

**STRANGE
TOWN**



Review of 2019



www.strangetown.org.uk



Founded in 2008 and based in Leith, Strange Town is a performing arts company for 5 – 25 year olds, which operates year round in Edinburgh. Strange Town is run by an experienced team and offers weekly classes, holiday courses, workshops in schools, regular performances in Edinburgh venues, a young actors agency and theatre for young audiences.

2019 in numbers

9

youth theatre shows

17

performances

1

European performance exchange project

5

Theatre for Young Audiences touring shows

Performed at the Traverse Theatre and the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh and in hundreds of schools across Scotland

7

Masterclasses

9

after school drama clubs in Edinburgh primary schools

184 youth theatre sessions

68 improv comedy sessions

34 acting for screen sessions

4 holiday projects

17 audition coaching sessions

36 people employed

3 full time

9 directors

5 assistant directors

8 writers

11 actors

4 stage managers

6 masterclass leaders

1 designer

1 lighting designer

1 sound designer

1 fundraiser

1 print and marketing designer

20 volunteers

4 admin assistants

15 stage management

work experience positions

1 prop maker





Message from the Chairman John Naylor

2019 has been another year of exciting new developments and growth.

Our **youth theatre** saw its first international collaboration and performances in Slovenia. Our new cross age range group (8-18) is now established, performing this year at the Traverse.

The Young Company's Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) toured across Scotland performing mainly to Secondary school audiences whilst giving young aspiring actors their first experience of the realities of working as actors. Working in collaboration with Fast Forward and No Knives Better Lives, *Balisong*, has now been seen by 44,000 school students throughout Scotland. Working with our partner organisations we continue to add to our range of issue related plays which now include gambling, alcohol, drugs and peer pressure, young fathers in the social justice system and the rights of children.

Our agency, which gives young people experience of professional performance – theatre, film, TV advertising – had a record year.

Employment was offered to more young people than ever before – writers, directors, stage managers and designers.

The heart of Strange Town is the development of young people whether it be towards a career in the performing arts or, as it is for the majority, an opportunity to build confidence and develop interpersonal and personal skills to enable them to enjoy a more fulfilled life. Through our bursary scheme we aim to ensure no one is turned away, whatever their ability or financial position.

“Receiving a bursary from Strange Town has ensured that my son continues with his drama lessons. My son is on the autistic spectrum and finds mainstream education difficult. At Strange Town he can be himself, explore the artistic side of his nature and socialise with a wider group of his peers. Thank you, Strange Town for giving us this opportunity.”

However, there have been challenges. Our after school drama in Primary schools work reduced because of building work in some schools. Given our development and growth, our excellent staff team have been very stretched. We need another core staff member.

2019 was the last full year of funding from most of our major funders, so Strange Town's future shape is uncertain. If funding goes well, we will be able to continue our development with an additional staff member and a bursary programme to match. If not, we will reshape within the resources available.

Our 2019 successes could not have been achieved without huge contributions from so many – our partners, our funders, our Board and above all our staff and volunteers, particularly our Creative Directors Steve Small and Ruth Hollyman along with Jessica Chalmers, our Administrator. Our heartfelt thanks to them all.

Theatre and performance are collaborative ventures. Strange Town exemplifies this.

John Naylor



Strange Town Patron **Tallulah Greive**



I was just eleven when I joined Strange Town, which at the time was less than a year old. I remember being so excited to be trusted, at such a young age, to not only perform, but co-create plays with incredibly talented writers and to have ownership over the stories we told. Although the original youth theatre has grown so much over the years, I've always felt that was the most special thing about Strange Town. They have never patronised young people but empowered them to make work that truly matters. They allow them to see outside of themselves and their experience, and to empathise with people who they may never know.

