

# EDINBURGH'S HOGMANAY 19

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## THREE YOUNG WRITERS FROM FALKIRK AND KIRKCALDY WIN *MESSAGE FROM THE SKIES* CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION.

THE YOUNG WRITERS' WORKS APPEAR AHEAD OF SIX OF SCOTLAND'S ACCLAIMED WRITERS AS THEY ALL SHARE THEIR LOVE LETTERS TO EUROPE.



Message from the Skies winners L-R Ariana, Louise and Nathan at Tron Kirk, Edinburgh. Photo (c) Ian Georgeson

**Nathan (S2) from Balwearie High in Kirkcaldy, Louise (S3) and Arianna (S4) both from Braes High School in Falkirk have won a competition run by Edinburgh's Hogmanay to write a love letter to Europe.**

The three winners will have their work projected onto three buildings in Edinburgh between 4.30pm and 5pm just ahead of *Message from the Skies* which starts at 5pm and runs until 10pm each day until Burns Night on 25 January. Louise's *Dear Flachau* will be projected onto the Tron Kirk, Arianna's *Dear France* will be projected onto the Bongo Club at the Cowgate, and Nathan's *Paris* will be projected onto the National Monument on Calton Hill.

The creative writing competition was open to all under 18-year olds in Edinburgh, the Lothians, Fife and Stirlingshire.

[The winning entries are at the foot of this release]

*Message from the Skies* is a unique cross artform collaboration with ten of Scotland's best artists, designers and musicians and six Scottish or Scotland based writers who have penned a love letter to Europe as part of Edinburgh's Hogmanay 19. Works by **Chitra Ramaswamy, Kapka Kassabova, Louise Welsh, Stef Smith, William Dalrymple and William Letford** are projected onto buildings in Scotland's capital, the world's first UNESCO City of Literature, at the start of the year in which we may leave the European Union.

*Message from the Skies* is presented as part of Edinburgh's Hogmanay 19 which leads with a passionate celebration of Scotland's shared cultural, historic and social connections with Europe.



**Nathan, age 12 from Balwearie High in Kirkcaldy said;** "First of all, I'd like to thank my RME teacher, Miss Donnelly, for this amazing experience. Without her mentioning this competition to me, I wouldn't be able to witness my story projected onto the National Monument on Calton Hill."

"My poem first came to mind after thinking about some key themes, such as Love for Europe, and Peace. This little idea slowly grew into what I could call 'my finished poem. The fact that I was chosen, out of all the other entries, made me feel extremely overjoyed! I've never felt so good. Message from the Skies has inspired me to keep writing."

**Louise, age 14 from Braes High School in Falkirk said;** "It feels amazing to be part of such an interesting project. The idea of projecting the letters on to buildings was so incredible to me so I was very excited to enter. I wrote my letter after looking through pictures of a holiday and listening to music. It suddenly hit me that the pictures were like little frozen memories that I could base my letter around. Seeing my story on such a big space where people can see it, is a very proud moment for me, I never thought something like this would happen."

**Arianna, age 14 from Braes High School in Falkirk said;** "I thoroughly enjoyed writing as a part of the Message from the Skies project though I had no idea I would win. I just wanted my letter to mean something, so I

chose to highlight the importance of acceptance as well as the love that can be present even in the most difficult of times, which I think is incredibly important.”

**Suzy Glass, Producer of Message from the Skies said, Suzy Glass, Producer for Underbelly said,**“Arianna, Louise and Nathan’s winning entries will bring the voices of the young people of Scotland to the fore. Their powerful short pieces showcase and celebrate our personal, historical and cultural relationship with Europe. They will light up three major Scottish landmarks from now until Burns Night, standing side-by-side with Love Letters to Europe created by critically acclaimed writers Kapka Kassabova, Stef Smith and William Dalrymple.”

Working with Underbelly, each writer has collaborated with visual artists, projection artists and composers – a total of 16 creatives - to bring their letters to life and writ them large on the walls of Edinburgh.

*Message from the Skies* is free to attend and is supported by Creative Scotland through the Scottish Government’s Festivals EXPO Fund.

