

# DST FIRST NIGHT

## Epiphany Term Round-Up 2018

£2.4 million refurbishment of The Assembly Rooms Theatre  
4 Selected Shows at the National Student Drama Festival  
One-night only DST show at the Gala Theatre

[Read more inside](#)



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Theodore Holt-Bailey in Hild Bede Theatre's *Cabaret*  
Photograph by Samuel Kirkman

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#### Cover Page Photographs:

Zac Tiplady and Rebecca Cadman in Sightline Productions' *Lela & Co*, photograph by Glenn Hay; Louisa Mathie and Jack Firoozan in Fourth Wall's *Yen*, photograph by Gregor Petrikovič; Rosalie Minnitt, Lily Edwards and Luke Maskell in The Durham Revue's *No Strings Attached*, photograph by Samuel Kirkman.

## Editor's Note

Welcome back to the DST First Night Newsletter! For those of you who are reading this for the first time, my name is Lucy, the 2017-18 editor of First Night. I hope you enjoy this Epiphany edition.

Epiphany Term was certainly jam-packed with student theatre, complete with a host of exciting productions, and a very successful Durham Drama Festival. Additionally, four Durham productions were selected for the National Student Drama Festival in Leicester over the Easter break – read more on that on page 4. This issue also includes an interview with DST's Technical Manager, Alok Kumar, and DST alumnus Lauren Hitchman, now working as a producer in London's West End. We also hear more about the upcoming DST show in the Gala Theatre, a re-run of HBT's successful Michaelmas production *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* – my taste buds are already tingling.

Once again, thanks for being part of the Durham Student Theatre community; none of the exciting opportunities reported in this issue would have been possible without our hard-working and enthusiastic members. If you are reading as an alumnus, please do get in touch with us and let us know what you've been up to post Durham/ DST.

Happy reading!

Lucy



#### Editorial Team

Lucy Knight  
Isabelle Culkin

#### Contributors

Kate Barton  
Maddie Lock  
Finlay Mead  
Damson Young

**With thanks to...**  
Experience Durham

Photograph by Rosie Dart

# Meet the Exec

**Finlay Mead** talks to Alok Kumar, a third-year Engineering student who is this year's Technical Manager for Durham Student Theatre.

## **Finlay Mead (FM): What is your favourite thing about being Durham Student Theatre Technical Manager?**

Alok Kumar (AK): Working with people is one of my favourite things about theatre and doing this role gives you so many chances to work with different people in different roles in the university. It's a pretty special moment when you're involved in making someone's stage vision come to life and it's so great to see people take the lessons you've taught them and the advice you've given them forward into other productions and hopefully even their future careers. I think the butterfly effect of doing something small for someone and seeing that grow into something much bigger that is my favourite part of this role.

“ Tech is as much about working as a team as it is working with cables. ”

## **FM: What's been the most challenging thing about this role?**

AK: I think representing technicians in theatre is a difficult job wherever you're working. I do think that there is almost a class divide between technicians and other people working in theatre which there really shouldn't be. It's been tough to deal with at times and I've seen people be put off by theatre because of it which really breaks my heart. I have noticed the boundaries between technicians and others blur slightly more this year which is great but I think there's still a way to go; there shouldn't be a boundary or divide at all.



## **FM: What have you learnt from this role?**

AK: I've become so much better at dealing with people. Every day I have people opening up to me about their problems and it's great to feel like a representative for so many people but it can sometimes be a little overwhelming. I've had to become a lot more patient and empathetic over the last year. I expected a lot of the role to be dealing with technical issues but that's actually such a small proportion of what I do.

## **FM: What are your plans for next year?**

AK: I've got another year here at Durham to go so I'll definitely continue to be involved in theatre over that time. I think I'd really like to explore other areas of theatre and maybe get out of the tech box every now and then. This year I've realised that DST is very much about people just giving it a go and I think that's something I need to embrace a little more next year – who knows what the future holds!

## **FM: Any advice for somebody interested in getting into tech?**

AK: Go for it! You've got nothing to lose and everyone else on your tech team at one point was in the same position as you where they didn't really understand what was going on. Tech is as much about working as a team as it is working with cables!



Name: Jennifer Baker

College: Castle

Year: 2

Describe yourself in three words:

Really love theatre.

