

DST FIRST NIGHT

Epiphany and Easter Round-Up

2016/17



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{ISSUE 2} AUGUST 2017

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MESSAGE TO ALUMNI

Over to you... we want to hear what you're up to!

Want to be a part of DST legacy and receive a number of exciting exclusives? Then why not take your seat in The 100 Club, which includes regular updates on DST and your name fixed on a plaque in The Assembly Rooms Theatre.

If you have any questions, want information on being part of our active alumni network or would like to be included in our next issue, drop us an email at theatre.coordinator@durham.ac.uk.

EDITOR'S NOTE



Hello and welcome to the second edition of DST First Night's newsletter.

My name is George Rexstrew and I have just completed my year-long stint as First Night Editor on the DST Committee. Once again, it has been great fun putting this together and I must say a huge thank you to all those who have contributed. I'd also like to wish Lucy Knight (next year's First Night Editor) and the rest of the incoming committee the very best of luck for the 2017/18 academic year.

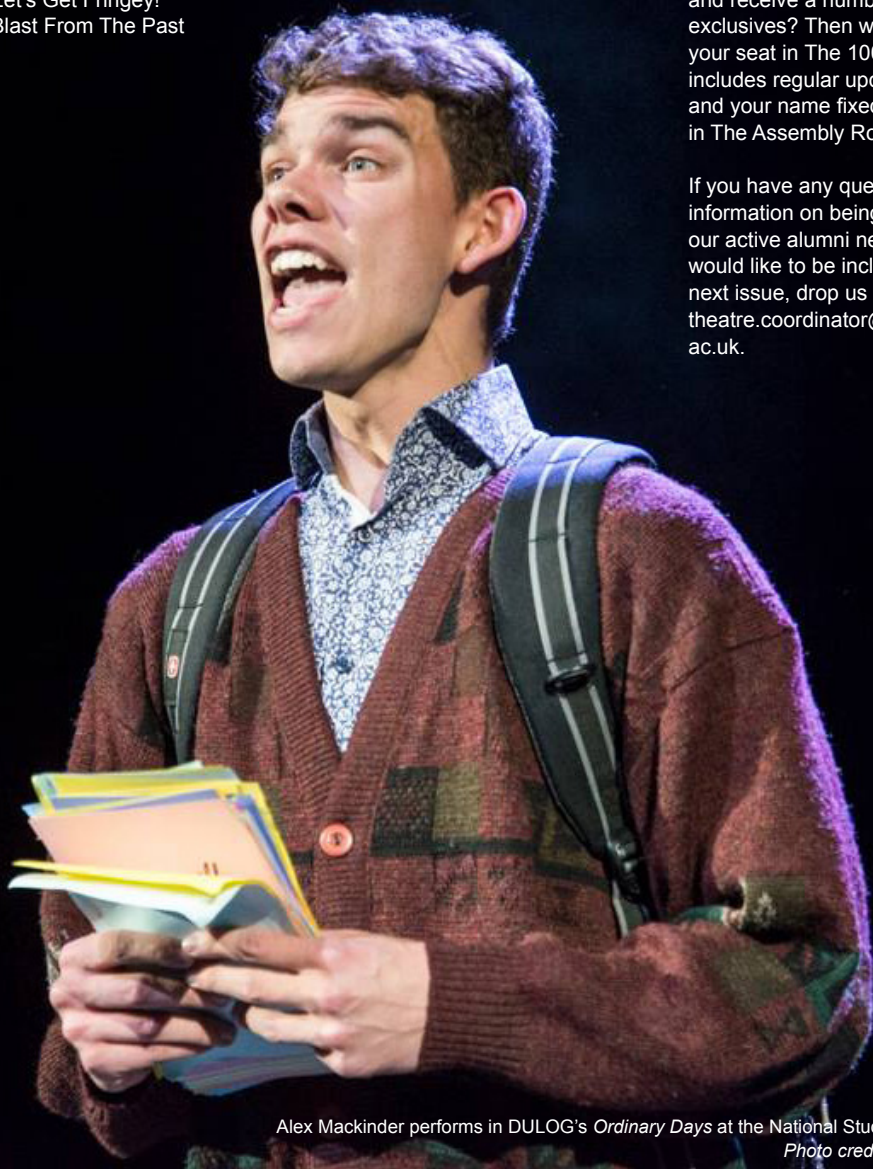
With over 80 shows performed over the past three terms, DST staging their very own Gala show and success at the National Student Drama Festival, it has been yet another fantastic year for Durham Student Theatre.

