

Dave's Edinburgh Comedy Awards throwing a spotlight on new talent at the Fringe

It is the 40th birthday of the Dave Edinburgh Comedy Awards this year, and Producer and Director, Nica Burns, who has run the awards since 1984, has undiminished energy for discovering new talent – which is what these awards are all about.

Burns explained that when she began there were 35 shows eligible and she was able to see all of them, but in 2019 that list had grown to 750 shows. Even this year the list of eligible comedy shows is still around 600 or so, and she said that this surely shows the “importance of the comedy genre in our culture”.

In her speech to a gathered audience at lunch on Sunday, she lauded the Fringe Society for offering performers rooms for no more than £280 per week (1200 rooms were let under this scheme). But, she also highlighted the new [Short Term Let legislation](#) which she views as an obstacle to performers coming to the Fringe who need accommodation while they are here.

The new legislation makes it mandatory to obtain planning permission to let out a **whole house** as a holiday let. This is intended to control the number of homes in the capital which are used in this way causing disruption for people living in

stairs where “party flats” had become the norm, and also to ensure that more homes are available to local people.

This view – shared by William Burdett-Coutts the Director of Assembly at their launch on Wednesday night – is in direct conflict with the view of the Leader of The City of Edinburgh Council, Cammy Day, who was happy that Edinburgh will become the first Scottish city to introduce the controls.

He said: “We have unique housing pressures in Edinburgh, with a small but densely populated city centre and a fast growing population. Combined with the surge in visitors we receive for the Festivals, this has always resulted in high demand for accommodation in the month of August. This change to policy will help us to control the number of properties being unsuitably used in this way and help us to better balance housing supply for local people all year round, without stopping people from renting out rooms to performers during the festivals.”

Dave’s Edinburgh Comedy Awards

The awards exist to “throw a spotlight on new and emerging talent, talent who have not yet got started”, brand new people coming and doing an hour long show for the first time. That is the difference according to Burns who points out that it is one thing doing a bit of stand up at a comedy club but quite another to have enough material for an hour long spot on the Fringe. And this is where new comedians and acts will be reviewed, not in London, as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe shows such a spotlight on comedy.

Nica said that the importance of the Dave’s Edinburgh Comedy Awards could be summed up simply by looking at previous winners who include names such as Steve Coogan, Emma Thompson, Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie. But she pointed out that the fact that such comedians have continued to make ‘em laugh is also important.

Nica Burns the producer and director of [@ComedyAwards](#) explained to us the importance of the awards to new and emerging talent who have not yet got the break they need pic.twitter.com/0Zqe42twlE

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [August 8, 2022](#)

Welcoming the President of the Fringe Society, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, to the awards lunch, which is customarily held just a couple of weeks before the judges announce the list of nominations, Burns said it was nice to be back. But she pointed out that the past three years have made this one “fundamentally different” and that it is now time to “reset, restart and rebuild our Fringe”.

Burns said: “Some venues are now reporting even better sales than 2019. That’s absolutely the best news of all, especially as this year the Fringe is also smaller – 17% less shows and 68 fewer venues, which resets the Fringe venue size back to 2009. We’ve been debating whether the Fringe has become too big for some time, so this year gives us a chance to see how a slightly smaller Fringe works and hopefully means that fewer performers will lose big sums of money.

“To any performer who has a tough time this year, remember what Eddie Izzard – our alumnus patron – said this year *“It took me 8 Fringe festivals to break through and 10 to finally arrive”* (that was in 1991, when he was nominated for Best Comedy Show). He also said *“it is also physically and mentally tough as hell”*”

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, Shona McCarthy, who endorsed this view, saying that despite the anxiety and nervousness at the start, the number of ticket sales for Fringe shows has just reached 700,000.

The Chief Executive of [@edfringe](#) gives a very positive message today – only a couple of days in to the 2022 Fringe..
pic.twitter.com/DYxBYo11a

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [August 7, 2022](#)

Remembering those who were lost since the last festival Nica included mention of the late and much lamented Sean Lock who was a former nominee of the prestigious award.

This year the judging panel will be chaired by Adnan Ahmed, Producer, Sky Studios Comedy, and will include:

Adnan Ahmed, Chair: Producer, Sky Studios Comedy

Cherie Cunningham: Channel Director, Dave

Ashley Davies: Freelance Arts Journalist, Metro Scotland and Times Scotland's Alba
Joe Hullait: Commissioning Executive, Channel 4 Comedy

Isobel Lewis: Comedy Critic and Culture Journalist, Independent

Dominic Maxwell: Comedy Critic, The Times

Pete Strauss: Executive Producer, BBC Studios Audio

Paul Abbey: Public Competition Winner

Jo Kinsella: Public Competition Winner

Monique May Munroe: Public Competition Winner

The nominations for the awards will be announced on Wednesday 24 August, and the winners revealed at a ceremony on Saturday 27 August at Dovecot Studios.