Favourite show last term:

*The Adventures of Slick Tuffman: a noir comedy*, by Mike Bedigan, as part of DDF 2018. It was so simple and effective, with stellar performances from Emily McLean and Luke Maskell.

**What do you love about theatre?** I think theatre is so special; as an audience member it offers you the chance to be completely engaged in a snapshot of another life. It can make you think and laugh in ways that I've never experienced with another medium. As somebody who wants to work in theatre, it has afforded me so many opportunities for personal development and it's just so much fun.

Name: Grace English

College: Grey

Year: 1

Describe yourself in three words:

Passionate, energetic, curious.

Favourite show this term: *Yen*.

**What do you love about theatre?** I love the way theatre exposes us to world-views beyond our own, and invites us to immerse ourselves in stories and livelihoods we might otherwise never cross paths with – it's a way of engaging with the world that's particularly moving and intelligent.



# Meet the Writers

Meet some of *First Night's* contributors



Name: Owen Sparkes

College: Castle

Year: 3

Describe yourself in three words: Actor, Director, Reviewer.

Favourite show last term:

*The Empiricist* by Caspar Bayliss.

**What do you love about theatre?** Theatre is an astonishing opportunity to both escape the real world and discover what it is that makes the real world really tick. I love the opportunity to explore people, lives, and stories that may be a million miles away from ours, but we can make just as true.

# Glitter, Backflips and 16 Fantastic Shows

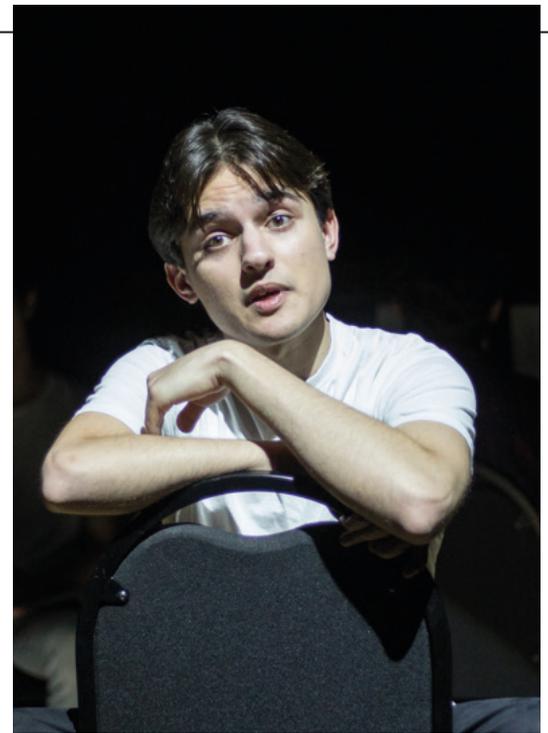
**Maddie Lock** is a first-year English and Education student who performed in MOSCOS in this year's National Student Drama Festival (NSDF). She tells us a bit more about her experience as a performer and first-time attendee of the festival.

**N** SDF 2018 - what a week to remember! Just a few hours after arriving, I was already sitting down to watch my first show of the week, the first of sixteen fantastic shows. Each of the shows I got to see opened my eyes to just how innovative theatre can be. One highlight was an entire audience clicking their fingers and stamping their feet to create the effect of a rain storm.

Every day was absolutely packed to bursting. The mornings began with optional discussions. These discussions were the perfect opportunity to have great conversations with the professionals and everyone else attending the festival. It was usually a mad dash to watch a show after this, which was almost always followed by everyone exchanging their thoughts on it as we grabbed some much needed sustenance.

great moments when we were all able to chill out on the grass in the sun and take a break too. After a few more shows it would be time for the evening event. There was a disco night where everyone pulled out their best outfits and dance moves (both good and bad), a quiz night where one of the rounds was dressing up a team member as Richard III (Patrick Palmer was utterly transformed) and an open mic night where Durham did not go unrepresented as Luke Maskell took the stage as a very amusing snail. The evenings were a great chance to meet everyone, have fun, and see a lot ridiculous things.

My two favourite days were probably Tuesday and Friday. Tuesday was the one and only performance day for MOSCOS. Once it got to the evening



having the best time clowning in front of the audience. Friday was a workshops day where I learnt all about the possibilities of community theatre, experimented with acting low power and high power characters, and got lifted up in the air by fifteen people only to find myself doing a sort of slow motion backflip.