This edition mostly features recap pieces on events from the last two terms, specifically Durham Drama Festival, NSDF, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and productions in The Assembly Rooms Theatre. We also spoke with ex-Hild Bede student Louisa Fitzgerald, who discusses her time at Durham, as well as offering some great advice to aspiring writers.

Enjoy flicking through this issue, and I hope you are all enjoying the summer months. If you are part of our alumni network, please do get in touch and let us know what you're up to... We'd love to hear from you!

All the best,

George



Alex Mackinder performs in DULOG's *Ordinary Days* at the National Student Drama Festival. Photo credit to Aenne Pallasca.

FEATURES

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- 08 HURRAH FOR HULLYWOOD! *Kate Barton blogs her experience at this year's National Student Drama Festival.*
- 10 LET'S GET FRINGEY! *Take a look at the 10 DST shows travelling up to Edinburgh Fringe Festival.*
- 11 BLAST FROM THE PAST *We catch up with Durham alumna Louisa Fitzgerald.*

With thanks to: Kate Barton, Experience Durham, Laura Jane Hepworth, Corinna Harrison, Uday Duggal, Lucy Knight, Harry Twining, Sophie Wright, Claire Simonis, Alexander Marshall, Sam Westwood, Carrie Gaunt, Charlie Keable, Tania Chakraborti, Shona Graham, Mubasil Chaudry, Kabir Jhala, Naomi Solomons, Tom Harper, Becky Brookes, Helena Snider, Naoise Murphy, Michael Nower, Jennifer Baker, Josie Williams, Genevieve Burns, Max Lindon, Julia Atherley, Helen Chatterton and Felicity Jukes.



Meet The Exec

WE SPEAK TO LAST YEAR'S DST PRESIDENT AND THIS YEAR'S INCOMING SABBATICAL OFFICER: ISABELLE CULKIN.

When did you start at Durham and what do you study?

I started at Durham in 2014 and I've just graduated with a degree in English Literature.

Did you know when you came to Durham that you wanted to perform?

When I came to Durham performing was the main prerogative, but that was mainly because throughout my life that always seemed like the only thing you could do with drama. At school I wasn't able to direct or produce and I definitely didn't know the extent to which theatre was a thing in Durham. I always knew I didn't want to be an actress professionally, so after a questionable lack of success with auditioning I decided to try my feet with other things, and found things I enjoyed an awful lot more. Sometimes I miss performing, as I really enjoyed being a glorified chorus member (to a weirdly large extent), but I've found things other things more fulfilling, especially being able to write my own plays.

How did you find your feet in DST?

I auditioned for a lot of things and didn't get in. I was lucky enough to be in my Freshers' Play but got fed up of rejection and decided that the only reason I wasn't going for other things is because they seemed more daunting. Someone in DST said 'you make your own opportunities' and it really stuck. So I applied for a couple of assistant producing jobs which went reasonably well and struck up a conversation with Suzy to set up a theatre company (Pitch Productions), and it all just went from there.

What's been the best thing about your role on the Exec?

Being able to make changes that actively and positively affect the future of the society. It's always rewarding to give back to a society which has given me so much. I'm also so happy to have been in a year when people were so actively engaged with DST and cared about how it was run and structured. It's great to be a part of this change.



What has been your biggest challenge as DST President?

Naturally most people have an opinion on who you are and what you are doing. The former is often difficult because that can feel quite personal when someone remarks negatively about you. The latter is often difficult because people mean well and just want the best for the society. It can be hard to be completely transparent when people don't realise that the reason things haven't happened is because of wider issues, be that pragmatic reasons or something happening in my own life. It's often difficult to keep your personal and professional life separate, but the job still remains completely worthwhile.

Any words of advice for the next President?

As long as you make decisions fairly, consulting your committee and members where possible, and with the best intentions, you just need to back every decision and know that you made them for the right reasons, even when sometimes it feels like it isn't received well. Leading on from that, consulting your committee is often the best thing you can do. Having the support of the people around you means decisions come from the group, and you can often come to a better conclusion over different issues and decisions. You will not always come to the best conclusion on your own.

What are your plans after being President?

I'm taking on Kate's job as Theatre Development Co-ordinator. I'm really excited to get started, and I'm looking forward to giving even more to the society. Being a student means you're limited as to how much you can do, and I can't wait to be able to give all my time to DST. I'm really excited to be able to work with Emma next year: I think she has some fab ideas, and I hope I can help support her in making them a reality.

Name: Tania Chakraborti.

College: Hild Bede.

Year: First.

