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**Transcription**
**Open Submissions Workshop #1: An Introduction**

Audio file location: https://soundcloud.com/traverse-theatre/open-submissions-workshops-1-an-introduction

Video (with closed captions): https://youtu.be/b9vwMISfZO0

[BEGIN AUDIO]

Hello! My name is Eleanor White, and I’m the Literary Associate at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh.

In today’s first workshop in our new series, I’m going to let you know a bit about who

the Traverse is, what you can expect from our new Open Submissions Workshops, and give you some information about our Open Submissions window, which will be open this autumn.

The Traverse is Scotland’s new writing theatre, committed to presenting urgent stories by exciting voices that have something to say about the world we live in or where we might be headed. We both produce our own work, and welcome productions from a huge variety of theatre and performing companies from around the world. We programme work year-round but are usually particularly busy in August, when we hold a special place as the beating heart of theatre during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

The Traverse Theatre Company is based out of our theatre building on Cambridge Street in Edinburgh city centre, in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle. On site, we have two flexible performances spaces which can be used in a number of configurations. Traverse 1, which can seat up to 284 people and Traverse 2, which can seat up to 124 people. Performances take place elsewhere in our building – including in our legendary bar – in site-specific venues across the city, and on tour, both nationally and internationally.

In addition to presenting shows in our building and around the world, we also work with local schools, youth groups and in other locations around the city of Edinburgh.

The Traverse exists at its core to work with the newest and rawest talent, primarily from Scotland but also from further afield, to develop and present creative writing that is bold, entertaining, and provokes conversation. Enabling people across society to access and engage with theatre is our fundamental mission. We believe that enjoying the experience of watching theatre shouldn’t just be for everyone – the experience of writing and creating theatre should be too. There are exciting and important stories and voices everywhere – and we want to discover and support as many of them as we can through our various talent development opportunities, such as this one.

In my role as Literary Associate at the Traverse, I work with writers at all stages of their career. Whether that’s exploring playwriting for the first time through our Young Writers Group, offering guidance on a script that’s come through our Open Submissions initiative, or workshopping a play to get it ready to share it with our audiences. I am a huge believer in the capacity of new writing to be challenging, moving, thrilling and to inspire real change. I feel really lucky that I get to spend my days working with writers, supporting them to create the brilliant, big-hearted stories that thrive on our stages and challenge and delight our audiences.

Today, I’d like to talk to you a bit about our talent development opportunities, specifically our Open Submissions initiative. Even if you think you’re familiar with the Traverse’s Open Submissions, please do keep watching, as we’ve refreshed our approach to it in terms of what we’re looking for and what we hope to achieve.

Every Wednesday for the next 16 weeks, we’ll be sharing a workshop here, on our website, free for everyone to access. The workshops will take different formats, and will each explore a different area of playwriting, providing you with new tips, tricks, ideas, and resources to help you develop your writing.

The workshops will be hosted by leading Scottish playwrights and theatremakers, such as Frances Poet and Douglas Maxwell among others, by members of the Traverse Artistic Team, and by early career writers currently on attachment to the Traverse.

We hope that over the next 16 weeks, we will be able to take you from that first moment of inspiration to write through to pitching your finished play to a theatre. And it’s no coincidence that it’s also 16 weeks until our Open Submissions 2020 window opens on the 1st of September.

So, if you’d like, you can use these next few months to develop and write a play, with the support of these workshops, to send to us in the Autumn when the window opens.

If you’d like to spend more time working on your play, that’s fine too – these workshops will remain online until September 2021 so you could submit a script next year if you prefer.

While only writers based in the UK and Ireland are eligible to submit their script to Open Submissions, these workshops are not solely limited to them. You can engage with them

from anywhere in the world, and we hope they’ll be a useful supplement to your writing practice.

We’re providing a toolkit, which is designed for you to use as and when you want to.

That’s why we’re supplying audio versions of each workshop alongside these videos, so you can access each one in a way that works best for you.

We hope you’ll join us over the next 16 weeks as we explore different ways of writing, creating characters, how to craft brilliant dramatic moments, and much, much more. If there’s a particular subject you’d like us to cover in one of these workshops, please do let us know. We’d love to hear from you about what you’d most like to explore, and we’ll share contact details at the end of this video if you’d like to get in touch.

Each year, the Traverse opens its script submissions window in search of bold, brilliant, innovative new plays. Anyone based in the UK or Ireland can send us their script for consideration by the Traverse Artistic Team. Whether you’re an established playwright or a first-time writer with a brilliant story, we want to hear from you!

Open Submissions is a key way that we get to know writers and build relationships with them, connecting with the exciting voices that will be occupying our stages for years to come. Some of the plays and many of the writers we’ve discovered through this initiative in previous years have ended up on our stages, or those of other theatres around the country. When you send us your play, it is read anonymously by our panel of readers, which is made up of theatre professionals from all over the UK.

The reading panel puts forward scripts that excite them for further development. These scripts are read by the Traverse Team, who whittle them down to a shortlist. These shortlisted writers then undergo a dramaturgical attachment with the Traverse, receiving intensive script development and the opportunity to showcase their work to a Traverse audience.

At the Traverse, we read for exciting voices rather than finished plays. We don’t expect the plays that come to us to be perfectly polished. In fact, we prefer when they aren’t – because we’re looking for scripts that we can collaborate on with writers that we’re excited about. We want to work with you to create that final product.

We can collaborate with you to hone your storytelling skills, but it’s very difficult to teach

someone to have brilliant, urgent ideas or to express them in a manner that feels wholly original. If there’s something about a script that feels completely new, fresh, or creative, that’s when we’re likely to seek to develop it.

We’ve made a couple of changes to the types of script we accept. For example, we now accept historical or biographical plays. While we cannot accept musicals, we do accept pieces of gig theatre or plays with songs. We’ll speak more about the type of work we accept and what excites us as part of next week’s session.

In terms of particular qualities that we look for, it’s not an exact science, and the best kind of script can take us by surprise! While there’s no such thing as a ‘Traverse play’, there are some qualities that we are always drawn to: those are urgent, accessible, and entertaining. To unpack those a little, by ‘urgent’, we mean, does it feel like a story that needs to be told now? Does it explore a subject that’s relevant to the contemporary moment, or that hasn’t been depicted on stage before? By ‘accessible’, we mean, is it a play that’s understandable, approachable, and engaging? Is it thinking about the audience’s experience of the story? Is it inclusive? Is there a diverse representation of voices within the play? ‘Entertaining’ can mean a whole host of things – a rip-roaring comedy, or a gripping drama that necessitates grabbing a drink in the bar afterwards to keep chewing over it. Will it keep an audience engaged, hooked? Will it ask a question of them, or invite them into a conversation?

For an idea of the kind of shows we’ve produced or co-produced recently, there’s *Mouthpiece* by Kieran Hurley, a searing two-hander that explores class and artistic responsibility, *Crocodile Fever* by Meghan Tyler, a hilarious political piece that features a leviathan crocodile, the tense and twisted *Ulster American* by David Ireland, and the thoughtful and emotional *Enough* by Stef Smith.

Over the coming weeks, we’ll explore different areas of playwriting, such as getting started, creating characters, and finding the right form for your piece.

Next week’s session will be a Q&A with me about Open Submissions. If you have any questions about it, or about playwriting more generally, please do get in touch.

You can tweet it to us @traversetheatre, or email writing@traverse.co.uk.

See you next week!

[AUDIO ENDS]