By the end of the week I was filled with joy and excitement at all the amazing people I had met, all the new experiences I'd had and all the wonderful shows I had seen. I was also completely exhausted and went home and slept for a week!

“ Each of the shows I got to see opened my eyes to just how innovative theatre can be. ”

Most days the whole festival would gather for an hour in the afternoon talk about the shows everyone had seen so far, which tended to open up whole aspects of shows that I hadn't even thought about! Despite the week being incredibly intense, there were also some

and the whole festival company had taken its seats and we had all donned a lot of silver glitter, it all became very real! I absolutely loved being part of this show, spending time with the cast, seeing the awesome staging and lighting that NSDF had made possible for us, and



A record-breaking four productions from Durham were selected for performance this year at NSDF:

- *Grounded*, a one-hander about a fighter pilot by Lion Theatre Company (LTC);
- *MOSCOS* a new puppetry and clowning show, also by LTC;
- *The Last Five Years*, a two-person musical which tells the story of their relationship by Tone Deaf Theatre Company;
- *The Events*, a drama following the aftermath of a massacre, by Cuth's Drama Society.

During the festival, two of DST's members won awards: Kishore Thiagarajan-Walker was awarded Spotlight Most Promising Actor for *The Events*, and Steph Sarratt was given a Judges' Commendation for Acting in *Grounded*.

# Return of the Quiche

**Damson Young** tells us more about the return of Hild Bede Theatre's *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* for a one night only performance in the Gala Theatre.



*5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* takes place during the 1956 annual quiche breakfast of the Susan B Anthony Society for the Sisters of Gertrude Stein, when their peaceful meeting is turned upside down. When the Communists attack, the closet doors blow open as secrets, repressed desires and an insatiable hunger for quiche are released.

I'm thrilled for the opportunity to return with *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* for one final hurrah. With a capacity of some 500 seats, taking it to the Gala Theatre will allow the show - and the sisterhood - to be bigger and better than ever. Expect chaos, quiche and, of course, lesbianism, as you've never seen before. A unique, immersive comedy that has enjoyed success worldwide, this truly is not a show to be missed.

Having said an emotional goodbye to *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* last term, I was naturally over the moon to discover that we'd have the chance to perform this weird and wonderful show one last time. The opportunity to work alongside such a stellar cast and production team again (regardless of the looming prospect of exam season) is an absolute dream, and a massive thank you is due to director of the Michaelmas production Lucy Knight for allowing me the chance to work with her magnum opus. This play is truly one that leaves you hungry for more, and I hope that many of you will join us for our final night and participate in our celebration of baked goods, homosexuality, and all things ridiculous.

The play, which has been performed off-Broadway and was the winner of the Best Overall Production at the 2012 NYC International Fringe Festival, returns for only one performance after its initial run of the show in October 2017. The show's initial run in Durham at The Assembly Rooms Theatre was praised for slick improvisational and absurd comedy from its all-female student cast.

Hild Bede Theatre is a student theatre company based in the College of St. Hild and St. Bede at Durham University, and operates under Durham Student Theatre (DST). The production was chosen out of the huge DST roster of shows in 2017 to return for a one-night-only performance on the Gala Theatre stage. The cast and crew are comprised of Durham students who are predominantly female, many of whom identify at LGBT+, and so pride themselves on bringing a play which celebrates both these communities to Durham audiences.

## What the reviews said:

'Any fool who perpetuates the idea that women aren't funny should come and see this production, and promptly be left with egg on their face: I haven't laughed as consistently in a show in a long time... this was a booming showcase of comedy 101' – *DST First Night*

'Incredibly charming and hilarious...the cast are incredible' – *The Bubble*

**5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche**  
Tuesday 5 June 2018, 7:30pm  
(1hr 10min running time).

Gala Theatre, Durham DH1 1WA.

Tickets from £9.50 at  
[www.galadurham.co.uk](http://www.galadurham.co.uk)



# There's No Place Like Home

Head of Student Theatre **Kate Barton** tells all about the exciting £2.4 million development of *The Assembly Rooms Theatre*.

With 81 productions staged already, it's been a busy year in Durham Student Theatre. With four shows selected for the National Student Drama Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival upcoming, the city is buzzing with theatrical activity.

Drama has been the highlight for many of us while at Durham, from the first night nerves and after-party euphoria, to the drama of press reviews and the adrenaline of auditioning. Over the years, many current and past students have come to view *The Assembly Rooms Theatre* as a second home.