Describe yourself in three words:

Honest, sassy and busy.

What is it you love about theatre:

Seeing people transform themselves on stage and how The Assembly Rooms Theatre can look so incredibly different week-in-week-out. It's magical.

Favourite show you've been involved in:

Five Kinds of Silence by Fourth Wall Theatre because the themes of the play were deeply psychological and unique to DST. Not only was the tech fantastic, but watching actors make me laugh or double take when I should have been crying was an incredible testament to the quality of theatre in Durham. I loved the entire production process, especially working with such fantastic young directors (Damson Young and Hetty Hodgson).

Favourite show you saw this year: *The Normal Heart* was quite simply a fantastic piece of theatre—the play's message and the acting were raw and accomplished. At times the audience were left in tears, and it often felt like a professional production due to its scope and imagination.



Meet The Writers

SOME OF FIRST NIGHT'S CONTRIBUTORS DISCUSS THEMSELVES AND SOME OF THEIR THEATRE FAVOURITES.

Name: Sophie Wright.

College: Mary's.

Year: Three.

Describe yourself in three words:

Short attention span.

What is it you love about theatre:

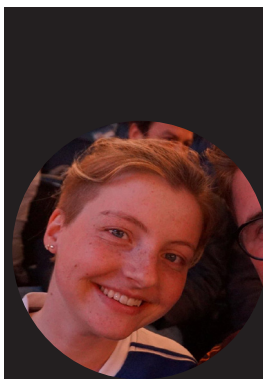
It offers promotion of the individual, but also leaves space for community creation.

Favourite show you've been involved in:

The Normal Heart by Fourth Wall Theatre for its balance between personal pride of the show and how much fun I had, but also for the sheer amount of hours I put into painting the stage (I kind of have to love the show for that!).

Favourite show you saw this year:

It would have to be a toss up between any Revue show and Piccolo Theatre's *Swallow*.



Shows... Assemble!

WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT EPIPHANY TERM'S PRODUCTIONS IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS THEATRE.

WEEK ONE: *Richard III* by Aidan's College Theatre

Description: ACT presented a surreal and unconventional take on a play where the wronged seek revenge, the weak seek protection and the embittered Richard cuts down everyone who stands in his way to the English throne.

What the reviews said: "A strong and well-rounded production" (The Bubble) and "an intellectually invigorating antidote" (Palatinate), ensuring that "you won't be dissatisfied with the standard of acting" (First Night).



WEEK TWO: *Kafka's Dick* by First Theatre Company

Description: When the world famous author Franz Kafka and his best friend appear in the living room of a middle-aged married couple in Yorkshire, absurdity and hilarity ensue as we learn that there is more to success than meets the eye.

What the reviews said: "A brilliant example of comedy well done" (The Bubble) and "an incredibly well acted and tightly delivered piece of drama" (First Night) that was "wonderful and gripping" (Palatinate).



WEEK THREE: *Constellations* by Lion Theatre Company

Description: A couple meet, fall in love, disappoint each other, and break up—or rather, they don't. Nick Payne's play follows the two in different versions of their relationship in different universes, experimenting with free will, quantum multiverse theory and love.

What the reviews said: An "emotionally exhausting" production (First Night) that "featured some brilliantly executed comedic lines" (Palatinate). "Davison and Mitchell's performances also gave rise to some incredibly powerful moments" (The Bubble).



WEEK FOUR: *Durham Drama Festival*

Description: This year's DDF shows in The Assembly Rooms Theatre included Charlie Keable's *Toll*, Kate Lipson's *Alford and the Acid Tip* and Kate Barton's *Screen 9*.

What the reviews said: *Toll*: "a touching, heartfelt and well written piece of theatre" (First Night); *Alford and the Acid Tip*: "the writing was witty and carried a strong message" (Palatinate); *Screen 9*: "student writing at its most empathetic that will stay with me for a long time" (The Bubble).



WEEK FIVE: *Made in Dagenham* by Feather Theatre Company

Description: Inspired by a true story, this is an uplifting musical based on the lives of men and women working in the Ford factory of 1960's Essex, offering a reflective, inspiring and funny telling of a fight for equality which remains relevant today.

What the reviews said: "Feather Theatre Company have succeeded in putting together a fun and light-hearted show" (First Night), that can in fact be considered "a real tour-de-force" (The Bubble).





WEEK SIX: *Carpe Jugulum* by Ooook! Productions

Description: Modern vampires have taken over, but how can they be fought when they're immune to garlic? This seemingly impossible task is thrust upon the uncertain Reverend Mightily Oats and Lancre's Witches.

