

A Week in Munsbach by Fiona Mulhern

A Week in Munsbach takes months of careful planning, fifty enthusiastic amateur actors and directors, and four talented, professional drama tutors, assemble them in a chateau in Munsbach secluded from the outside world, and see what happens. The Munsbach experience is one of constant experimentation.

This was the twelfth time New World Theatre Company organised the European Summer School and they did a fantastic job. The location is ideal, a beautiful manor set in its own grounds in the heart of the country. We were very lucky with the weather and a lot of the activities took place outside under clear blue skies. Most of the students live in and a close sense of community is soon created. People come back year after year from places as far flung as Sweden and North America. Others came from the UK, Switzerland, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, and of course Luxembourg.

A carefully devised timetable accounts for practically every waking hour. The day begins with a group warm up session after breakfast that brings the whole school together. Students then split into smaller groups and take part in different workshops, pausing for lunch and dinner and finishing at 9pm each evening. They gather every evening in the lively student run bar, and there are two special evenings of poetry and music as well as a picnic and trip to Luxembourg town mid week for a much needed break. For many the temptation to stay up late night after night is impossible to resist.

Getting your head around the intricacies of the timetable can be confusing at first but its logic eventually becomes apparent. It has evolved after years of feedback from students and tutors to become something very unique.

The workshops focus on the creative process rather than on a finished production. The range of choices is adapted to suit all tastes. One project works on developing "skills" such as writing, delivering comedy, acting in different styles and directing. A second explored different themes - the theatrical possibilities offered by the information revolution, recurring themes in turn of the century theatre, how actors can "transform" a moment in a play with voice and movement and how Brecht's work was to influence musical theatre. A third project had the students in the directing workshop each taking a small group and working with them as directors. The workshops provide opportunities to explore and experiment that are not available when a real production is being staged. The timetable includes "shares" and "swops" that allow students to try out what other groups were doing in their workshops and sample their work in progress.

You don't need to have any acting or directing experience to take part in Munsbach. All that is needed is a willingness to participate wholeheartedly. Lifelong friendships are struck up and the last day involves a lot of emotional farewells. The atmosphere lends itself to self-discovery and exploration as well as a lot of fun and laughter