Underbelly for Edinburgh’s Hogmanay and the Edinburgh International Book Festival have realised the vision of six writers across six sites. Working with Suzy Glass, each writer has collaborated with visual artists, projection artists and composers – a total of 16 creatives - to bring their letters to life and writ them large on the walls of Edinburgh.

Each writer’s letter marks Scotland’s shared historic, social and cultural connections with this family of nations in a creative response to the context of our times.

#### **Chitra Ramaswamy – Emma Pollock – Daniel Warren – Custom House, Leith**

Guardian columnist and author, Chitra writes a comment piece about her childhood in London, holidaying in Spain, moving to Edinburgh as an adult, discussing her identity as a second-generation immigrant in the UK and in Europe.

**Daniel Warren** works with archive and live action footage to tell Chitra’s story; the film has an accompanying track composed and performed by **Emma Pollock**.

#### **Kapka Kassabova – Bright Side Studios – Pippa Murphy - The Scottish Monument, Calton Hill**

Bulgarian born, Highland based writer and poet Kapka writes about the origins of Europa, touching on deep time, mythology and legend. She explores how Europe is more permanent and enduring than detailed political ideas that dominate our everyday world.

Founded by Susanna Murphy and Cristina Spiteri, **Bright Side Studios** has created images from Kapka’s writing which come into focus before dissolving into nothing. **Pippa Murphy** brings together a soundtrack which fuses her music with found audio inspired by Bulgarian polyphonic music, Mesopotamian and Gaelic female chanting.

#### **Louise Welsh – Emlyn Firth – Tech Cube, Summerhall**

Glasgow-based author of short stories and psychological thrillers, Louise has developed a poetic statement about our shared origins and culture, accompanied by a series of words translated between Scots and European mainland languages which demonstrates that though our dialects are different we can still be understood.

**Emlyn Firth** uses a typographic approach to illustrate Louise’s work, playing with themes of language and communication.

**Stef Smith – MJ McCarthy – Eleanor Meredith – Bongo Club, Cowgate**

Stef is one of Scotland's most exciting young playwrighting talents, here she writes a poetic letter that charts the decline of a relationship, an emotion-laden narrative where celebration and excess collide.

**MJ McCarthy's** sweeping ambient score and **Eleanor Meredith's** saturated watercolours come together to bring Stef's letter to life.

**William Dalrymple – RJ McConnell – Double Take Projections – Tron Kirk**

One of the world's leading historical writers, William considers the Scots' historical relationship with mainland Europe, highlighting significant archeological discoveries both at home and further afield to demonstrate the deep and long bonds that connect us.

Composer **RJ McConnell** has created a jigsaw of musical voices reflecting the different places and eras Dalrymple covers in his writing, while **Double Take Projections** is bringing William's story to life through timelapse.

**William Letford – James Houston – Leith Library**

Scottish poet Billy writes a lyrical letter full of nostalgia and humour to a past love with whom he explored Italy as a younger man.

Billy's piece has been brought to life by **James Houston**, who has developed a typographical approach that responds to the rhythm and pace of Billy's writing.

*Message from the Skies* is free to attend, and each piece can be enjoyed individually. It **runs from dusk till 10pm nightly from 1 January until 25 January 2019** and is developed in partnership with Edinburgh International Book Festival, Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature and supported by Creative Scotland through the Scottish Government's Festivals EXPO Fund.

A free app, developed by Edinburgh based Odd Panda, accompanies *Message from the Skies*, containing the letters in their written form, audio versions for visually impaired and foreign language versions of each work in Chinese, Spanish, German and French.

**Ed Bartlam & Charlie Wood, directors of Edinburgh's Hogmanay, said:** "Over two hundred years ago, Burns penned the poem to Mrs Dunlop that inspired this project and wrote that "something in us never dies, on [our] frail uncertain state, hang matters of eternal weight". So it's wonderful at the start of 2019 to invite these amazing artists to Hogmanay and ask them to collaborate with other artists and respond to this "matter" and explore our ties to Europe by writing, animating and composing a love letter. These letters celebrate our deep, eternal and passionate connections with Europe and it's exciting to be able to share them with Scotland and the world as they come to celebrate Hogmanay in our capital city."

