

# Edinburgh International Magic Festival starts on Friday



From vampire-style illusionists to a week-long kids' course revealing the secrets of magic; from uncanny mind-readers to comedy and theatre – the [Edinburgh International Magic Festival](#) is back this week. And it's bigger than ever, with more than 30 performers from eight countries taking part.

'It's amazing to see the festival growing,' said artistic director Kevin McMahon, himself a magician, who founded the festival three years ago. 'It's wonderful that we've been able to find an audience of more than 3,000 who want to get involved in magic. It's really satisfying to know that they're out there, and that they appreciate good magic – and I'm so glad that the festival has been one of the catalysts for that.'

✘ The festival's grand opening on Friday 29 June is with a [Magic and Variety Gala Show](#) in the Lyceum Theatre, bringing together seven performers from around the world, and some from closer to home. 'One of the acts, Voronin, is someone I've always admired,' explains McMahon. 'He's Ukrainian, but he ran his own event in Seattle for about 15 years, where he was the Dracula-esque host. He far and away the most experienced magician we have, a real master of what he does.'

And alongside juggler Jeton from Germany and illusionists Les Chapeaux Blancs from France, McMahon is also showcasing Scottish talent in the gala show: theatre company Vox Motus, who perform illusions from their recent Lyceum show *The Infamous Brothers Davenport*, and mind-reader Drew McAdam.

Also in the Lyceum is [Voyageurs Egarés](#), a fully staged show combining theatre, clowning and magic by French performers

Jérôme Helfenstein and Claude Brun. 'I saw the show in Spain last summer,' says McMahon, 'and I found it astonishing.' So what can the audience expect? 'It's such a joy to watch an hour-long produced magic show that's so visual, and done completely without words. They use some really startling effects, and there are some moments that are truly beautiful. It starts off with the guys meeting at a train station and end with them blasting off into space – the show takes you into all kinds of different worlds. Sometimes the performers are clowns, sometimes magicians, and sometimes they're interacting with shadow versions of themselves.'

It's also a show that will appeal to all ages, says McMahon. 'It's not specifically a children's show, but kids will certainly enjoy it, and there are a lot of comedy moments. There are games that they play with us noticing things, like they're trying to mess with us.'

Children also get the chance to see how magic is really done in a five-day [Magic School](#) for seven- to ten-year-olds hosted by magicians Gary James and Luke Eaton. 'The kids going along to that will be able to meet a lot of the magicians performing in the festival,' says McMahon. 'They're not just locked in a room with a magic teacher – it's a really vibrant environment where other performers will be getting involved.'



John Archer

One of those is [John Archer](#), best known from CBBC's *Help! My Supply Teacher is Magic*, who also has his own show in the Traverse bar café. 'I really want the kids to feel part of what's going on, and to inspire them to practise and get really good – and, you never know, maybe perform at the festival themselves later on,' says McMahon.



Colin McLeod

Although he finds it difficult to single out shows as particular highlights – ‘It’s hard for me to choose because they’re all good!’ he says – McMahon points to Scottish mind-reader [Colin McLeod](#)’s one-off performance as one to watch. ‘I’m excited about that show. He’s doing a parody of Sherlock Holmes, taking some of the things that people will have seen on television and in the cinema and demonstrating them live. It’s cool to watch.’

And continuing the movie theme, Newcastle-based magician [Matthew J Dowden](#) brings a show inspired by classical films. ‘He’s chosen a few movies that he loves and has been inspired by, and recreated moments from them live on stage using magic,’ says McMahon. ‘For *Singin’ in the Rain*, for example, he dances with a floating umbrella, which makes its own way round the stage.’

There’s also close-up magic from local magicians [Lewis Barlow](#) and [Michael Neto](#), card feats from ‘Card Ninja’ [Javier Jarquin](#), and [The Colour Ham](#), a show combining magic with sketch comedy and featuring McMahon himself as one of its performers. ‘I’m always thinking about where magic is going and how we can interact with other art forms to make something new, and The Colour Ham is essentially sketch comedy with magic and special effects,’ he explains. ‘Sometimes it’s silly, and sometimes it’s extremely silly! But we try to give an audience that likes sketch comedy and an audience that likes magic something a bit different.’

We’re all used to seeing magic tricks on TV, or even on YouTube, but how important is it to see magic in the flesh? ‘It’s vitally important,’ says McMahon. ‘The experience is far more powerful. It’s the same reason that people go to Wimbledon or to see a live football game. As an audience member you have a responsibility – you can influence the show, by giving energy back to the performer. And seeing it with your own eyes just can’t be replicated by seeing it on television.’

The [Edinburgh International Magic Festival](#) runs from Friday 29 June until Friday 6 July in various venues throughout Edinburgh.

