

BBC Arts launch DEBUT first-time playwrights initiative

Bim Adewunmi, Katherine Parkinson, Beryl Richards & Frank Skinner to produce new plays for Edinburgh Fringe

Ahead of the Edinburgh Festivals, BBC Arts today, 15th May, announces details of DEBUT, a unique new initiative for first-time playwrights.

Working with four writers who have never written for the stage before - **Bim Adewunmi, Katherine Parkinson, Beryl Richards** and **Frank Skinner** - the joint initiative with Avalon aims to encourage writers to step out of their comfort zone and write their debut play, which will then be produced for the Edinburgh Fringe.

The writers were approached at the beginning of 2018 and invited to submit an hour-long first draft of a play. The shows will be developed and produced ready for the Edinburgh stage in August.

Jonty Claypole, the BBC's Director of Arts says: 'Edinburgh in August is one of the most creative places in the world. It's the role of the BBC to share that energy and joy with the rest of the UK and beyond, which we do throughout the month across our services. It's also an opportunity for talent to experiment with new directions and ideas in a safe environment. As part of our Edinburgh activity, BBC Arts is delighted to be working with Avalon on DEBUT, supporting four extraordinary talents to develop their writing practice in new ways.'

Jon Thoday, joint MD of Avalon, says: 'Avalon are thrilled to be working with BBC Arts on this initiative encouraging talent to try something totally new to evolve at a brilliantly creative melting pot - the Edinburgh Festival Fringe'

DEBUT will see four plays produced for and performed at the Edinburgh Fringe 2018:

- *Hoard* by **Bim Adewunmi** (senior culture editor for BuzzFeed News and columnist for the Guardian)
Underbelly, White Belly, 1st – 26th August 2018, 5.20pm
- *Sitting* by **Katherine Parkinson** (*The IT Crowd, Doc Martin, The Honourable Woman* and *Humans*)
Gilded Balloon, The Dining Room, 1st – 26th August 2018, 3.15pm
- *Diamond* by **Beryl Richards** (*Joe All Alone, The Secret Life of Boys, Uncle Dad* and *My Life as a Popat*)
Underbelly, The Dairy Room, 1st – 26th August 2018, 4.15pm
- *Nina's Got News* by **Frank Skinner** (*Fantasy Football League, Baddiel & Skinner Unplanned, Room 101* and *Taskmaster*)
Pleasance, Queen Dome, 1st – 26th August 2018, 2.50pm

Bim Adewunmi said: *'In my journalism and my essays I'm always seeking out the stories of everyday people, sometimes in unusual situations. The family in 'Hoard' is living just one of those stories — and I'm delighted Avalon and BBC Arts have given me a chance to bring them to life for the stage.'*

Katherine Parkinson said: *'I would never have thought to try and write a play unless asked to do so, and so I am delighted that the BBC and Avalon did ask! I cannot however be held responsible for the results.'*

Beryl Richards said: *'This has been a fantastic opportunity for me, I have loved writing Diamond and relish the chance to see an audience react to my work'*

Frank Skinner said: *'This is such a brilliant initiative. Thirty years in comedy and I never knew I was only one encouraging phone call away from writing a play. I put down the receiver and picked up my laptop. Suddenly, I feel like a man of the theatre. I am hankering for a fedora'.*

For seventy years, the Edinburgh Fringe has been the birthplace of critically-acclaimed breakout productions including Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), Richard Thomas and Stewart Lee's *Jerry Springer The Opera* (2002) and Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* (2013), whilst writers such as Jez Butterworth (aged just 19) and Enda Walsh found early success with respective plays *Cooking in a Bedsitter* (1991) and *Disco Pigs* (1997) there too.

DEBUT embraces the Edinburgh Fringe as the platform it was designed for, as a launchpad for new playwrights and their debut plays to be seen and to evolve, ready for whatever might happen beyond the Fringe.

DEBUT plays information

Diamond by Beryl Richards

Beryl Richards is a multi BAFTA award-winning and Emmy-nominated TV and film director best known for *Joe All Alone* (BBC), *The Secret Life of Boys* (BBC/ABC), *Uncle Dad* (ITV), *My Life as a Popat* (ITV) and *The Ward* (ITV). As a specialist in family and children's comedy and drama, Beryl was elected chair of Directors UK in 2015 and won the 2016 Women in Film and TV ITV Achievement of the Year Award. 'Diamond' is her first ever play.

'I just had to see you. I... just y'know... just once. Once. I needed to.'

When reunited with the mother who abandoned him at birth, successful surgeon Jordan rejects her. Shortly after his mother's death, he realizes that he may never know the truth about his origins. Everything changes when a mysterious young woman arrives unexpectedly, sparking Jordan to embark on a journey of discovery, revelation, and redemption.

Hoard by Bim Adewunmi

'Hoard' is the debut play by Bim Adewunmi, senior culture writer for BuzzFeed News and columnist with Guardian Weekend. She is a 2018 finalist at the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) Ellie Awards, and her work has appeared in Vogue, Mslexia, Red, and Monocle, among several others. Bim turns her hand to the stage for her debut play.

