The Grow Festival and season for 2019 has recently been revealed by Hull Truck theatre. It's a development program of events and workshops, says the brochure, for artists of any age and at any stage in their careers, and their audiences too, of course. Adam Pownall is the producer at Truck that's been putting the festival together. He breezed into the studio to tell us more.

Yeah. Well, so when I first started at Hull Truck, um, last year, and I think it's now in its fifth year, um, it was Grow festival and it was a, uh, a kind of week or four days to a week's worth of, uh, kind of events and sharings of work, also finished work as well. Um, but I, my first day at Hull Truck was during Grow festival and I walked in and I thought, wow, what a great buzz around the building. There's artists here enjoying themselves, going to see work and talking about theatre and arts and, and I thought that is absolutely brilliant. And then like the artists I said to me, Oh yeah, it's only coz it's Grow festival that we're all here and excited because it is Grow festival. And I thought, well, how do we find a way to kind of nurture that excitement and buzz around new work?

Like all year round is the main aim. But let's start with, let's just take it from being in just one week and let's take it to, um, a season.

Okay. So tell me about the intensity of that opening weekends then. Yeah, no, the actual Grow festival itself.

Yes. So, Grow festival this year. It starts on the 7th of May to the 11th of May. And um, it's, it is, uh, a kind of five day intensive, lots of platforms for lots of different types of artists. Um, so we open with a poetry slam event in association with Round House London. Uh, so that will give up to around 12 local writers, a chance to, uh, perform as part of the slam and the winner will get to go and perform at the Round House in London. Uh, so that's a nice big opening. Um, and then, uh, throughout the week there's all, all kinds of things.

We've got artists that we are, so there are Hull Truck support artists that are sharing work as part of it. There are artists that have done residencies at Hull Truck, um, that are, are sharing early ideas of work. Um, we've got Lydia Marchant who's a local writer. She's got a script called Mumsy. Uh, she's been developing that with those and we're going to share that with, with actors and that will be a script in hand performance and then all kinds of other, um, performances that art already. Um, and the reason I think it's crucial to have, um, performances, not just from our local artists but from a regional and national artists is to, to kind of, it is a bar to set for our artists to set themselves again so they can look at that work and go, that's what other people are making at different stages of their career. Where am I in comparison to that? Um, but also it's, it's a festival for audiences as well. So hopefully we're going to encourage, um, our, our audiences to come in and see the work and enjoy it. So as well as all of those performances in and script in hand pieces, there are workshops, there's talks, there's networking events, there's launch parties, loads of different things going on.
So are the, um, the workshops, are they open to public as well or is it just...

Yeah, absolutely. So, uh, one of the workshops I think is really interesting. So Amanda Huxtable, um, recently, uh, uh, worked with us as a change maker. So she spent two years working with Hull Truck on the senior management team. She's a theatre director, she's black, she's female. Um, so she wouldn't normally get opportunities be just because of the way that the world is. And we're trying to break down those barriers and the clue's in the title, she's a change maker. So she worked with our, with our team and departments to look at how we can create more opportunities and she's giving a talk on that. And it's interesting in itself. Um, but anyone could come along to that. Barrie Rutter, who's, who's now become our patron, he's going to do a directing masterclass. And I'd just think that's, that's going to be brilliant for any local artists that want to be a director or want to look at, at how under the directors as their process. But also, um, in the same way when we do a Hull Truck production, we have disco that discover days where people, uh, members of the public can come and meet the directors of the shows and see how they work.

So what I've made clear within the kind of branding and marketing message that actually this is a festival for artists and audiences for audiences that are interested in new work, that are interested in, in seeing new theatre being made. You make a good point there, don't you, about, um, teaching audiences just as much as teaching. You know, the production of theatre itself was absolutely fascinated angle. Without audiences we wouldn't be anywhere would, we wouldn't be doing it. So I think it's clear for me that to, artists will bring audiences and audiences will respond to artists. And it's about opening the platform for, for that connection to happen. And what I find really interesting is that not only will artists see other artists' work, but we will all come out of the studio or the bar or wherever the promise has happened afterwards and chat about the work.

And especially if it's a piece in development and we're doing feedback and there's, there's kind of post show discussions. It's, it's all about how we can use the audiences to, to develop that work and, uh, and change how that work has made an influence.

What would you say, I'm looking at across the brochure. What would you say, uh, you know, pick out perhaps one or two shows where that development of the audience perhaps key to that show more than the development of the piece itself

Okay. There's, there's two and, uh, have very varying scales. The first one would be a piece called, um, aunting or anting, however you say. Uh, but as in the word aren't as an Auntie. Um, so, uh, there's an artist called Matilda Branson and she, uh, is making a piece of work based on what it kind of explores her decision of whether to have kids or not and whether being an Auntie has just enough, but on the same week that her niece was born, um, she, a box of, um,
like we had kind of artifacts and papers that belonged to her great aunt who was like one of the first pioneering female surgeons.

06:09

Like even her surgeon certificate has Mr and then her name and then they've scribbled out mister and put miss and yeah. Um, so it's really interesting kind of look at history, looking at her personal relationship to her niece. Also at the same time, um, she kind of uses influences from famous aunties from within fiction. Um, so like Harry Potter's Auntie or the Aunties in, uh, James and the Giant Peach. And so it's really interesting, but it's really early days, so there's no script for it yet. It's still being made. It's, she's in rehearsals now. Um, so that won't be a performance. You won't go and sit in a theatre. You will sit and have a conversation with Tilly, she will share bits that she's written. I'd like, I know from personal experience you get to play with bubbles, you get a little shot of whiskey. Um, so it's sensory as well.