What the reviews said: "Ooook! achieves exactly what it sets out to do" (First Night), and "the resulting production is hilarious and heartfelt, beautifully detailed and offers a parade of strong performances" (The Bubble).

WEEK SEVEN: *The Ritual Slaughter of Gorge Mastromas* by Castle Theatre Company

Description: From the early promise of the Seventies through to unrelenting capitalism of the Eighties and Nineties, follow Gorge on the journey from innocence to savage greed and knotted honesty, as he invents three golden rule for success, whatever the cost.

What the reviews said: "CTC's production was interestingly conceptualised" (Palatinate), providing "slick, tightly choreographed and pleasingly ominous chorus work" (First Night).



WEEK EIGHT: *Urinetown* by DULOG

Description: After a 20-year drought, a terrible water shortage plagues the city, leading to a government-enforced ban on private toilets. Amid the people, a hero decides that he's had enough and plans a revolution to lead them all to freedom.

What the reviews said: "DULOG injected energy and vibrancy into their production" (Palatinate), which was "very strong and enjoyable" (The Bubble). "The talented and hilarious cast managed to give a truly entertaining performance" (First Night).



WEEK NINE: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Fourth Wall Theatre

Description: Providing a modern-day adaptation of Oscar Wilde's arguably greatest classic, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* tells the Faustian tale of a beautiful young man who decides to sell his soul, allowing his portrait to age and wither, while he maintains his youth and beauty.

What the reviews said: "I was impressed by the efforts of the whole team to draw relevance to today's society, which is full of self-consciousness" (The Bubble).



NOT FORGETTING...

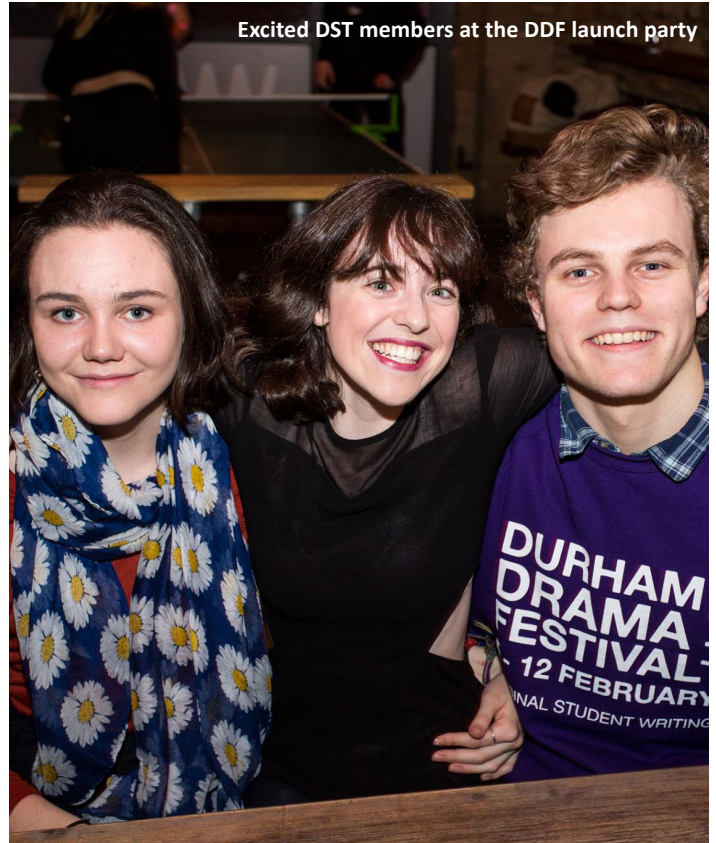
Epiphany Term: LTC's *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*, The Durham Revue's *The Revusual Suspects*, DULOG's *Spamalot*, HBT's *Eight*, TCMS' *Sweet Charity*, Fortnight's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, tdtc's *Songs for a New World*, Fourth Wall's *The Dumb Waiter*, DOE's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Durham Revue's *ComedyFest*, 1TC's *The Bloody Chamber*, HBT's *Rock of Ages*, Fourth Wall's *Five Kinds of Silence*, BTC's *Konstandin Normandeau*, FHTC's *The Unexpected Guest*, Woodplayers' *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*, Green Door's *Crushed Shells and Mud*, Buttered Toast's *The Crunch* and CTC's *The Wasp*.