'If I hadn't come here this evening, when would I have met him?'

Rafi and Ami are about to meet their little sister's boyfriend for the first time. Out of the blue, their mother arrives. Wura often shows up unannounced, and it's never been a problem except this time, it is. Why doesn't she know Brian exists? For this close knit family, this secret has explosive consequences, one that forces the three sisters and their mother to face up to old hurts and unspoken tensions.

Sitting by Katherine Parkinson

'Sitting' is the debut play by BAFTA award-winning actress Katherine Parkinson whose credits include *The IT Crowd* (Channel 4), *Doc Martin* (ITV), *The Honourable Woman* (BBC Two) and *Humans* (Channel 4). Sometimes emotional, sometimes poignant, sometimes funny, Parkinson turns her talents to playwriting for the first time in her extensive career.

'Do you even need me here? I think you do. Actually.'

In an artist's studio, three different people sit for a painting. They find themselves in the same chair for very different reasons and years apart from each other, but they are all searching for a connection. Will they find it

Nina's Got News by Frank Skinner

In 1987 Frank Skinner spent £400 of his last £435 in his bank account to book a venue at the Edinburgh Fringe for the first time. Four years later he took home the Perrier Award – now Edinburgh Comedy Award - the most prestigious prize in comedy. His first book spent 46 weeks in the Sunday Times Bestseller List. His first single, *Three Lions*, has gone to number one on three separate occasions. He's written and fronted television programmes including *Fantasy Football*, *The Frank Skinner Show* and *Room 101*. His radio show has won three gold ARIAs and saw him inducted into the Radio Academy Hall of Fame.

He's never written a play, until now.

A show about Nina's truly incredible news, how her ex-boyfriend and her best friend react to it, and whether they can possibly believe her.

NOTES TO EDITORS

We are really excited by the prospect of working on this and look forward to developing this idea for the future. Writers who are interested in hearing more and talking to us about the initiative please get in touch - DEBUT@avalonuk.com

Also at Edinburgh Fringe... As part of BBC Arts commitment to the Edinburgh Fringe, for the first time BBC Radio 3 will record a series of audio dramas in front of an audience in a specially created pop-up radio drama studio at Summerhall. The pop-up studio will feature a mixture of performed works building upon the rich legacy of audio drama that BBC Radio 3, and Third Programme before it, is proud to have brought to audiences for over 70 years. More details will be announced shortly.

About BBC Arts

The BBC is the biggest creator of arts content and is Britain's creative partner – a stage for the nation to experience the very best arts; when they want, how they want.

- **The nation's stage:** access to arts and culture programming for all through the licence fee – we create and showcase more arts and culture than any other broadcaster
- **An Innovator:** constantly finding new ways to bring the best quality culture to audiences; working with the arts sector as partner and acting as a hot house for new talent
- **Britain's creative partner:** a bold force in the UK creative sector as creator and commissioner, also a platform for new talent
- **An investor in quality:** we only present the highest quality arts and culture programming, crafted by skilled production teams and shared with all audiences
- **Bringing the nation together:** like no other we create and amplify moments in arts and culture, cutting through with a broad audience

About Avalon

Avalon is a multi-award winning talent management, live promotion and television production group with offices in the UK and the USA.

Avalon and ARG, the talent management arm has discovered and represents many artists which are household names, both in the UK, the USA, and around the world.

Avalon produced *Newman and Baddiel: Live at Wembley*, the UK's first arena comedy show; *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, the first West End show to win all four UK 'Best New Musical' awards; and has continued to produce live shows globally, as well as promoting more winners and nominees of the prestigious Edinburgh Comedy Award than any other company.

In 2018, Avalon was again named the number one true independent television production company in the UK and has produced numerous ground-breaking television shows including: Emmy and Peabody award winner *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (HBO), multi-award winning and Emmy-nominated *Catastrophe* (Channel 4/Amazon Prime), RTS and Rose d'Or winning *Not Going Out* (the BBC's longest running sitcom currently on air), BAFTA and RTS nominated *Taskmaster* (UKTV/Comedy Central USA), multi-BAFTA award winning *TV Burp* (ITV1), *Russell Howard's Good News* (BBC2), *Fantasy Football League* (BBC/ITV) and *Workaholics* (Comedy Central USA).

Other shows currently in production include: *Wyatt Cenac's Problem Areas* (HBO); *The Button* (BBC One), *The Chris Ramsey Show* (Comedy Central UK), *Alternatino* (Comedy Central USA), *Russell Howard & Mum: Road Trip* (Comedy Central UK), *The Russell Howard*

Hour (Sky One), *The Week That Wasn't* (Sky One) and *Stand Up Central with Rob Delaney* (Comedy Central UK); whilst the catalogue is sold worldwide by Avalon Distribution.

For Avalon news visit: www.avalon-entertainment.com or [@avalonent](https://twitter.com/avalonent)