MFA Theatre Directing at Birkbeck

A summary of the work of recent graduates as of December 2016

There are over 90 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.

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. Recently she has directed direct Benedict Cumberbatch in Hamlet at the Barbican and Brian Friel’s The Faith Healer at the Donmar Warehouse. Her other work includes: Posh at the Royal Court and then the West End; A Light Shining in Buckinghamshire at the National Theatre; Mark Ravenhill’s adaptation of Candide at the RSC; several productions at the Royal Court, the Gate Theatre Notting Hill, and at Sheffield Theatres.

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 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. He is now associate director of the Royal Court and will be directing ‘B’ by Guillermo Calderon there in September 2017. His production of Pygmalion tours for Headlong in spring 2017.

Liz Stevenson, who graduated in 2014, won the JMK in 2015 and directed Barrie Keeffe’s Barbarians at the Young Vic in November 2015. 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.

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), Suba Das (commonpractice), Anthony Stones (Tea-Fuelled).

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

Birkbeck directors are, or have been, associate directors at Sheffield Theatres, the Curve Leicester, Stephen Joseph Theatre Scarborough, 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 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; This House and An American in Paris.

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

Rob Swain
Programme Director
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