

This is a letter to people starting out and wanting to make DIY theatre. Wanting to know what it feels like to make DIY theatre. A letter in which I can share with you my experience of what DIY theatre is, has been, and should be. I hope there is at least one sentence here to kick-start your own development.

“When you walk onstage tonight to bring the noise, treat it like it’s all we have”

Bruce Springsteen, SXSW Keynote Speech, 15/3/12

DIY THEATRE IS

being electrocuted more than once.

filling your studio with junk and trying everything, until that room is only full of *essential* junk.

wiring your CD player that you got when you were 16 to the onstage sound desk.

turning a paint shop into a venue.

the most exciting way of making theatre.

building the set to the dimension of your car so that you can drive your show to the next town. To any town.

playing an impromptu music set to an audience because midway through the show your CD player that you got when you were 16 burnt out and now your mate has to run five blocks away to get a replacement.

the hardest and most rewarding way to make theatre.

making new friends: battery operated lights, household lamps, extension cords, cable ties, gaffa, hot glue guns, cardboard, car speakers. These are your friends now.

driving through the night, unpacking a show, setting it up, delivering your all, packing it up and driving onward to do it all again, just the same but different every time.

having a drill on stage incase any of the set falls apart mid show.

fostering relationships with people, theatres and Universities who are willing to champion your work and support your development. These relationships are so important to your company’s longevity.

shutting down a whole docklands site because you were performing in a shipping container and cut through mains power with a cleaver. Should have used a prop cleaver.

ripping off set designs that you saw in main stage theatres and re-designing them with \$500.

creating an environment where the audience and you are complicit.

having theatre programmers not take you seriously, and learning not to take it personally but use it as fuel to win them over.

thinking OFF the grid. (The Suitcase Royale used motorbike batteries to power our latest show, *Zombatland*. This was conceptually effective since the show is set in a low-budget caravan park, and saved cash and time as those batteries are rechargeable too. During one of our seasons the theatre lost power and we were the only production still able to run that night.)

inviting your heroes to see your work. (Bruce Springsteen is invited to each season of The Suitcase Royale's work.)

saying "what's that buzz" 1 minute before your first sold out audience is about to enter.

building a community and network of artists from all over the world.

fixing "that buzz" 20 seconds before your first sold out audience is about to enter.

researching different council's throw out days and driving through the suburbs collecting other peoples junk to build into your set. Old Home Entertainment speakers, fittings, leather suitcases, household lamps: other peoples cast-offs have become The Suitcase Royale's props and sets for years.

sharing beers with the audience after a show and getting feedback directly from them.

late night gigs with musicians from all over the world.

having reviewers not understand you because they can't pigeonhole your work: "are they a band? A theatre company? A comedy troupe? A bunch of amateurs?"¹

selling beers at the show to fund your petrol money while on tour.

¹ Guardian online article "Is this amateur night": <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/aug/10/edinburgh-comedy-notebook-amateur-bungling>

learning how to wire together your own lighting rig.

booking your own tours and thinking outside the box as to where you can perform.

learning how to use spreadsheets.

having an audience member come up to you on the street and hand you a brand new replica prop. They were in the show last night when you broke the original.

making music, writing music and recording music. Being a band.

becoming your own lighting designer, operator, actor, set designer and musician. Take the time and effort to acquire technical skills. The more self-contained you are when you are first starting out the more you can make and tour.

having a Chihuahua run on stage mid-show, because the Chihuahua lives in the space where you are performing. Then making the Chihuahua star of the next scene.

multi-tasking. (In our shows the lighting desk is usually by my drum-kit. I hold the sticks in my mouth or drum one-handed when I need to change the lighting state.)

sacrificing summer to make a great show in a black box.

making more from less (cash). Production values don't make a show. It comes down to sweat and craft. Having no money can be the best thing for a production because it forces you to find ways of building the grand images from nothing.

OK if it's accessible.

a party that you initiate, where everyone is in the space together for this small time and what ever happens on that particular night only happens on that night.

stealing from every artform.

doing it yourself – in which 'it' is everything. Not just the creative but also the practical. Be your own producer, treasurer, grant-writer, driver, and PR. And anything else you need to make the art and give it to its audience.

DIY THEATRE IS

treating it like it's all you have, and then bringing the noise.

Joseph O'Farrell (JOF)

Credit: Joseph O'Farrell (JOF)

BIOGRAPHY:

Joseph O'Farrell (JOF) is a multi-art performer, producer, curator, musician and lecturer from Melbourne, Australia.

He is a founding member of Junkyard theatre company, The Suitcase Royale; a trio that has been touring new Australian theatre works nationally and internationally since 2004.

The Suitcase Royale coined the term *Junkyard Theatre* to describe their work. A seamless combination of live music, live operation and image-based theatre which is largely constructed from second hand materials and junk. The term is now broadly used in Australia and Europe to describe theatre work with this ethos.

Joseph's continues to explore these principles in his solo practice and has extended it to community and artist led events. His ability to work across genres has also allowed him to inspire young and emerging performance makers around the globe as a lecturer and workshop leader.

www.thesuitcaseroyle.com / www.jofmakesart.com