Easter Term: Pitch Productions' *Love, Love, Love*, CTC's *Macbeth*, Fortnight's *Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead*, Buttered Toast's *Survivor*, Fourth Wall's *The Normal Heart*, PTC's *Romeo & Juliet*, DST's *The Canterbury Tales*, LTC's *Joseph K*, The Durham Revue's *Allstars*, tdtc's *Miscast*, Fortnight's *Wasted*, Wrong Tree's *Souvenirs*, DULOG's *Zanna, Don't!*, DOE's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, CTC's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, PTC's *Lemons*, 1TC's *Landing*, Wrong Tree's *Solstice*, Woodplayers' *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Hedda Gabler*, TCMS' *American Idiot*, ACT's *Shopping and F*cking*, BTC's *Black Comedy*, FHTC's *Little Shop of Horrors*, Ooook!'s *Blackadder III* and HBT's *Twelfth Night*.

Nine New PIECES!

**THE 42ND DURHAM DRAMA FESTIVAL
FEATURED FRESH COMEDY, VERBATIM
THEATRE AND EVEN A BREXIT-THEMED
PLAY.**

Durham Drama Festival (DDF) is one of Durham Student Theatre's annual highlights. Offering a platform for innovative writers to showcase their work, as well as providing ample opportunities for actors, directors, producers, technicians and costumiers, DDF sees new ideas transformed into written scripts and developed into staged performances. Now in its 42nd year, this year's festival took place between 6th-11th February, and an extensive line-up saw the staging of 9 new plays across the city's venues.



Excited DST members at the DDF launch party

Site Specific

A Year of Minutes, by Hamish Clayton

Kristofferson Park Residents' Committee is like any other residential committee. They squabble over who picked an apple from the tree without prior permission, walking too close to one another's windows, and why that back gate is always so squeaky. Taking the form of a year's worth of minutes from their meetings, it soon becomes clear that the events of Kristofferson Park (much like the political events of this year) are about to take a turn for the unexpected.

The Bocchae: a post-truth tragicomedy in three parts, by Alison Middleton

Remember the Brexit? We do. In fact, it bears spooky resemblance to Euripides' *The Bacchae*. Did Ancient Greek tragedy predict the future, or is there something even spookier going on here? Boris and Dave have been mates since day one, but when their party is shaken by a referendum on the EU, their lives change forever. No man is an island, but Britain is. Channel your deep angst about the future of the UK with this very surreal tragicomedy about a very real state of affairs.

Daisy's Dead, by Alice Clarke

It could have been the perfect crime. But now, after a botched robbery attempt, an unexpected hostage and a stab wound to the leg, Jack's position is hardly any better than that of his bound and gagged victim, Ben. Trapped in a catch-22 scenario, the pair have no choice but to work together if either is to escape.



A Year of Minutes

The Assembly Rooms Theatre

Toll, by Charlie Keable

"I thought they wanted soldiers." Four long years later, Toll realised the army wanted much more from him. Join Toll as he recalls his memories of the so called Great War. From plucky recruit to shell-shocked survivor, this is a true story of the horrors of war unlike any other.

Alford and the Acid Tip, by Kate Lipson

California, USA. The local penitentiary's Death Row is in full swing. But not if three protesters can help it. Follow their journeys through mind, matter, and surreality. From game shows to prison gates, this is a hallucinogenic comedic exploration of the capital punishment and its consequences.

Screen 9, by Kate Barton

Screen 9 is a documentary piece which is a culmination of over a year's worth of research into the Aurora shootings in Colorado during a showing of *The Dark Knight Rises* in 2012. The script follows four characters, created from interviews with American citizens, survivors, articles, press releases, blogs, videos, tweets, and trial coverage.

Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey



Black Box

Rose, by Isabelle Culkin

Rose is 21 and pregnant. Mark is 20 and not entirely sure whether he's the dad. *Rose* is the story of two people whose paths cross based on a split-second decision. A contemporary take on storytelling, *Rose* explores the reasons why people stay, and at what point our stories begin, crossover, and end.

The Not So Divine Comedy, by Freddie Drewer

This play showcases everyone's favourite stars and icons, such as that hunky Spanish dude you met in Magaluf, the cute but mysterious guy in that band you love, a very relatable protagonist, and the author of the best-selling autobiography of all time: God.

Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey, by Andrew Shires

A ghostwriter and his best friend work tirelessly to create the greatest book ever written. A book of short stories about love, religion, friendship, and spiders. Except they didn't write a single word. Kevin Spacey wrote it. Kevin Spacey wrote everything.