06:57

Um, what's crucial for Tilly in that is that she will get to speak to those audiences and see what they respond to. Um, find out what their feelings of, of having kids or not is. And it's really like emotional cause it is quite a touchy subject, um, for, for people that are either they've had kids or if they've only had one and that they should, they have more. And it just opens up a really broad conversation that works best for very, very small intimate audiences. So actually I think there's only going to be 30 tickets available for that. Um, uh, it's, it's pay what you can, I think. Ah, yes. It says yet it's just had to check it's pay what you can so you can literally pay a pound or come along. It's about having a small room of people that can influence Tilly's work and for her to kind of test new bits of work and 10 people talk about it.

07:45

Another one at the other end of the scale, there's a company called one five four collective and there are a collective of quite a lot of different artists from different art forms. So some of them are digital designers, some are musicians, writers, poets, all sorts. And that they kind of all come together in, in whatever variety they need for their, for their shows. Um, and they've always made work of, of a smaller scale. So touring studios or things that will go to festivals, but they've never done anything on it on a mid scale stage. So actually what we're doing during Grow is for two days we're giving them the heron say there, we'll get to go in the space. They will get to play with our lights, with the sound using projection cause that's a big part of their work. And they're doing a piece called the incarceration of Nellie Bly.

08:32

I can't remember the story about her, but it's really interesting story. But for us it, that one isn't as much about the story. It's more about that company getting the chance to go on a main stage and the audience can come along to that and they will share what they've learned in the two days obviously that the work's being made elsewhere in rehearsal elsewhere as well. But they get to come in and try putting it on a bigger stage and audiences can come along for free and see what they share and have that conversation with the artists.
Uh, some of that you keep mentioning tour ready. Some of these shows are actually going up to Edinburgh afterwards.

So yeah. So at the end of gross these and in July we've, we've got, um, for previews, what kind of brought this about is actually us working with, um, Absolutely Cultured and the Hull independent producers initiative with middle child and Back To Ours is a, we're doing a thing called Hull takeover.

So we are supporting companies from hall to go to Edinburgh to do their show and to give them that experience and they will get support from the venues. They get support from me as a producer from uh, Jamie at Middle Child doing some marketing support. Um, but they will go to Edinburgh. They will perform their shows there. They get print as part of it, they get new photo shoots. So it's kind of, it's a really cool thing for these companies. I thought actually let's, let's give them a test run. So we're giving them the studio for the day. So it is called Hull takeover on that day, they have 10 minutes to get in to get their set up and built up. They do the performance and they've got 10 minutes to get out and then in the next company gets in, um, or during the day they have to go out into hold, uh, giving out leaflets, trying to get audiences to come.

Uh, we're working with the, the brilliant Hull volunteers, so they're going to be supporting them. And so it's just going to be like a crazy day, but really good experience for them.

That's the, the sort of typical fringe experience, is it, 10 minutes to get in.

If you've, if you've never seen what or is like it is an experience and it is manic and it's, it's crazy. But a key thing about what we're doing with Hull takeover is supporting like their pastoral care. So when, when the volunteers who will go up to Edinburgh as well, while the festivals on is actually the, the volunteers aren't there to help them. Marketing just with marketing the show or, or just to stand on the front door and welcome audiences. It's about making sure the companies are okay. You're making sure their mental states are right, making sure they're eating properly because it is such an experience and you literally, when you've got to show up there, you get up, you have to go out flyering, you then have to do the show in like say you've got that 10 minute, um, get in and get out time.

Um, and you have to do this show and it can become a bit manic. Um, so yeah, it's about giving the companies the opportunity to go up there and do that. Um, and, uh, and we're just helping them in the lead up to that as well. So with, with press and PR and all that kind of thing.

All the companies involved, are they professional companies? Is there any scope for amateur company?

Well, they're all in, they're all at very different stages of their careers. So, um, obviously middle child or doing very well, um, from Hull, uh, they go up all the
time and they're part of Hull takeover. Um, so they're quite an established company and people expect them to go to Edinburgh. Now, uh, the Roaring Girls who are doing the show beach body ready, uh, they're actually performing twice as profile as part of Grow season with Hull takeover.

11:50 And they're doing the full show as well. They've never been in Edinburgh before. There's Just Club theatre theatre doing a piece called standing too close on our own in the dark, the longest title for a show. They're literally a really early career company that they literally just started up and they're getting support from, from partners across the city. And then the other one is The Herd theatre. So anyone, um, around Hull might know that work. They work a lot with Hull libraries. Uh, they have a piece called Slime, uh, which is, uh, for, for young children and it's a charming little show, uh, and, and they're going to be up there for the Hull month as well.

12:26 I know that show while I did the production stills.

12:29 you just know everyone

12:30 Also with the, um, it's not just the Hull takeover that we're doing as Edinburgh previews previews with all of the previews. We do have, have Hull connection in some way. Uh, so we've got some comedy. We've got, um, Jack Gleadow and Lucy Beaumont or come in and they're doing a double bill preview of, of the, the work that they're going to take to Edinburgh. Uh, we've got the Kagools. I don't know if you've heard of those, but Nikki, who's half of the Kagools, uh, she's from Hull. Um, but they're, they do brilliantly or the fringe festivals, um, whether it's Adelaide or Edinburgh. Um, and they're coming to do a night with us. Um, so yeah, it's going to be a really busy time. And we've got Richard Stott as well, who's a, another local, a comedian. But yeah, he's coming. I'm doing a brilliant standup show about Poland Syndrome.

13:16 There's lots going on. So well known names. Well known faces, big companies, little companies, big audiences, little audiences.

13:24 Yeah, no, there's there, there literally is, I know it's a cliche, but there really is something for everyone. And whether you are, you're just interested in one kind of show or whether you are, I'm really interested in, in trying to absorb as much as we can as possible. There really is something for you to enjoy.