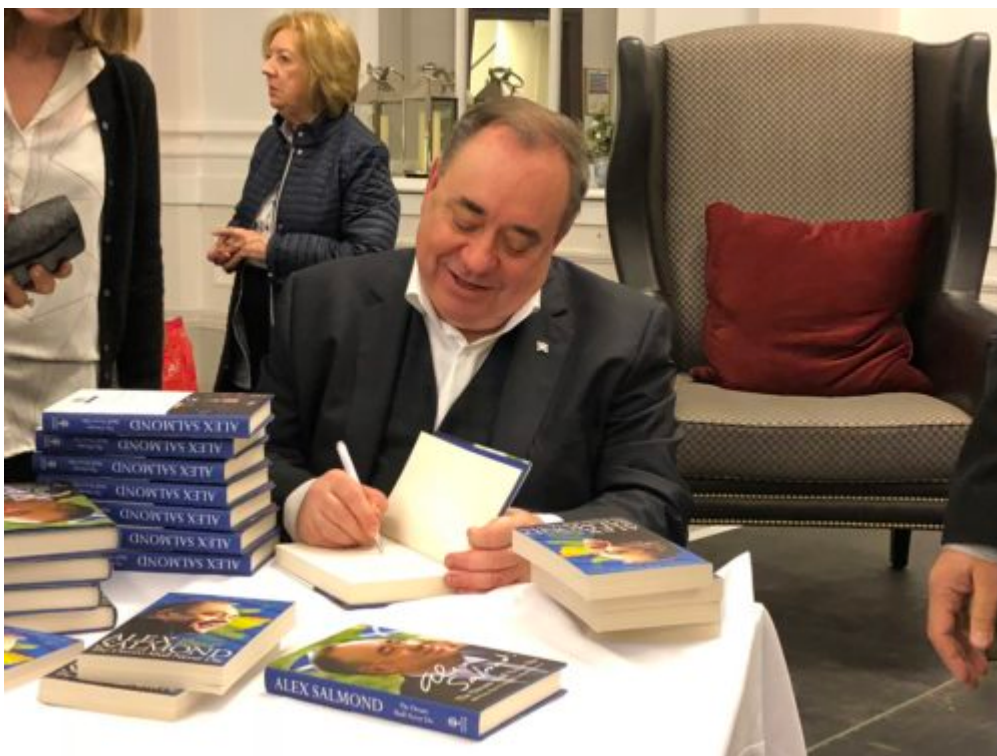


# Alex Salmond Unleashed!

## 2018\*\*\*\*

If you missed Alex Salmond on Saturday night at the Principal Edinburgh George Street with the 30th of his Unleashed shows , then worry not as he revealed that he will be back on the Fringe in the summer. The new show will have a new look and be a bit different from last year.



The audience last night was a little different from those who gathered to see him last August, Perhaps the Fringe show audience was a bit more diverse. This time round the audience was largely pro Indy and made up of one former MP, a former MSP (and former Presiding Officer) and one serving SNP MP, as well as a couple of hundred people who were mainly fans.

But don't think that this was just a second rate show based around the former First Minister's achievements and filled with Theresa May bashing drivel (although she and Amber Rudd are toast as far as the former politician is concerned. (Oh, and Jacobs Rees Mogg is your next Prime Minister)

This was a good well-rounded piece of entertainment. It did not have the pzazz of the Fringe show with all the stage lighting and sound systems, but it seems that Eck has grown into his role as chatmeister. He seems more at home and perhaps less eager to prove that he can pull this off. We know he can. The run of shows last summer was a total sell out.

This time his house band The Carloways chose to play at a wedding in Oban rather than support Alex, but he brought on the more than able Ryan Joseph Burns with his father the eminent portrait artist [Gerard M Burns](#) who paints wonderful portraits, one of which used to hang behind Mr Salmond's desk when he was First Minister, and the stellar singer Sheena Wellington.



Joanna Cherry MP QC meets Professor Clara Ponsati with Aamer Anwar standing behind

In addition to turning a profit from ticket sales, there are books to be signed after the show. The charity auctions after his shows last year which raised over £30,000 for charity involved the sale of unique opportunities: the chance to have afternoon tea with Alex and his guest of the day at the Principal.

*Last night and on Friday the post show auctions raised over £5,000 and the profits from the two shows in Dundee and Edinburgh are going towards what he regards as a very good cause.*

As he [told me](#) in New York the other week, he had invited former Catalan minister Carla Ponsati onto the show. She appeared alongside the lawyer Amer Anwar who is defending her against the European Arrest Warrant issued against her.

