31st I landed back at Logan Airport, tired and elated. What a joyous time. What an extraordinary experience. Thank you for the encouragement and support that got me there and safely home again. It's a wrap.