I am thrilled to say that the University has committed to invest £2.4 million in a refurbishment of *The Assembly Rooms Theatre* starting this August!

Director of Experience Durham, Quentin Sloper, has said: "The Assembly Rooms Theatre is a beacon of art, creativity, and performance – not just in Durham, but across the region. I'm delighted to announce this investment, which will make this popular and iconic local venue even better."

The theatre is well over a hundred years old and is still used every day

by students. With arts funding being cut around the country and no formal theatre degree available at Durham, this refurbishment is going to help more students participate in the arts, as well as provide more of the student experience that helps to make Durham so special.

The £2.4 million plans will include:

- Improving workshop, toilets and dressing room facilities;
- Restoring the historic ceiling;
- Preserving the fabric of the building;
- Improving accessibility.

While this refurbishment is incredible, we hope that through the support of alumni and partners we can make further changes to the building so that future generations of students can experience the magic that the stage has to offer.

We want to raise a further £300,000 to make changes that will have a real impact on the theatre, including:

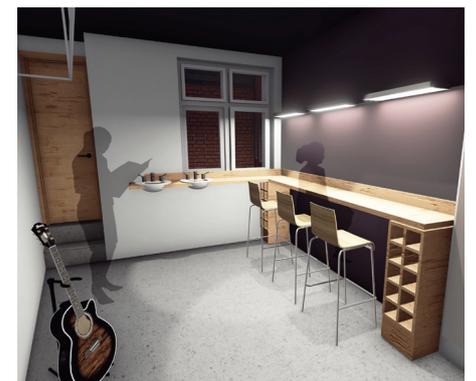
- The creation of a licensed bar and café area in the balcony;
- Renewing the current lighting rig;
- Improving the auditorium.



If you want to support the theatre refurbishment, I would love to hear from you. You can contact me at [theatre.manager@durham.ac.uk](mailto:theatre.manager@durham.ac.uk)

We welcome any donation, sponsored by yourself or by a company. If you are interested in being a patron, have a look at our packages here:

- £100 – Have your name inscribed on the workshop wall;
- £500 – Name and pick a seat in the theatre auditorium.
- £10,000 – Name a refurbished dressing room in the theatre.
- £20,000 – Name the newly renovated box office.
- £60,000 – Name the brand new bar for the theatre.



# Catching up... with Lauren Hitchman

Our editor **Lucy Knight** spoke to Lauren Hitchman, a former member of Durham Student Theatre, now working in theatre production.

## **Lucy Knight (LK): When were you at Durham University?**

Lauren Hitchman (LH): I was at Durham from 2012 to 2015, and I studied English Literature at Collingwood.

## **LK: What do you do now?**

LH: I work for Trafalgar Entertainment Group as the Production Assistant on *The King and I*, which is transferring to the West End from Broadway.

## **LK: What kind of theatre did you do whilst at Durham?**

LH: I produced a range of different types of theatre. In my first year, I produced the Freshers' Play, which was Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*. Later that year I produced a musical adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*. In my second year, I produced Leo Mylonadis's adaptation of *The Furies* in Durham Castle's Norman Chapel, which we later took up to the Edinburgh Fringe. But my highlight was definitely producing a new musical adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (written by Leo with a score by Jack Moreton) as a promenade piece at Durham Cathedral. Working on such diverse shows helped me to work out how the role of a producer changes and stays the same across different styles of theatre.

*Working on such diverse shows helped me to work out how the role of a producer changes and stays the same across different styles of theatre*

## **LK: How did you get into the industry after graduating?**

LH: In the summer after graduating from Durham, I interned for Bill Kenwright Ltd for a month. I stayed on as a production assistant for a few months, before heading off to Oxford for my Masters. When I graduated from Oxford, I started on the Stage One Trainee Producer Scheme. My first six-month placement was at Bill Kenwright Ltd, where I worked on productions such as *Evita*, *Blood Brothers*, and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. My second six months were at Sonia Friedman Productions, where I predominately worked on plays, such as *The Birthday Party* and the Almeida transfers of *Hamlet* and *Ink*. The Stage One scheme is a fantastic route into the industry as it gives you a unique insight into the workings of some of the country's leading theatre producers, and allows you to compare their differences and similarities.