**On announcing the exciting artists and locations of Message from the Skies,**

**Minister of Europe, Migration and International Development, Ben Macpherson, responsible for the Winter Festivals, said:** "Edinburgh is one of the world's best known cities for bringing in the New Year. Few places celebrate quite like Scotland – the home of the world-renowned Hogmanay celebrations.

"Scotland's ties with our European friends and neighbours stretch back many centuries. This initiative reflects those ties of friendship, business, culture and commerce – strong ties that the Scottish Government is determined to see endure, whatever the New Year holds in terms of the Brexit process.

"The Scottish Government is a long-time supporter of Edinburgh's Hogmanay, having provided £180,000 for this year's festivities via our Expo fund, to enhance this festival and make sure it continues to have the same massive international reach – and so that Hogmanay continues to demonstrate Scotland's values of fairness, diversity and openness, as well as our unique and inclusive culture.

"A range of events are on offer this year, continuing Edinburgh's reputation as one of the best cities in the world in which to start the New Year."

**Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, said:** "We have thoroughly enjoyed working with Edinburgh's Hogmanay to select these six authors, all of whom will bring something different to this excellent project. Following on from the success of the project last year, Message from the Skies once again brings the city to life in the dark days of January."

**Ali Bowden - Director, Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust, said:** "Message from the Skies is a bold and dazzling project that brings literature to the streets of our capital, for the world to see. These superb artists and writers are speaking to us all, opening up a conversation with us about one of the most important issues of our time."

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For further information, interviews, media passes and any other media enquiries please contact

**Susie Gray** [susie@thecornershoppr.com](mailto:susie@thecornershoppr.com) 07834 073 795

**Kate Bouchier-Hayes** [kate@thecornershoppr.com](mailto:kate@thecornershoppr.com) 07825 335 489

#### NOTES TO EDITORS

"Message from the skies" is a line from Robert Burns' poem "Sketch New Year's Day. To Mrs Dunlop" (1789).

#### Nathan's winning entry:

##### *Paris:*

When I think of you, my heart skips a beat.  
When I see you, I feel enchanted. Your blissful simplicity wraps me in a blanket of comfort and When I am around you, I long for time to stop, so that we can treasure every moment we have together.  
Paris, not a thing on this planet can be compared to you.  
Your smell intoxicates me, like a seductive poison.  
Your streets, they grace the ground that was once nothing.  
Your people! Oh, how they walk with strength, and with purpose.  
Your love, how it swallows me up, and has me dreaming of you eternally. Your love is like a blanket of comfort, a blanket that I'll never forget.  
When my family left me behind, I had nothing. But - it was your everlasting care and compassion that kept me going, even throughout the darkest days.  
Paris, you're not just my 'je ne sais quoi', you're everything I've been searching for.  
You are the sunlight to my thunderstorm, the happiness to my sadness, the yes to my no.  
I could never live on without you.  
Paris, all I ask of you is to find my loved ones and bring them back to me. I never knew that I needed them more than I do now.  
I believe in miracles, that's why you were built, Paris.  
My family needs me – and I need them.

Don't forget me, mon amour.  
**Never** forget me.  
Ne m'oublie jamais. Tu es la prunelle de mes yeux.

**Louise's winning entry:**

Dear Flachau,  
I take the shot, the click echoing through the valley. The flash startles me, even though I was expecting it. You get used to it the more you do it. I lower the device, inspecting my work as it lies in front of me. Blood red spread on pure snow, grey cotton floating gently, the wind causing it to ripple. My heart skips with the shock of the cold as I remove the glove from my left hand, putting my weapon away gently. I replace my glove, musing over the scene. Revenge is sweet, I conclude, smiling at my work.  
This isn't the first time I've taken this shot, I've taken the same one hundreds of times, but this time it's different. Something is new, perhaps the rocks have shifted slightly. Maybe the wind has whispered its harsh words down the channel, rubbing off a small layer of its strength.  
I can relate to the rocks, thousands of words have rubbed off on me, weathering the walls I built to protect myself from the pain. My weapon to deal with those who hurt me is not a gun or a harsh word, but a camera, for if you can tell the story with a picture, save a tiny part of the world in your pocket, the words and the wind don't bother the scene. The rocks are the same and the snow is forever frozen.  
When I was younger, I would look at the pictures in the nature magazines that populated the receptions of the places I went. I would sit, eyes wide and little hands gripping the pages, my mind absorbed by the wonder in front of me. I made a silent promise to myself each time I read one: one day I would go there and snatch a fractured piece of the world and carry it with me, so that whatever came my way I would be ready.  
Thank you for your space and your beauty, but most of all thank you for giving me the small piece of yourself. I will keep it with me, and let it fill in the cracks that were left by constant weathering. Thank you for sharing yourself with me and letting me create my own story, one where the cracks don't bother me as much. Thank you for your gentle grey clouds and your red sunrises. Thank you for being you.  
Yours, always.  
Cora