I left the youth theatre at seventeen, not only with an acting career made possible by the agency, but with the incredible friends I'd made. It's become a running joke in Edinburgh: you'll always know someone who knows someone that went to Strange Town. I left with a sense of professionalism, of the importance of being prepared, being on time and being part of a team. But really, I left with this feeling that because Ruth and Steve had always taught us that our voices deserved to be heard, my voice truly mattered.

It's been a huge honour to represent Strange Town as patron for this last year, and it fills my heart with joy to see them continuing to teach young people to see outside of their own experience, to make incredible work and raise their voices louder."





Youth Theatre

Throughout the year Strange Town youth theatre run weekly sessions for young people aged 8 – 18. In 2019 these included sessions in acting for screen, improv comedy and script work.

Strange Town Youth Theatre performances in 2019 included:

Double Bill at The Traverse Theatre, June

Little Boxes written and directed by Catherine Expósito (14 – 18s)

Stolen Futures by James Beagon, directed by Ruth Hollyman (8 – 18s)

The Scottish Storytelling Centre, June

Eleanor the Adventurer and the Land of Splendiferous Hats by Tim Primrose, directed by Catherine Ward-Stoddart (8 – 10s)

Where the Land Meets The Sea by Diane Stewart, directed by Ellen Shand (Friday 11 – 14s)

The Ollissey by Tim Primrose, directed by Adam Rosa (Wed 11 – 14s)

The Scottish Storytelling Centre, December

Jaq and the Beanstalk by Tim Primrose, directed by Catherine Ward-Stoddart (8 – 10s)

Cindy by Amy Drummond, directed by Ellen Shand (Friday 11 – 14s)

Sno Wite and the 7 Dickensians by Isla Cowan, directed by James Beagon (Wed 11 – 14s)





4iD is a collaborative performance project involving Strange Town and youth arts organisations from Slovenia, Finland and the Netherlands. The chosen theme of the collaboration is European identity and what it means to be a young European today. In October 2019, groups of young performers from each country presented fifteen-minute pieces in Slovenia, which were then used as stimuli to create a thirty minute performance involving all thirty five actors, directed by five emerging directors. This was performed as a site-specific production outdoors in the centres of Ljubljana and Nova Gorica.

Strange Town presented its fifteen-minute piece at the Storytelling Centre in December to great acclaim. Look out for news of other performances of this new piece of theatre in 2020.



For the second year running Strange Town collaborated on an Acting for Screen project with Screen Education Edinburgh. From January to June Strange Town's young actors and SEE's young film makers worked together building up their skills. Over 3 weekends in June the group shot 3 short films which were screened at the Filmhouse in August. They are now available to watch online:

Make Lemonade [Click here](#)

Skidmark [Click here](#)

The Funeral [Click here](#)

For the September to December term a new Acting for Screen group worked with filmmaker and director Ryan Dewar of Dreamcastle Films to learn all about acting for screen and how it differs from acting on stage. These young people will have the opportunity to use their skills and appear in short films made by Screen Education Edinburgh in 2020.



Young Company

Strange Town young company exists to give young emerging actors the opportunity to learn their craft through hands on training. Working in partnership with other organisations Strange Town has developed a repertoire of issue-based plays for young audiences (TYA – theatre for young audiences) that have been performed in prisons, theatres, a football stadium and schools across Scotland! All these shows were directed by Steve Small apart from *Flutter* which was co-directed by Kai Peacock and Steve Small. *Dr Korczak's Example* was directed by Steve Small and Kai Peacock was the assistant director.

BALISONG by Jen Adam

2019 began with *Balisong* by Jen Adam going back out on tour after a break over Christmas. This play highlights the dangers of carrying a knife and asks the audience to think about their own responsibility if they know someone is carrying a knife. It toured Scottish secondary schools tour until Feb '19. *Balisong* was then revived for a third tour of Scottish secondary schools from September – November.

After three schools tours (2017–19) *Balisong* has toured to every local authority in Scotland and has been seen by an audience of over 44,000 young people.

