



Northumbria graduates Jake Jarratt and Cameron Sharp, who are performing at this year's Elevator Festival

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## New talent takes to the stage

**Six brand new plays, written and performed by a talented new generation of theatre-makers, will take to the stage this week for Live Theatre's Elevator Festival.**

Among them are graduates from Northumbria University's [BA \(Hons\) Drama degree programme](#), performing three shows developed with the support of Live Theatre's Bursary scheme.

*Alt-Right on the Night*, by Sheffield-born actor, playwright and comedian

[Matthew Greenhough](#), is a new show exploring friendship and disenfranchisement in modern Britain, set to a punk rock sound track.

Having graduated from Northumbria in 2013, Matthew is founder and creative director of [Wound Up Theatre](#) and received national acclaim last year for his show *Bismillah! An ISIS Tragicomedy*.

After winning a 2018 Live Theatre Bursary, Matthew will return to Newcastle this week to stage his new play. It will be a homecoming in more ways than one – not only to the city where he found his love of the stage, but to Live Theatre, where he worked during his student days.

Matthew said: “I come from a working-class background and didn’t know what I wanted to do when I first left school. I joined the Drama degree at Northumbria when I was 22, originally with the idea of being a comedian, but then fell in love with theatre.”

It was a performance of the one-woman show [The Tin Ring](#) by Northumbria [Associate Professor Jane Arnfield](#) which inspired Matthew to write and perform his own work. “I was totally captivated,” he said. “I knew then that was what I wanted to be doing.”

Having found success over the last 12 months, Matthew’s advice to students graduating from the Drama degree this year is to persevere. “You need to learn to deal with knock backs, but at the same time, if you have something interesting to say and a unique way of saying it then just keep writing.”

He added: “The last year has been amazing for me, my play *Bismillah!* came to national attention, and at the same time I found out I had been awarded a Live Theatre Bursary which gave me the time and space to develop *Alt-Right on the Night*.

“I’m really looking forward to returning to Newcastle and to Live Theatre, I have such a strong connection with the city and the venue and I’m really pleased I get to debut my new play here – it’s all come full circle.”

Also taking part in the Elevator Festival are Northumbria graduates Jake Jarratt and Cameron Sharp, with their show *W\*nk Buddies*, which explores identity, gender, and sexuality.

The pair met as Drama undergraduates in 2013, but it wasn't until they joined Northumbria's [Theatre and Performance Masters course](#) three years later that they actually spoke for the first time.

As Cameron explains: "On the surface we're very different and we both had preconceived ideas about each other based on our sexuality, but when we actually started talking we realised we come from very similar working-class backgrounds and the experiences which shaped us into who we are were almost identical."

The play, set in a bedroom at a student house party, is based on real conversations between Cameron and Jake around identity, class, sexuality and gender, mixed up with boxing, drag, dads, school, relationships, films, and porn.

Since graduating in 2016 both Jake and Cameron have developed successful careers. Cameron, who is originally from Doncaster, is the founder of, and performer in, drag cabaret theatre group *Bonnie and The Bonnettes*. Meanwhile Jake, from County Durham, has been touring his solo show *Blokes, Fellas and Geezers*, which explores inherited views of masculinity in working class communities.

This is the first time the pair have written and performed together, an experience they were able to undertake thanks to a bursary from Live Theatre.

As Cameron explains: "It wasn't just the money from the bursary which allowed us to create *W\*nk Buddies*, it was also the mentoring, support and practice space at Live Theatre. Often new artists don't have the luxury of being able to develop new material at their own pace and having the support and advice from our mentor has been really helpful."

Following *W\*nk Buddies* debut at the Elevator Festival, Jake and Cameron hope to tour the show, with a particular focus on working class areas. "There is a powerful message about understanding in this play and we're both really passionate about performing this in the kind of areas we grew up in to try and spread that message," said Cameron.

Asked what advice they would give to young writers and performers staring

out on their journey, Cameron said: “Never be afraid to ask question – a lot of the opportunities we’ve had were because we just kept asking.”

Liz Pavey, Interim Programme Leader for the Theatre & Performance MA at Northumbria University, said: “We are so impressed and proud to see how much Cameron and Jake have achieved both individually and in collaboration in the short time since they graduated from the MA Theatre & Performance. Through direct engagement with the cultural industries, the programme enables students to develop their professional networks whilst honing their personal artistic vision and performance-making abilities.”

*W\*nk Buddies* will be shown in a double bill with *West End Girls*, by Adam Hughes. The other plays which have been awarded a developmental bursary from Live Theatre and feature as part of Elevator Festival are *Pops* by Charlotte Josephine, which will be shown in a double bill with *Locks*, by Ashleigh Nugent; and *The Devil Danced in Our Eyes*, by Jonluke McKie, who graduated in Applied Theatre from Northumbria University in 2007.

Initially performed as an extract at last year’s Elevator Festival Scratch Night, the piece has been developed over the last year to an hour long play, looking at sexuality, mental health and relationships.

The Elevator Festival will also feature a series of talks and workshops including a Women in The World Discussion in which Chinonyerem Odimba, Live Theatre and Northumbria University’s joint Writer in Residence joins a panel to discuss the representation of women on stage.

This year marks the fourth edition of the Elevator Festival, which runs from Thursday 21 to Saturday 30 March 2019. All six writers and companies have been selected by Live Theatre for their exceptional new ideas and all received a £2,000 bursary to allow them to develop their performances.

Graeme Thompson, Creative Producer of Live Theatre, said: “Elevator Festival is a real celebration of talent and has a huge amount of quality work on offer. It’s a chance to see six fantastic new plays which are all very different but all fabulous stories and a great night out.

“After our national call-out, three of the five of bursaries awarded to develop work this year, were awarded to graduates from Northumbria University.

Matthew, who is now running his company in London/Sheffield, recent graduates Jake and Cameron, and Jonluke McKie. It is great to welcome all three plays to Live Theatre's stages.

"All of these artists are on the rise, so we'll be seeing more their work in the future and it's worth seeing them here at Elevator Festival first."

Live Theatre is one of Northumbria University's key cultural partners, with the two organisations working together to create a collaborative writer residency programme which connects the University with professional theatre practitioners.

Award-winning playwright [Chinonyerem Odimba](#) is the 2018/19 joint Writer in Residence. Her play [Princess & The Hustler](#) is at Live Theatre from Tuesday 9 to Saturday 13 April, and she is currently working with students from Northumbria's BA (Hons) Drama (Acting and Performance) programme on their final year degree showcase to take place at Live Theatre From Wednesday 29 to Saturday 1 June, in which they will perform [Land: Beating the Bounds](#), written by Chinonyerem specifically for the occasion.

Live Theatre has now launched it's call out for its 2019 Bursary offering £2,000, support and space to develop innovative new theatre for next year's Elevator Festival. See [www.live.org.uk/bursary](http://www.live.org.uk/bursary) for details.

Tickets cost between £10 and £8, with concessions £8 and £6 (concession priced tickets to include all young people aged 25 and under, proof of age is needed when booking or collecting tickets). To book tickets and to find out more contact Live Theatre's box office on (0191) 232 1232 or visit [www.live.org.uk/elevator](http://www.live.org.uk/elevator).

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