The D'Olivier Award Winners



Best Actor: George Rexstrew (Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey)

Best Actress: Claire Foster (Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey)

Best Director: Andrew Shires and Ambika Mod (Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey)

Best Ensemble: Steph Sarratt, Ed Chapman, Emma Louise Howell, Sebastian Higgins (Screen 9)

Best Festival Director: Annie Davison

Best New Writing: Isabelle Culkin (Rose)

Best Original Comedy: Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey

Best Play: Screen 9

Best Supporting Actor: Kieran Laurie and Andrew Cowburn (A Year of Minutes)

Best Supporting Actress: Saroja Lily Ratnavel (Alford and the Acid Tip)

Judges Commendation for Innovative Writing: Alison Middleton (The Bocchae)

Outstanding Debut: Alice Clarke (Daisy's Dead)

Outstanding Dramaturgy: Kate Barton (Screen 9)



Adam Simpson as Toll

DDF 2017 JUDGES

Michael Brazier
Ben Weaver-Hincks
Gemma Wright

GUEST JUDGES

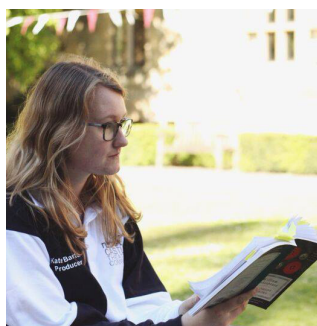
George Aza Selinger
Kath Burlinson
Matt Dann
John Godber
Chris Grady
Alex Macqueen
Jake Murray



Hurrah for HULLYWOOD!

MOVING FROM THE SEAS OF SCARBOROUGH
TO THE CULTURAL HUB OF HULL, DURHAM
CONTINUES TO TAKE THE NATIONAL STUDENT
DRAMA FESTIVAL BY STORM.

BY KATE BARTON.



Kate gives a day-by-day account of this year's National Student Drama Festival, which featured 3 DST shows, an alumni production and plenty of inspiring theatre!

DAY ONE

The Saturday morning dawned bright as I headed to Maiden Castle to collect the van to travel to Hull. We packed it full to the brim with props and headed off to take part in NSDF 2017.

After unpacking, set up immediately began for *Hidden*, directed by Alex Prescott and starring Harvey Comerford and Georgie Franklin, who would be performing that same evening. Meanwhile, the *Swallow* team began assembling the complex LED door for their production the following day. *Hidden* went off without a hitch and was greatly enjoyed by all. That evening, Michael Brazier (Festival Director) welcomed us all to the festival and to Hull, the UK City of Culture 2017, and so the frivolities began!

DAY TWO

The next day saw the start of the NSDF workshops, which are a fantastic opportunity to meet seasoned professionals and take part in masterclasses led by industry experts in all fields of theatre: be it design, acting, directing, tech, writing, producing, stage combat, musical theatre, or even pyrotechnics! That afternoon was

Swallow's opening night, performed in a black boxed sports hall. The show was a huge success, with even a few tears shed by audience members and judges! There were more shows that evening, including Sheffield University's *Blackbird* and *He She They* from O Collective.

DAY THREE

By Monday, we all found ourselves settling into a routine of attending workshops from 10am until 1pm, followed by discussions and shows. Led by Chris Thorpe, the discussions provided everyone attending the festival the opportunity to discuss some of the bigger issues facing the industry. Topics included gender casting and the persistent struggle of women in leadership roles. Monday also featured the infamous Eighties night, where the thespians went all out on colourful attire and flares for an evening of running man revelry.

DAY FOUR

Tuesday meant it was *Ordinary Days'* moment to begin their set up in Middleton Hall, NSDF's largest venue. Given that the original production was in Durham's small music concert hall, the change to a 450-seat theatre was a

The cast of Piccolo Theatre's *Swallow*



huge shift for the whole team. Tuesday's discussion meant that it was *Hidden* and *Swallow's* turn to be grilled in front of the entire festival company, who could direct questions at both the prod team and actors. The discussion brought up interesting topics, from accents too often being a signal of class, and transgender casting.



Durham alumni in rehearsal for *Thick Skin*

DAY FIVE

Wednesday saw the opening of *Ordinary Days*, and after an intense week of theatre pieces about bipolar disorder (*Cognitions*), the refugee crisis (*Say It Loud* and *No Human is Illegal*) and the frightening rise of technology (*Nothing is Coming*, *The Pixels are Huge*), watching a light-hearted musical about life in New York offered a welcome change. The evening consisted of the infamous pub quiz, where all members of the festival gather in groups to answer questions on a variety of questions, varying from theatre to the city of Hull! I had the wonderful Alex Spencer-Jones (selector for both *Hidden* and *Swallow*) on my team, which we named 'Hullow Days'—that's Hull, *Hidden*, *Swallow* and *Ordinary Days* all in one! We came a respectful 7th place, and so were pretty chuffed with our efforts.

