MFA Theatre Directing at Birkbeck

A summary of the work of recent graduates as of October 2019

There are over 100 graduated Birkbeck directors. Over 80% of are working regularly as theatre directors and producers and although it is impossible to summarise the totality of their work, the account below gives an indication of the breadth of their work and some indication of where future Birkbeck graduates may expect to work.

In 2019 Birkbeck directors directed productions at the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Exchange Manchester, Chichester Festival Theatre, the Curve Leicester, the New Vic Staffordshire, the Theatre by the Lake Keswick; many national tours, including People, Places and Things, Pink Sari Revolution and The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time; at several opera houses in Europe; and at several theatres in the USA.

The work of some individuals includes:

Lyndsey Turner is an associate director of the National Theatre and won the 2014 Olivier Award for Best Director for her production of Chimerica at the Almeida and then in the West End. Lyndsey directed direct Benedict Cumberbatch in Hamlet at the Barbican. Her other work includes: Posh at the Royal Court and then the West End; Top Girls at the National Theatre; several productions at the Royal Court, the Donmar, the Gate Theatre Notting Hill, and in New York.

Sam Brown is the first English-speaking director to win two major opera awards: the European Opera Prize and the Ring Award - prestigious European-wide competitions for emerging opera directors. The European Opera Prize brings with it an opera production at the Teatro Sociale di Como, and the Ring Award an opera production at Graz Oper and several productions planned for the ENO and other leading European opera houses until 2020. He has just directed a very well-received revival of The Barber of Seville for Welsh National Opera.

In 2018 Justin Audibert was appointed as the Artistic Director of the UK’s leading theatre for children and young people, the Unicorn Theatre and directed the RSC’s Taming of the Shrew in 2019; and Suba Das was appointed as the artistic director of leading new writing theatre company HighTide.

In September 2019 Atri Banerjee won the Stage Debut Award for best director for his production of Hobson’s Choice at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester.

In 2012 Sam Pritchard won the most prestigious award for emerging theatre directors, the James Menzies-Kitchin (JMK) award and subsequently directed The Fire Raisers at the Young Vic. His production of Pygmalion toured for Headlong in 2017. He is now international associate director of the Royal Court.

Liz Stevenson, who graduated in 2014, won the JMK in 2015 and directed Barrie Keeffe’s Barbarians at the Young Vic and is now Artistic Director of the Theatre by the Lake Keswick.
In 2013 Kim Pearce was the runner-up. Kim Pearce also won the Regional Theatre Young Directors award in 2011. Kate Budgen was the JMK runner-up in 2008 and many Birkbeck directors have made it to the final stages of the JMK.

In January 2019 Fay Lomas won the inaugural Peter Hall Emerging Artist Fellowship at Kingston’s Rose Theatre.

Several directors have set up companies that are supported by Arts Council England: Annette Mees (Coney), Jack Lowe (Curious Directive), Simon Pittman (Rough Fiction), Paschale Straiton (Red Herring), Anthony Stones (Tea-Fuelled).

The artistic directors and associate directors of the London fringe theatres Jermyn Street Theatre, Clapham Omnibus, The Playground, The Drayton Arms and The Last Refuge are or have been Birkbeck directors.

Birkbeck directors are, or have been, associate directors at Sheffield Theatres, the Curve Leicester, Stephen Joseph Theatre Scarborough, the New Vic Staffordshire, the Dukes Theatre Lancaster, the Theatre by the Lake Keswick, Theatre503 and The Gate Notting Hill.

Birkbeck directors are regularly assistant directors at the National Theatre, the RSC, the Young Vic, the Old Vic, Shakespeare’s Globe and the ENO, and have assisted leading directors such as Rufus Norris, Greg Doran, Nicholas Hytner, Michael Boyd, Howard Davies, Lucy Bailey, Yael Farber, Rachel Chavkin and Katie Mitchell.

Many West End productions have had Birkbeck associate directors, overseeing their runs. Most recently: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time; People, Places and Things; Everyone’s Talking About Jamie.

Several directors now work in the US, and in theatres in Europe, and one runs a drama school in Mumbai.

Rob Swain

Programme Director
MFA Theatre Directing

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