

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2022 – Welcome to Americana; a place of dreams, of freedom – a warzone

A group of teenagers are stuck in a murder ballad they cannot escape – the killer could be anywhere or anyone. Could it be you?

Welcome to a land where law puts gun ownership ahead of life in the name of freedom, where media and musical traditions glamourise killers, where mass murder has become performance – seeking to bump up the body count for maximum notoriety.

This is a nation where politicians and powerful interest groups have helped create a climate of fear, where every stranger is treated with suspicion and citizens are told to arm themselves.

Americana: A Murder Ballad is the latest work from leading Scottish playwright Morna Young, with music by Davey Anderson, and presented by the multiple Fringe First Award winning Pepperdine Scotland.

Young, named Scots Writer of the Year in 2019, has created a drama which uses the murder ballad (a musical form taken by Scots and Irish emigrants to the New World) to explore how America's youth are trapped in a perpetual cycle of fear.

A folk musician herself, Young sees how these ballads that sentimentalise violence and criminality have become deeply

ingrained in music and media. More than that, they say something disturbing about society in general.

She says: "I first approached *Americana* with the question: how do we break the cycle? Time and time again, we see shootings in America and the subsequent thoughts and prayers without meaningful change. Spending time with young Americans, I was devastated to learn of the Active Shooter drills that students practice: run, hide, fight. Far from being a rare occurrence, active shooters are now part of the country's DNA.

"At the same time, I became increasingly interested in the use of murder within music and particularly ballads. The idea of a musical cycle, that restarts time and time again, allowed me to use structural form as a way to explore this perpetual cycle of violence.

"Whilst the gun problem may be US specific, *Americana: A Murder Ballad* taps into the universality of collective fear, and the consequences of mistrusted 'othering'."

Pepperdine Scotland specialises in creating collaborative works bringing together leading Scottish writers and drama students from Pepperdine University, California, to present a specially commissioned world premiere play at the Edinburgh Fringe.

Past projects have included *The Abode* by Davey Anderson (★★★★ *British Theatre Guide*, ★★★ *The Herald*, ★★★ *British Theatre.com*) and Fringe First winner *The Interference* by Lynda Radley (★★★★ *Broadway Baby*, ★★★★★ *British Theatre Guide*, ★★★ *The Scotsman*, ★★★ *The List*).

Like previous Pepperdine Scotland productions *Americana: A Murder Ballad*, which is directed by Cathy Thomas-Grant, seeks to address pressing issues about the contemporary world.

In this case it questions the institutions that have enabled gun ownership to come ahead of human life. It also reflects

the way that song has frequently become a way to romanticise acts of brutality, often against women, and those who commit them.

The production is highly relevant now, after woundings and deaths caused by guns (already rising sharply in 2018-19) leapt by 33% in the first 13 months of the pandemic from 32,348 to 43,288. Minnesota alone saw a 120% increase (see [New Scientist](#)).

About murder ballads

Murder ballads were highly popular in the 18th and 19th century, being taken from Scotland, Ireland and elsewhere in the UK to the USA. Their lyrics form a narrative describing the events of a murder, often including the lead-up and/or aftermath.

They had a powerful influence on American music that stretches across the centuries and through many genres, with songs such as *Delia's Gone* or *Long Black Veil* by Johnny Cash, *Where Did You Sleep Last Night* (traditional but covered by Nirvana) or the Louvin Brothers with *Knoxville Girl*.

Listings Details

- Venue: Assembly Checkpoint (Venue 322)
- Time: 13:20
- Dates: 3-17 August 2022
- Previews: 3&4 August
- Duration: 75minutes
- Ticket prices: Previews £8.50. Aug 6-9,12-14 £15.00 (£14.00 concessions) Aug 5,10-11,15-17 £13.50 (£12.50)
- Advisory: Age 14+
- Box office: edfringe.com and 0131 623 3030

