

TOGETHER WE ARE

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

THE OUTRUN

AUDIO INTRODUCTION TRANSCRIPTION

KATE MOLLESON: Hello and welcome to The Warm Up, the all you need to know guide to this year's Edinburgh International Festival. I'm Kate Mollison along with the Festival Director, Nicola Benedetti, and special guests who were involved in the creation of the performance you're about to experience. I'm here to give you extra insights and context to help you enjoy it all the more.

The Edinburgh International Festival's theme this year is Rituals That Unite Us. So our guests will be sharing their own rituals around the creative process that help to bring the performance you're about to witness to life. These can be habits or routines that they always touch on in the months and weeks leading up to this show, on the day of the performance, or maybe just that moment when they're about to step onto the stage. Join me and Nicola Benedetti as we guide you into the world of The Warm Up.

And now we cover Amy Liptrot's best-selling memoir, The Outrun, brought to life in an epic and elemental world premiere. We're going to hear from the brains behind the adaptation, the writer Steph Smith and the director Vicky Featherstone. But first, the Festival Director, Nicola Benedetti.

NICOLA BENEDETTI: This year we have a sort of unprecedented amount of world premieres and premieres of some description and The Outrun is an incredible tale of overcoming addiction and someone really at a crisis point in their life, where finding the way out is not necessarily clear, but it gives us such insight into a particular psyche.

The uniqueness of life in Orkney is something that fascinates people all over the world, but we're particularly thrilled to be also introducing an exchange, a sort of youth exchange through our Discovery and Participation Department in the Festival with young people from Orkney who will be coming over to Edinburgh and working particularly with this tale and the identity of place and heart.

VICKY FEATHERSTONE: I'm Vicky Featherstone, I'm the director of The Outrun, adapted from the book by Amy Liptrott.

STEF SMITH: I'm Steph Smith, I'm the writer involved in the adaptation of Amy Liptrott's memoir. It follows the story of her as a young woman, having grown up in Orkney, moving to London, facing various obstacles, including her battle with alcoholism and her subsequent recovery.

Within that narrative, there's explorations of nature, the duality between urban and rural space, the digital world, the natural world. Lots of things collide and are explored, including the geography of London and Orkney. And I suppose as the person who's done the adaptation, I wanted to keep the soul of the book and explore those themes but ultimately find a way to tell them on stage in a way that feels dynamic and live and works for a live performance rather than a literary one.

VICKY FEATHERSTONE: So we've taken Steph's amazing script. It's got a cast of ten, four of whom are professional singers and six of whom are actors and singers. So music composed by Luke Sutherland, who is in fact from Orkney, is a major part through it, and there's a huge sung element to the piece representing the sort of soundscape. There's poetry, some of the sort of more visceral moments of recovery and survival that feels that that's kind of held in a sort of movement and sound space.

And then within that, Steph's written these incredible scenes, which are very detailed, very beautiful scenes between the woman who is living her life and struggling to survive, and the people that she encounters along the way that are part of her story. So it goes from a sort of quite epic operatic movement scale to these very detailed, focused, duet scenes between actors.

One of the things that we've done, we've really benefited from some sort of R&D, research and development, sessions where we've brought the other creative teams and actors in. We've tried to work out from Steph's text how we make this world three dimensional and so that's been something which we've played about with a lot in rehearsals and in workshops.

So there's been a lot of improvisation around some of the ideas in it as well. Also, there's something about looking at the script and then being able to go back to some of the descriptions that are in the book which obviously wouldn't be in a play text, and going between the two in terms of how you realise that the rest of the world, that feels very exciting for us all, and creating something we want to feel really moving and really challenging but also incredibly uplifting because it is hopeful all the way through. She's trying to be better and trying to survive so even within the darkness and the real messiness there's real hope and that's something that we're really interested in trying to really find and shine a light on in this.

STEF SMITH: I think when you read the memoir you don't automatically go this would be a great stage play because it's so literary. And I think in some ways I love that challenge. That was one of the things that drew me to it, was that there was real space for it to shift form in order to find its way to stage and also it really speaks to Amy's generosity.

She's been so deeply supportive of this process and I feel so thankful for that. If it hadn't been for her being up for the adventure, we wouldn't be here today. When writing, I feel like I have lots of small little rituals that include everything from going for a walk, walking is a big part of my process, allowing myself to step away from my computer and be in nature and be in the world in a way that takes the pressure off sitting in front of a blank page. Even though it doesn't really look like working, it is working.

I always write in the afternoon. I always have to have a coffee next to me and a water. I think there's certain times of day that invite certain rituals as well when you're writing. And I think for me, the small rituals are the most important rather than big gestures.

VICKY FEATHERSTONE: Wow, that's so amazing to hear that, Steph. There are things that I do, like a notebook is a really important part of the ritual of rehearsing for me, because it's about sort of like recording things or words, it's often words that stick out, things that people say, so I would record that and then I would look at that at the end of the day and again before coming into rehearsals the next day.

Overplanning rehearsals is quite reductive and it turns it into like a school day. But the things that make me plan are the words that have come out of the day before and the things that have come out of the day before and what's the mood to go into what we all need to do the next day. So that is actually a sort of really clear ritual.

When we're talking about the word ritual, I think that the ritual of the act of coming to a theatre as an individual to become part of a community and bear witness to a story being told is incredibly ritualistic and I find very humbling. I'm always eternally grateful that people are leaving their world for a moment and wanting to engage in something that we hope is going to have meaning for them. So that is always extraordinary. I always want an audience to feel safe, but slightly disrupted.

The transformative thing for me about theatre is to feel something that you didn't know you were going to feel. That is transformational. So you didn't know on this day you were going to sit there and feel this thing because we've all come together and done that. And I find that thrilling.

STEF SMITH: I find that quite moving actually. I suppose speaking more specifically to what we're creating, I want people to be moved by the adaptation. And I hope that they see Scotland in a different light to how it's usually presented on stage and on screen.

That we're showcasing a world that we don't usually get access to. I hope they see parts of themselves reflected on the stage and also, as you say, things that surprise them.

VICKY FEATHERSTONE: Having been inspired when I was like 18 and I first came to the International Festival and the work that I've seen at the International Festival has been some of the most inspiring and influential work on me.

And it just feels always extraordinary that it still exists, that we're able to make work like this, and that the beautiful audience want to come and see it. And I just think that's incredible. And when everything is so difficult around us, and there are so many challenges on time, on money, on survival, none of this should be taken for granted, and we should just really nurture and hold it and celebrate it.

Kate Molleson: Steph Smith and Vicky Featherstone, *The Outrun* performing at the Church Hill Theatre, 31 Jul–24 Aug. The duration is an hour and 10 minutes with no interval. Well, Nicola mentioned earlier the International Festival's First Youth Exchange. This has brought together young people from Edinburgh and Orkney to develop creative writing in response to the themes of *The Outrun*, which will be exhibited in the Church Hill Theatre Cafe throughout August.

There are loads of dates for this one, so go to eif.co.uk for more details.