

Edinburgh Youth Theatre is given star backing

The stars have come out in support of Edinburgh Youth Theatre (EYT) this week with James McAvoy funding a digital relaunch of master classes by actors Jack Lowden and Kate Dickie, director and writers John McPhail, Stef Smith and Robert Florence.

Classes will be available to everyone with the James McAvoy Bursary.

There is a community of young people who attend drama classes and all kinds of performance training at Bellfield in Portobello, ranging from acting to design and film production. This helps build confidence and life skills and the cancellation of the classes for 3-18 year-olds has been devastating.



Shauna Macdonald, Artistic Director of EYT
Shauna Macdonald, Artistic Director of EYT, has provided
online classes and provided regular Zoom classes with 70 films

for lockdown and a Master Class with industry professional Douglas Maxwell. Participants have tuned in from all across Europe.

But the income stream has been much reduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, even though EYT introduced a Pay What You Can scheme.

Shauna and her team were delighted when their patron and star of stage and screen James McAvoy (best known for *X-Men*, *Atonement* and *His Dark Materials*) made a substantial donation to the youth theatre's Pay What You Can Scheme, which will allow many young people in Scotland access to EYT's online 8-week term this autumn (until Bellfield opens in October) called 'Take – ACTION!'. It will include EYT's first ever weekly film class run by Shauna and film maker Paul Barrie, as well as more Master Classes with actors Jack Lowden (*War and Peace*, *Dunkirk*, *Mary, Queen of Scots*), Kate Dickie (*Game of Thrones*, *The Nest*) Moyo Akandé (*The Cry*, *1745*); director Philip John (*Moondogs*, *Wedding Belles*, *Outlander*, *Downton Abbey*); writers Stef Smith (*Enough*, *Nora: A Doll's House*, *Swallow*) and Jenni Fagan (*The Panopticon*) and writers and actors Robert Florence and Iain Connell (*Burnistoun*, *The Scotts*), international casting director Simone Pereira-Hind, as well as a return from John McPhail already confirmed.

The donation means Edinburgh Youth Theatre can now offer **The James McAvoy Bursary** as the leading branch of their Pay What You Can Scheme. Any potential or current student facing financial hardship will be able to access this bursary scheme to reduce their fees to an amount manageable for their family. This commitment is a reflection of James McAvoy's strong belief that drama should be open to all, whatever their financial circumstances. Shauna and James met when they both attended Paisley Youth Theatre as teenagers and have remained friends ever since.

James McAvoy said: "Youth theatre was the spark that ignited a

passion for drama in me, and as well as being the place I met Shauna it helped build in me a confidence that many children from low income household lack. So many aspects of the performance industry and arts education already feel like the preserve of the privileged so I believe it is vital that enriching learning opportunities like Edinburgh Youth Theatre should be accessible to all.”

Shauna Macdonald said:”The James McAvoy Bursary means that many more young people in Edinburgh and beyond will have the chance to nurture their creative voice and be given a safe space to expressive themselves. I am passionate that drama can change people’s lives for the better. This bursary will allow EYT to positively affect so many more young people, helping them to not only excel in the arts but also to explore their sense of themselves and their world through using drama.”

To book for Take – ACTION!, the autumn term of classes at Edinburgh Youth Theatre visit www.eytheatre.com