This is serious stuff. Professor Ponsati could face what is essentially a life sentence if convicted by the Spanish courts which wants to try her on charges of 'violent rebellion' and the alleged misappropriation of funds.

Possibly the best move she made was to return to The University of St Andrews where she teaches economics so that she can face the arrest warrant proceedings here in Scotland. She has a lot of public support here in what she describes as a 'deep down democratic community'.

Perhaps another sage move has been to engage Sarwar who has enlisted the help of some of the best legal minds Scotland has, including the Dean of Faculty Gordon Jackson QC. The advice to turn to Anwar came from the erstwhile Presiding Officer Tricia Marwick who was in the audience last night.

No matter who Carla Ponsati had turned to it was always going to cost money, and a lot of it. Anwar related the story of the [record breaking Crowdjustice campaign](#) which was set up to pay lawyers' fees, not just in Scotland, but also in Belgium, London, Spain and Germany. This action, if Professor Ponsati is successful in defending it, will break new legal ground.

The crowdfunder was set up at 8am on the morning that Professor Ponsati attended St Leonard's police station to turn herself in. But by the time they got to court, the total sum raised was already in the thousands. Now he asks that big

backers get behind Professor Ponsati as the costs may run up to £500,000, and at present the crowdfunder is halfway there.

The former minister is mild-mannered, small in stature but clearly a force to be reckoned with. Asked by Salmond why she didn't simply count her blessings with a comfy job at his alma mater in St Andrews, she explained : "I could not just walk away. When you have been waiting for a government that you really wanted, I had to be there." And she was there, as an elected minister of the Catalan government that the Spanish one is now fighting to dismantle and discredit. She commented on this : "What has been done is a total violation of the Spanish constitution. Human rights are the most important value to be protected."

Enter Amer Anwar who is a stalwart defender of human rights. He explained the rudiments of the case to a rapt audience, claiming that this is an abuse of the European Arrest Warrant process which was initially intended for drug smugglers and sex traffickers. Anwar said : "This is a gross perversion of the truth. Clara has been charged with violent rebellion and misappropriation of funds, but not one of the charges is attributable to Clara. And if Spain gets away with this then who is next?"

The lawyer called for more support for his client, recently endorsed by the STUC, and who has the clear backing of the SNP. He called for all political parties to stand behind her against the breaches of the rule of law by the Spanish government.

He concluded : "It is time to condemn these abuses happening right here on our doorstep, and abject silence is not enough."

***Salmond threw his weight behind First Minister Nicola Sturgeon in this matter,***

*saying she was perfectly correct when she said that the Scottish Government could not interfere in the case and that it was a matter for the courts to decide.*

*The former First Minister and MP also alluded to the current stalemate in the Brexit negotiations between the UK Government and Scotland saying that Nicola Sturgeon and her Brexit minister Mike Russell are absolutely right in refusing to cave in to Westminster.*

*He said : "They must stick to their guns. Accessibility is key to Holyrood and this harks back to Donald Dewar who devised something brilliant by outlining simply the reserved matters ahead of the first parliament in 300 years being convened. If Westminster can say no then rather than going back to the Devolution Bill's original principles they will simply keep on saying no."*

Professor Ponsati outlined the position in Spain where she claimed : "The media monopoly is ruthless. There is not a single newspaper even minimally reporting news. All the news is just systematic lies with reports of terrorism and violence in Barcelona. Simply not true. It is for the Catalans to decide for the Catalans."

With the serious business over the show passed back to [Ryan Joseph Burns](#) with his beautiful music, Sheena Wellington who got the audience singing, a certain likeness of the Rev IM Jolly in The Very Reverend Former First Minister who took to his wing-backed armchair suggesting that Billy Graham's death leaves a space for him to fill.

Then we were in for a real treat. Des Clarke. You may have heard him on Breaking the News on BBC Radio Scotland – but there is nothing like a whirlwind comic in full flow in person. He was on fire...as himself – and then as a certain President Trump complete with fake tan (so that's why Trump missed The White House correspondents' dinner!).

'Trump' believes that if Kim and Moon can bury the hatchet then he can now do the same with Alex Salmond. He may have claimed in passing to be the mother (yes mother) of Ruth Davidson's baby, and he also suggested that we in Scotland should build a wall and get Carlisle to pay for it.

He also professed that it was great to meet Professor Ponsati, and that he was right behind the Matalan freedom movement. Totally hilarious, rapid fire original content.

Clarke is a class above many other stand ups. It was great to see him live and we can only hope that he returns to Edinburgh with Alex Salmond's new Fringe show this summer.

It will undoubtedly be a bunfight to get tickets for this year's Alex Salmond Fringe show. No matter what your politics, you might enjoy it – and you can donate to some charitable cause at the same time.