Balisong was produced by Kai Peacock and funded by No Knives Better Lives in partnership with Fast Forward.

FLUTTER by Duncan Kidd

Flutter examines the growing problem of youth gambling. Toured March – May 2019. Look out for a new version of *Flutter* (now called *Trust Me*) touring secondary schools from January – April 2020.

Funded by Gambling Aware and produced by Fast Forward.

WASTED by Duncan Kidd

Raising the dangers of alcohol and the issues of peer pressure this play toured secondary schools from May – June.

Funded by SWAF (Scottish Whisky Action Fund) and produced in partnership with Fast Forward.

BEING A DAD by Duncan Kidd

Performed at the first Edinburgh Thrive Conference in November.

Originally commissioned by Fathers Network Scotland for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2016 this short play about a young father in the early stages of the criminal justice system has now been performed in prisons, theatres and conferences. Funded by A Sense of Belonging Arts Programme

DR KORCZAK'S EXAMPLE by David Greig

Performed at the Scottish Storytelling Centre at Edinburgh Festival Fringe followed by 17 performances in Secondary Schools in Edinburgh, East Lothian and Fife. (Info pack and report produced).

Funded by A Sense of Belonging Arts Programme.



STRANGE TOWN AGENCY

The forefront of young Scottish talent



Strange Town Annual Review 2019

The Strange Town Young Actors Agency continued to have clients cast in numerous professional film, TV and theatre productions. Highlights included:

FILM

- > Tallulah Greive playing lead role Orla in feature film **OUR LADIES** (Sony/Sigma Films), directed by Michael Caton-Jones, that premiered at the BFI London Film Festival and will go on general release in 2020
- > Lewis Gribben playing lead role Duncan in feature film **BOYZ IN THE WOOD** (Matthew Plouffe/Tobey Maguire/Brian Coffey/Laura Tunstall) that premiered at SXSW film festival, winning the Midnighters Audience Award and opened the Edinburgh International Film Festival. It will be streamed on Amazon Prime Video in 2020
- > Silvie Furneaux appearing as supporting role Daisy in short film **EDUCATED** (Sigma Films), that premiered at Edinburgh International Film Festival
- > Rachel Doherty appearing as lead role Annie in short film **SURFACE NOISE** (eca) that is currently having success at film festivals.
- > Lewis Gribben shooting as lead role Tommy in short film **THE IAIN BANKS APPRECIATION SOCIETY** (Campfire)
- > Castings in various student films, notably Jakub Bednarczyk in **THE LAST WINTER**, Jude Coward Nicoll and Josie O'Brien in **THE LOST SOCK**, Fraser MacRae in **VIRIDIOS**, Alaina Flanagan, Amy Quinn, Stanley Treshansky and Hamish Hastie in **THE PRINCESS AND THE BIRD**, Alannah Skellett in **ROSEMARY'S GRANDDAUGHTER** and Jacob Watson in **HINDSIGHT**

TV

- > Lewis Gribben playing significant role Dylan in Channel 4 drama **DEADWATER FELL**
- > Talluah Greive shooting as lead role Maddie in forthcoming TV drama **PENANCE**, to air on Channel 5
- > Zindzi Hudson continuing to appear as regular role Ruby McLean in **RIVER CITY** (BBC Scotland)
- > Tallulah Greive appearing as lead role Lauren in **FLATMATES** (BBC iPlayer), a spin off series to **MILLIE INBETWEEN** (CBBC)
- > Rachel Doherty, Alisa Gashi and Nandi Sawyers-Hudson shooting in BBC One drama **THE NEST** that will air in 2020
- > Rachel Doherty and Bea Tena-Hutchinson shooting in BBC Scotland pilot **THE DALY GRIND** that will air in 2020

- > Reno Cole appearing in BBC Scotland pilot **DASH**
- > Calum Caulfield and Billy Thomson appearing in TV drama **THE SMALL HAND** (Channel 5)

