

Stage school holding an open day and auditions this weekend

The co-founder of one of Scotland's leading junior stage schools has called on young people interested in a career in the performing arts to attend two days of auditions and masterclasses which the school is holding this weekend.

Drew Gowland, who founded Fierce Theatre Schools with his partner Murray Grant, urged anyone aged 11-19 with aspirations of a stage career to attend the open day on Saturday 9 September and auditions on Sunday 10 September.

Drew, who also co-founded the MGA Academy of Performing Arts, said the aim of Fierce was to help talented young people prepare for full-time training in the performing arts. "We tailor the training towards transitioning from kids' drama classes and fun and games to serious career preparation," he said. "It's like a pre-school for drama school or musical theatre school."

Scholarships are available for talented students who may struggle to foot enrolment fees, which Drew said was important because both neither he nor Murray would have had the careers they'd had without financial support.

He said: "I can vividly remember my high school careers

teacher telling me people from my background couldn't afford to go to drama school. So we've always tried to make sure that if a young person shows talent, they're not prevented from progressing because of money. People tell them it can't happen but we say 'no, both Murray and I got scholarships to go drama school and have had successful careers'."

Drew, originally from Leeds, planned to join the Royal Air Force and train as a pilot rather than have a career in the performing arts, but decided against joining the military after being told he would have to lie about his sexuality.

"I was going to be a pilot, but in 1999 it was illegal as a gay man to join the Air Force. I went to my careers advisor and they said you can't join unless you lie about your sexuality and even back then I thought 'no, absolutely not, I'm not doing it', so I went back to school and my teacher said 'why don't you do the summer musical, it might cheer you up?' I did and from that I got a scholarship to go to drama school even though I hadn't even thought of a career in the performing arts."

Drew later joined 603 Squadron in Edinburgh as a reservist in 2012 and is now a sergeant in the RAF police. In 2010, he and Murray founded MGA in a former pub in Balgreen, Edinburgh, later adding two further venues as the academy grew. MGA will open a new purpose-built campus in Livingston next year.

In 2022 Drew and Murray sold their interest in MGA and have since led Fierce Theatre Schools, whose graduates include Rory Macleod, 22, who is about to make a homecoming to Edinburgh in the title role of Romeo in Romeo and Juliet, and Caitlin Tipping, 26, who is currently starring as Elsa in Frozen at Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

Drew, who is also head of entertainment and enrichment for the luxury cruise company Explora Journeys and is based in Geneva, said the aim of Fierce was to help young people overcome

potential obstacles and prepare them for the realities of full-time training in music and drama.

He said: "Every school has loads of students and lots of fun and invariably there's two or three that show real promise but that school might not be equipped to prepare them for drama school or they're not pushed because the other students aren't interested. So what we do before they leave or lose interest, we audition them, they come to us and we nurture them. So when they arrive at drama school, they hit the ground running; they know how to work hard, take direction and focus and they know how to behave in a rehearsal room."

Fierce Theatre Schools' Open Day takes place on Saturday 9 September from 9am-midday while auditions take place on Sunday 10 September from 10am-1pm, with discussions on scholarship opportunities available to parents and guardians thereafter. All activity will take place at The MGA Academy of Performing Arts, 207-209 Balgreen Rd, Edinburgh, EH11 2RZ. To register interest, email edinburgh@fiercetheatreschools.com

Scholarships are available for talented students who may struggle to foot enrolment fees.

Auditions can also be arranged online by emailing edinburgh@fiercetheatreschools.com



MGA Academy, Edinburgh. Photo shows Andrew Gowland (blue top) and Murray Grant. Photograph by Mike Wilkinson... PHOTO © Mike Wilkinson.