**Arianna's winning entry:**

Dear France,

Thank you for being the heart of Earth. The place that can always be relied upon to be the country of romance and affection, even in a world that sees no end of war, destruction and hate. Thank you for fulfilling the duty of displaying the message of love to all of us as routinely and dependably as the beats of a heart, as you give the world spirit and hope that perhaps one day, we will all care for such ideas.

Even throughout history you have been an inspiration to the rest of the world on the love and value of mankind. The Atlantic slave trade, for example, was a dark time for humanity and a time when Britain was blinded by wealth and fuelled by greed. Britain bought and sold black people like items, resulting in millions of individuals suffering inhumane treatments, all so that the British population could have the luxury of sugar, cotton, tobacco and cold hard cash. For a period in time we deemed the worth of money more important than human life. However, after the French revolution the message of freedom was prominent amongst your people and it wasn't long before it was heard here. It set the ball of realisation rolling throughout our nation as the people of Britain understood that, no matter the colour of skin, each person on this earth is united by the humanity we all share within us, and each person - no matter their race - deserves freedom and love. In a time of agony, France's ideas of liberty led many here to follow in its footsteps and though it was not the only factor, it was one of great importance that contributed to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1808. Even today the message, remembered for fighting the cause of humanity, continues to fight against racism and in favour of acceptance because as George Santayana stated, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." We cannot change history, but we can learn from it and continue to fight for the cause of love and freedom, spoken to us by no other than France.

France, this is a letter from Great Britain to say that we, as a nation, haven't always been great, however, you have taught us a great deal about freedom, the value of life and perhaps most importantly, how to love; and for that France, we love you.

With great affection, Arianne Burrow

## **About Underbelly**

Underbelly is a UK based live entertainment company. Their events and festivals division operates one of the largest operations at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, selling over 460,000 tickets for over 200 shows, in 22 venues over 25 days in 2018.

2018 was the sixth year Underbelly produced Edinburgh's Christmas for City of Edinburgh Council (2017/18 saw a record breaking 781,520 tickets issued to visitors from 47 different countries), and the second year of producing Edinburgh's Hogmanay also on behalf of City of Edinburgh Council, which in 2017-18 welcomed 160,000 over 3 days.

2019 marks the eleventh year of Underbelly Festival on the Southbank - one of the biggest multi-arts offerings in London - with over 100 shows programmed over 6 months on the South Bank.

Underbelly also produces Christmas in Leicester Square, Underbelly Festival in Hong Kong, West End Live in Trafalgar Square for Westminster City Council and the Society of London Theatre.

Underbelly Productions is the theatrical arm of Underbelly, presenting, producing and promoting a diverse programme of international work. In 2017, in association with Cameron Mackintosh, they produced a major revival of the classic musical Five Guys Named Moe, which ran for 30 weeks at the purpose built Marble Arch Theatre. This scorching production garnered rave reviews and was nominated for 3 WhatsOnStage Awards (including Best Musical Revival) and as Best Entertainment and Family at the 2018 Olivier Awards. In 2017 they were also Associate Producers on the UK Premiere of the musical Big Fish starring Kelsey Grammar, which enjoyed a sold-out Christmas run at The Other Palace. As part of the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Don't Tell Me Not to Fly a one-woman cabaret featuring a revolving cast of some of the West End's favourite leading ladies premiered in the 900 seater McEwan Hall.

In 2018 Underbelly sold over 1.5 million tickets to their various events.