THEATRE

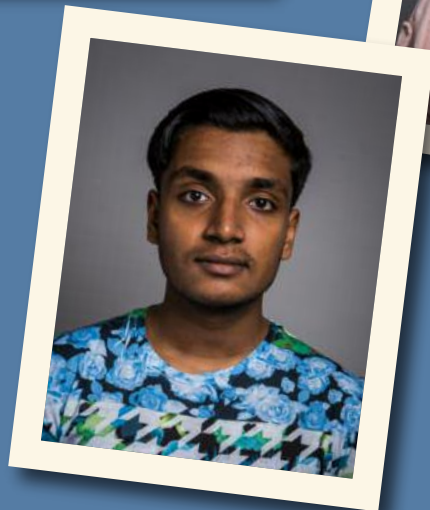
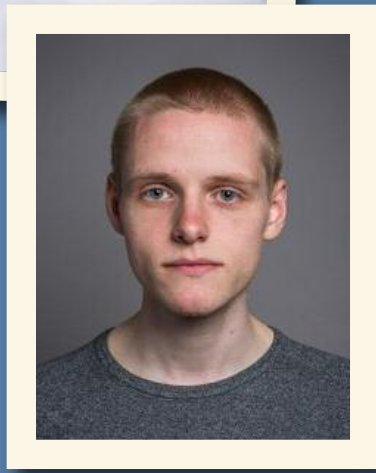
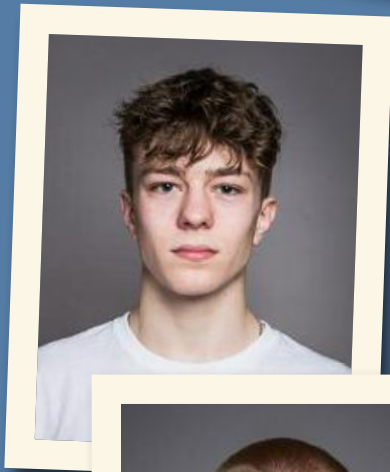
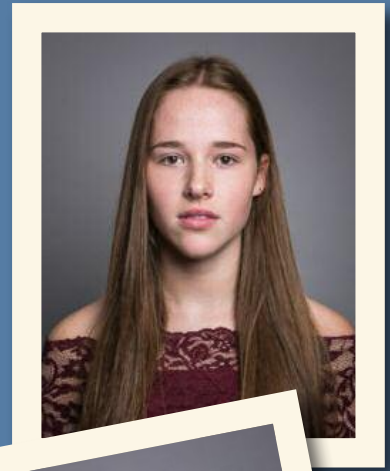
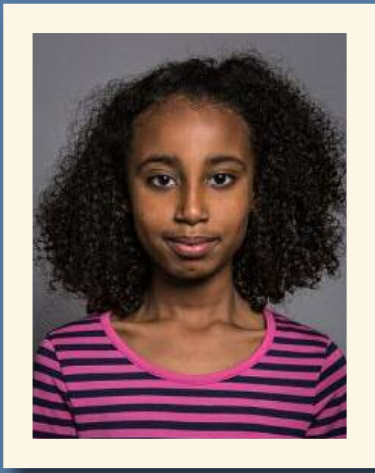
- > Susie Chilver, Ciara Flanagan, Rosella Elphinstone, Taylor Learmonth, Suzanne O'Brien appearing in **THE PATIENT GLORIA** (Gina Moxley/Abbey/Pan Pan) at the Traverse Theatre
- > Pola Kasprzyk appearing in **THE MONSTROUS HEART** (Stephen Joseph/Traverse) at the Traverse Theatre
- > Tiana Milne-Wilson appearing as the Prince in Howden Park Arts Centre's **CINDERELLA**
- > Fraser MacRae and Suzanne O'Brien in touring stage production **FLUTTER**
- > Rebecca Forsyth and Suzanne O'Brien in touring stage production **BALISONG**