## **LK: How is producing in the professional world different to producing in Durham Student Theatre?**

LH: The similarities are quite surprising. Like DST, you find yourself working with the same people on different productions, as it's such a small industry. I suppose that the key difference is the fundamental focus on the business element of 'show



business'. This is certainly the case in the commercial sector as opposed to the subsidised sector: the bottom line is the bottom line and therefore a large proportion of your day-to-day work is made up of commercial and business-focused tasks.

## **LK: What have you learned from working in the West End?**

LH: How to be diplomatic, how to write contracts, how to throw a good press night party, and how to fly a pug from LA to London (my biggest challenge so far...)

## **LK: What have been the highlights since graduating?**

LH: I've loved working for three different companies and getting to meet such a wide range of people across the industry. I think my biggest highlight was the press night of the first show I really saw the 'life cycle' of, which was *La Cage aux Folles*. I'd been involved in the casting, seen the designs, watched it in rehearsals, so seeing it on stage for the first time was a really fantastic moment. Watching the first preview of *The Ferryman* in my first month at Sonia Friedman Productions was also a highlight: there was a communal sense that we'd all just experienced something incredibly special.

## **LK: Any tips for upcoming commercial theatre producers?**

LH: Apply to Stage One! It's an amazing organisation with lots of different funding streams available. Before you apply, be certain that you want to work in commercial rather than subsidised theatre, as they solely support commercial theatre producers. Secondly, it's a friendly industry and people want to help passionate young people. If you come across someone who has worked on the kind of shows you want to work on, drop them an email and ask them for a coffee. Don't always email the people that run the companies or the big players - often those who are in the first few years of their career will provide you with the best advice and guidance.



# Durham Festival of the Arts 2018

1 June – 25 June

DFoA is back for its fourth year, bigger and better than ever! With events celebrating music, theatre, and artistic excellence in Durham there is truly something for everyone. The festival will run from Friday, 1 June until Monday, 25 June and will encompass 14 music concerts, 14 theatre productions, a black box series, performance workshops, community masterclasses, an art and photography exhibition and so much more! Led by students, this year there is more for the local community to get involved in than ever before, so please head to the website to find out all about what's on offer and plan your DFoA adventure.

[www.dfoa.co.uk](http://www.dfoa.co.uk)

## Durham Drama Festival 2018 Awards

1 June – 25 June

### Best Actress:

#### Winner:

Emily McLean (*The Adventures of Slick Tuffman: a noir comedy*)

#### Nominees:

Victoria Bull (*Flowers N That*)  
Layla Chowdhury (*Marsistan*)

### Best Actor:

#### Winner:

Luke Maskell (*The Adventures of Slick Tuffman: a noir comedy*)

#### Nominees:

John Broadhead (*The Empiricist*)  
Mo Hafeez (*hypocritical*)

### Best Supporting Actress:

#### Winner:

Aliya Gilmore  
(AQUA SPECTACULA)

#### Nominees:

Anusha Perron (*Marsistan*)  
Fionna Monk  
(AQUA SPECTACULA)  
Grace Longman  
(*hypocritical*)

### Best Supporting Actor:

#### Winner:

Max Greenhalgh  
(AQUA SPECTACULA)

#### Nominees:

Freddie Collings  
(AQUA SPECTACULA)  
Andrew Cowburn  
(AQUA SPECTACULA)  
Lewis Russell  
(*The Empiricist*)

### Best Ensemble:

#### Winner:

AQUA SPECTACULA

#### Nominee:

*hypocritical*

### Best Director:

#### Winner:

Will Bedigan (*The Adventures of Slick Tuffman: a noir comedy*)

#### Nominee:

Jasmine Price  
(AQUA SPECTACULA)

### Best New Writing:

#### Winner:

*Marsistan*,  
by Hamza Adam Rafique

#### Nominees:

*The Empiricist*, by Caspar Bayliss  
*The Adventures of Slick Tuffman: a noir comedy*, by Mike Bedigan

### Best Show:

*The Adventures of Slick Tuffman: a noir comedy*, by Mike Bedigan  
AQUA SPECTACULA,  
by Jasmine Price

### Special Commendation for Technical Achievement:

Alok Kumar (AQUA  
SPECTACULA)

If you would like to contribute towards the next First Night newsletter get in touch via

[theatre.coordinator@durham.ac.uk](mailto:theatre.coordinator@durham.ac.uk)