

Ice ice baby

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95 shows, all performed from an in ice cream van Mark Brown looks at a cool contribution to Glasgow 2014

Glasgow's Commonwealth Games will soon be upon us but, even before they begin, crowds will be flocking to the Queen's Baton Relay and the opening events of the Culture 2014 programme of arts, entertainment and festivals.

A notable and inspired part of the cultural programme is The Pokey Hat, a family show performed from inside an ice cream van by acclaimed children's theatre company Grinagog. Artistic director Clare McGarry promises a "fast-paced" 30-minute piece, with free ice cream, as the show's travels mirror the Scottish route of the Queen's Baton between June 14 and July 23. The ice cream van will then continue rolling into various communities until August 3. All told, Grinagog will perform no fewer than 95 shows.

The production has, McGarry explains, been a year-and-a-half in the planning. In entitling it The Pokey Hat, the company was of course referencing the distinctively-shaped ice cream cone. In devising the piece, they have drawn on a considerable amount of research carried out in the east end of Glasgow. Interviewing hundreds of people in the area, Grinagog discovered that ice cream evokes all manner of memories. From family outings in the summer to the arrival of Italian migrants in Scotland, and the birth of the many Italian cafés and ice cream parlours, the ice cream van is an evocative symbol.

As McGarry readily acknowledges, the more cynically minded might point out the darker side to the history of the ice cream van in Glasgow's east end. Indeed, Grinagog did toy with the idea of making a humorous reference to the infamous Ice Cream Wars of the 1980s; only to realise that there's no way to really make those violent events palatable for a light-hearted family show.

Needless to say, the piece has found much greater inspiration in nostalgia, and there was plenty of that to be found during the company's research. For instance, one interviewee is the granddaughter of the Italian migrant who set up the Rendezvous Café on Duke Street in the east end of Glasgow; a café which is now to be found in the city's Riverside Museum as a piece of living history.

The show - which will be performed by Ross Allan, Isabelle Joss and Louise Montgomery - will comprise three short sections, known collectively as "the pokey hat experience". The first will be a scene on a traditional Glasgow tenement street; the second will take us on a family trip to Rothesay (complete with puppets); and the final part will evoke an old Glasgow Italian café.

The Pokey Hat marks a new departure for Grinagog. Their previous work (including the much-lauded comic piece *The Edibles*, which is nominated in this year's Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland) has been aimed at young children, whereas their new show is designed for the whole family. There are, McGarry acknowledges, elements in the stories that will appeal more to nostalgic adults. However, she is confident that Grinagog knows how to pitch every aspect of its show to children.

"For us it's about the style of the storytelling," she explains. "There's lots of music, lots of interaction and lots of comedy, which will keep children engaged."

So, if you're out and about at any of the Queen's Baton Relay events, you'd be well advised to get there early and prepare to give it big licks.

Tour details for *The Pokey Hat* can be found at grinagog.co.uk