RADIO/VOICEOVER

- > Asiyah Williams playing the Girl in **SHRAPNEL** (BBC Radio 4) and Tiana Wilne-Milson playing lead role Gabby in radio drama **THE SPACE PROGRAMME** (Baffle Gab Productions)
- > Voiceovers for animations and commercials such as Matthew Gilmour Wright for **ZOG** and **KIT AND PUP** (both BBC ALBA) and Niall Bayne for **SQA** on Spotify

COMMERCIALS/ ONLINE/VIDEO

- > Violet Fluendy and Katy Thorne were cast in a commercial for **MITSUBISHI**
- > Castings in various online films and campaigns for eg Scottish Government, notably Rachel Doherty, Silvie Furneaux and Nicholas Troy in campaigns about period poverty; Kel McNaught for the **EFPIA**; Josie O'Brien and Annie Pantopoulou for **CERVELO**
- > Castings in various music videos, notably Zindzi Hudson in **SISTER BUDDHA** (Belle & Sebastian); Edward Hutchings, Ruaridh Mollica and Nicholas Troy in **EASTER ROAD** (Callum Beattie) and Alaina Flanagan in **FLOWER INTO WOUNDS** (The Ninth Wave).





Alumni

In 2019 Strange Town were delighted to welcome back several ex-members of Strange Town youth theatre to work professionally with Strange Town. We asked Poppy Apter, Fin Ross Russell and Rob Small what their memories of Strange Town were and what it was like coming back to work with Strange Town

Poppy Apter Stage Manager

I joined Strange Town at the beginning of my theatre journey, and it allowed me to discover what working in theatre is really like, in a safe & supported environment. Having the opportunity to work on fully realised shows in a theatre space while still of school age is a unique experience, and one that for me helped confirm that this was the industry I wanted to pursue a career in. I have since graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with a degree in stage management and have been invited back to Strange Town to work on their Christmas 2019 and Spring 2020 shows as a staff member. It feels great to be able to give something back to an organisation that helped me get to where I am now, and to work with the stage management work experience programme they have to help the next generation of backstage technicians!

Favourite Strange Town show/moment: *Sno White & the 7 Dickensians* by Isla Cowan 2019 – Brilliant script which did a great job of updating the story to fit modern times, and the cast's comedy timing was excellent.

Fin Ross Russell Assistant Director

As somebody who participated in Strange Town as a teenager and was subsequently inspired to study at the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama and work at Chichester Festival Theatre, being offered the opportunity to assistant-direct the Wednesday 11–14 group signified my artistic development coming full circle, allowing me to be part of the development of the current generation of Strange Town participants. Being a member of Strange Town is not simply being part of a company, it is becoming part of a family who not only care about young peoples' growth as performers but also as confident human beings capable of handling anything life throws at them.

Favourite Strange Town show/moment: *Trash Palace* by Sam Siggs (2014) Getting to work with the story of "Brittany" and "Scott" in the thick of the 2014 referendum build up, it felt like we were part of

representing that history in a way that felt special to us and I still remember every element of that story and play six years later.'

Rob Small Designer of the 8-10's show posters & the animation for the TYA show *Flutter/Trust Me*

I liken my experience of being at Strange Town to going through a revolving door and coming out again with your hair sticking up and your clothes dishevelled (but in a good way.) It was an absolute whirlwind ride.

Strange Town taught me how to be the confident me. Being chained to a radiator and shouting at the top of your lungs to a crowd of 600 people will do that, but it was wonderful. It gave me a chance to show my friends that I wasn't just a super quiet guy. And I know I'm not the only one who felt that way in my group. It really helped shape me in ways I wasn't expecting, both in my personal life and my social life. I really felt good about myself when I was in that room.