DAY SIX

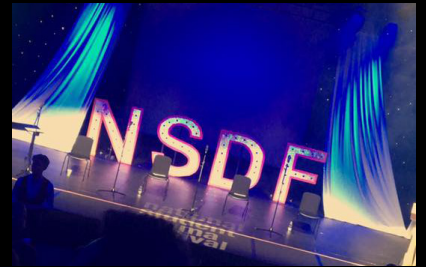
Thursday was the final day of shows, with *Ordinary Days* closing the festival, and before we knew it, NSDF was over for another year. As shows began to wind down, phone numbers were exchanged and Facebook friendships were made, with everybody vowing to keep in touch with one another, and continue to make and talk about theatre.

DAY SEVEN

Friday evening was spent at the prize-giving ceremony, where we celebrated the winners of the prestigious NSDF awards, and Durham impressively scooped up several. Celebrations ended with a party back at the Students' Union, and we all started to say our final goodbyes with friends old and new.

KATE'S CONCLUSION...

As Chris Thorpe said to us all at the start of the week, "NSDF is a conversation made up of lots of little conversations in workshops, in the bar and after the shows". I can honestly say that I have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of these conversations, and I hope to take everything I learnt during this inspiring week into my later work and theatre practice.



Awards galore!

Congratulations to the following individuals who were recognised at NSDF's concluding awards ceremony:

Spotlight Most Promising Actor

Harvey Comerford (*Hidden & Thick Skin*)

Spotlight Most Promising Actress

Annie Davison (*Swallow*)

Judges' Mention for Acting

Matt Dormer (*Swallow*)

Meriel Killeen (*Ordinary Days*)

The Sunday Times Harold Hobson Drama Critic Award

Lily James

Judges' Mention for Writing

Callum Kenny

Samuel French New Play Award

Caitlin McEwan (*Thick Skin*)

The Cameron Mackintosh Award

Alex Mackinder (*Ordinary Days*)

The Buzz Goodbody Director Award

Ellie Gauge (*Thick Skin*)

Judges' Commendation for Directing

George Rexstrew (*Swallow*)



DST alumni Georgie Franklin and Harvey Comerford in Battered Soul Theatre's *Hidden*



Meriel Killeen singing in DULOG's production of *Ordinary Days*

let's get fringe!

A recap of DST shows being
performed at this year's Edinburgh Fringe Festival!

Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey (DDF 2017)



A Year of Minutes (DDF 2017)



Laugh Actually (The Durham Revue)



Edges: A Song Cycle (DULOG)



Angels in Erotica (DDF 2017)



Solstice, Souvenirs and The East Wind Rages (Wrong Tree Theatre)



Toll (DDF 2017)





Louisa Fitzgerald

FROM DIRECTING HER FRESHERS' PLAY TO DEVELOPING SCRIPTS AT PINEWOOD, HILD BEDE ALUMNA LOUISA FITZGERALD TALKS DURHAM, BREAKING THE INDUSTRY AND WORKING WITH BRITAIN'S TOP SCREENWRITERS.

When did you graduate from Durham and what did you study?

I studied English and graduated in 2006. I was in Hild Bede.

Tell us a little bit about your DST experience.

My enduring memories and friendships from Durham are all connected to theatre. I started off co-directing the Freshers' Play, *School for Scandal*, and then continued to do one or two plays a term. I mainly directed, but I acted in a couple of plays as well—I always think that it is a good idea for a director to understand what it is like to be an actor; that way you can be more sympathetic in your work with them! I also helped to run our college drama society and was the editor of Artslink, which is what the DST magazine was called back in 2004!

What did you do after graduating and how did you find yourself script editing?

After graduating I moved to London to pursue a career as a theatre director. This involved joining a fringe theatre company, N1 Theatre Company, and assistant directing and training with them, whilst also trying to get assistant directing roles elsewhere. I assisted at the Gate in Notting Hill, the Globe, the Arcola and the Nuffield in Southampton, as well as directing and producing my own work in fringe theatres across London: Theatre 503, The King's Head, The Old Red Lion, The Cock Tavern, Battersea Arts Centre etc. It's not an easy career to move forward in because there is so much competition, and so I became increasingly interested in dramaturgy. In 2011, I decided to take a break from directing and focus on a writer-led career in television. Since then I've never really looked back! I started as a researcher on BBC's *Holby City* and then worked up to being a script editor. I have since worked with some of the most exciting writing talent in the UK. I've worked for Kudos and Hat Trick as a script editor and development producer and am now Head of Development for Pinewood Television.