So coming back to Strange Town years later to work was a rather surreal experience, if a comforting one. Making the posters for these shows lets me see the performance from the other side, watching a character I spent hours hunched over scribbling transform onstage before my eyes. It's truly something special to watch a Strange Town show and see a kid who just has it, the knack for acting! And I love that more than 10 years on, the audience still applauds when the Strange Town logo appears at the start of the show. I've still to see that anywhere else.

I'm incredibly grateful to be involved with Strange Town again. It's conjured back memories of huddling around on the couches outside the rehearsal space with friends, having just come out of school and looking for a place to be you.

Favourite Strange Town moment – Playing Mother Hubbard and doing the voice in *Pantoland* by Sam Siggs (2011), the most fun I've had.



Partners and Funders

Fast Forward www.fastforward.org.uk

Fathers Network Scotland www.fathersnetwork.org.uk

Screen Education www.screen-ed.org

Active Inquiry www.activeinquiry.co.uk

Rolled Up Productions



Supported by:

Barcapel Foundation, Calton Youth Ministry Trust, Caram Trust, Nancie Massey Charitable Trust, Ponton House Trust, Princes Exchange Foundation, Tillyloss Trust, The John Watson's Trust, Creative Scotland Go See Share Fund.

People

Jen Adam	writer	Tallulah Greive	patron	Ailis Paterson	assistant
Joel Anderson	actor	Lianne Harris	actor	Kai Peacock	assistant director
Poppy Apter	stage manager	Ruth Hollyman	creative director	Kirsty Pickering	actor
Lottie Avery	stage manager	John Paul Hurley	masterclass leader	Archie Powell	stage management work experience
James Beagon	writer/director	Katie Innes	production and design manager	Tim Primrose	writer
EmmaClaire Brightlyn	masterclass leader	Catie Johnston	admin assistant	Emma Quinn	print designer
Bradley Lewis Cannon	director	Zak Laing	stage management work experience	Sam Robertson	stage management work experience
Jessica Chalmers	administrator	Veera Laitinen	stage manager	Malcolm Rogan	lighting designer
Susie Chilver	admin assistant	Charlie Park-Long	volunteer	Adam Rosa	director
Caleb Conrad	stage management work experience	Hayley Keating	actor	Fin Ross Russell	assistant director
Isla Cowan	writer	Duncan Kidd	writer	Ellen Shand	director
Gregor Davidson	improv comedy leader	Ellie Lennon	actor	Jack Sinclair	actor
Ryan Dewar	acting for screen leader	Theo Merback	work experience	Steve Small	creative director
Fraser Dodds	actor	Harrison MacNeill	actor	Diane Stewart	writer
Amy Drummond	writer	Fraser MacRae	actor	Kate Taylor	fundraiser
Danielle El Jorr	stage manager	Ed McGurn	masterclass leader	Mark Thomson	masterclass leader
Catherine Expósito	writer/director	Isla McPherson	stage management work experience	Ailsa Tully	stage management work experience
Paige Fennel	stage management work experience	Stephen McQuade	prop maker	Catherine Ward-Stoddart	director
Lily Intihar	admin assistant	Caroline Mathison	improv comedy leader	Kamau Williams	stage management work experience
Ciara Flanagan	admin assistant	James Mills	assistant director	Jennifer Winn	stage management work experience
Rebecca Forsyth	actor	Holly Morton	lighting assistant	Nicola Wood	assistant director
Gavin Fort	sound designer	Odessa Olandini	stage management work experience		
Bobbi Gibbs	stage management work experience	Suzanne O'Brien	actor		
Joe Gorazdowski	stage management work experience	Orla O'Connor	masterclass leader		
		Keiran O'Toole	stage management work experience		

Strange Town Board
Andrew Baker, Kate Bayne, Andy Catlin, Robert Davidson, Mary McGookin, John Naylor OBE (Chair) & Ailis Paterson





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Registered office: **Out of the Blue Drill Hall, 36 Dalmeny St, Edinburgh EH6 8RG**