What is the most exciting and enjoyable script project you've worked on post-Durham?

I was very excited to be working on the Abi Morgan series, *River*, which was on BBC One about a year and a half ago. Abi is simply one of the best writers in the country, and it was an incredible experience to be part of the process of bringing one of her shows together. That said, *The Secret* on ITV last year is probably the project I'm the most proud of. Working on a true life story was a huge challenge, and the legal and criminal research was fascinating, but I also think it is a truly original piece of storytelling in that it is hugely realistic and shot in a way that makes you feel like you are in the room and complicit in everything that happens; it offered quite a different viewing experience for the audience.

Any advice to those in DST about entering the 'real' world of writing?

Read and watch as much as possible... and practise, practise, practise! I am always astonished at how few aspiring writers are well read or literate in television writers, given that they want to go into that industry. If you want to be a playwright, then you need to read as many plays as possible, go to the theatre (especially to see new writing), think about what it is that works and what doesn't, and how you might tackle your subject in your own way. There are also some brilliant podcasts out there—I would recommend listening to the playwright's podcast from The Royal Court in particular.

The hardest part, really, is the starting point: the idea. The best advice I can give an aspiring writer is 'have a good idea', but it is hard to know how to go about that. I tend to find that the most successful ideas are those that have something original to say. The best ideas will rarely happen in isolation in front of your blank computer screen. Get out of the house, get inspired by a piece of art, go to a gig, do some people-watching in the street, break up your routine... Most good ideas come from great characters, so if you are really stuck I would go back to thinking about people and what you find interesting about them. I know writers who go and sit in the public gallery at courthouses or in a café opposite a hospital, or even in a waiting room at a GP just to watch people—the smallest glance or tiniest detail could be the starting point for a whole story.

Once you have an idea, there's a process of getting it down into a script of some kind—that process is something that each writer will discover for themselves. Some will carefully construct and write each scene brilliantly at a time, and others will need to draft and redraft and redraft... I've gotten to draft 38 before on one of my projects! Once you are happy with a script then you need to get it out there: that's the only way to actually become a professional writer. You have to back yourself: send it to agents, send it to theatres, enter awards, send it to producers, try to put it on, even if just in a room above a pub—get it heard. The writing is the bit that's in your control: the rest is about developing relationships with the people who can actually make your work happen.



Genevieve O'Reilly and James Nesbitt in ITV's *The Secret*



Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat



Romeo and Juliet

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S D'OSCAR WINNERS!

Best Actor: George Rexstrew (*Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*)

Best Male Comedic Performance: Andrew Shires (*The Revusual Suspects*)

Best Actor in a Musical: Elliot Mather (*Sweeney Todd*)

Best Musical: Spamalot (*DULOG*)

Best Actress: Steph Sarratt (*Swallow*)

Best Musical Director: Alex Mackinder

Best Actress in a Musical: Sophie Forster (*Sweeney Todd*)

Best New Writing: Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey by Andrew Shires

Best Band: Spamalot

Best Play: Swallow (*Piccolo Theatre*)

Best Choreographer: Rosie Dart

Best Producer: Genevieve Burns

Best College Musical: Rock of Ages (*Hild Bede Theatre*)

Best Publicity: Romeo and Juliet

Best College Play: Someone Who'll Watch Over Me (*Castle Theatre Company*)

Best Set Design: Romeo and Juliet

Best Comedy: The Revusual Suspects

Best Sound Design: Constellations

Best Costume Design: Spamalot

Best Supporting Actor: Zac Tiplady (*Romeo and Juliet*)

Best Director: George Rexstrew

Best Supporting Actor in a Musical: George Rexstrew (*Spamalot*)

Best Ensemble: The Revusual Suspects

Best Supporting Actress: Angharad Phillips (*Penelope*)

Best Female Comedic Performance: Claire Forster (*Cold Fronts and Hot Flushes: The Short Stories of Kevin Spacey*)

Best Supporting Actress in a Musical: Lily Edwards (*Urinetown*)

Best Hair and Make-up Design: Sweeney Todd

Best Tech: Spamalot

Best Lighting Design: Sweeney Todd

Best Technical Director: Michael Nower



A Midsummer Night's Dream



Zanna, Don't!