

# Deaffest 2019

**Nikki Stratton** reports from the festival that celebrates the amazing talents of young Deaf people

Deaffest is the UK's leading Deaf-led Arts & Film Festival, held at Light House, Wolverhampton [www.deaffest.co.uk](http://www.deaffest.co.uk). Funded by the Arts Council and the British Film Institute

(BFI), the 2019 festival was the 13th, making it the most successful, resilient and longest running festival of its kind in the UK.



To reach out and engage with the younger generation Deaf co-founders of Deaffest - Nikki Stratton and Marilyn Willrich (on right in photo) launched Young Deaffest in 2007 to run alongside the already established Deaffest. Not only have they striven to provide Deaf people with a platform to showcase their talents but also to inspire, encourage and support young Deaf people to achieve their full potential.

Many deaf young people have little or no access to Deaf role models. Deaffest programmes and commissions high quality UK and international Deaf artists, thus providing opportunities to access Film and the Arts without communication barriers.

The theme of Deaffest 2019 was "Share Your Story". Storytelling is linked to culture, and the Deaf population famously has a rich and resilient Deaf culture. UK and International Deaf filmmakers, performers, actors, visual artists, musicians, comedians and dancers gathered at Deaffest to ▶

## Nominations to BATOD's National Executive Council

Inside this magazine, and on the website, you will find a nomination form for the forthcoming elections to BATOD's NEC (*closing date end of October*)

[www.batod.org.uk/about-us/nomination-form-for-nec-2020-2022](http://www.batod.org.uk/about-us/nomination-form-for-nec-2020-2022)

**Do you want to make a difference to the profession? Do you want to be involved in the development of BATOD's policy and practice? Do you want to enhance your professional development?**

Please consider putting yourself forward for election to the NEC. We welcome full members of BATOD at all stages of their QToD career and in all settings, including those who have not been in the profession long.

If you wish to find out more about what is involved, please contact Paul Simpson on [batod\\_neo@icloud.com](mailto:batod_neo@icloud.com) or 07506 400270



explore different methods of storytelling through scriptwriting, acting, journalism, comedy, dance, rap, music, lyrics, signing to music, TV presenting and visual arts.

A large turn-out of Deaf students aged 11 – 17, from three midlands schools arrived at Light House on Thursday 16th May for the full-day activities at Deaffest. Leading the workshops was a brand-new collaborative duo, much loved Deaf British comedian and actor John Smith, and young dance and finger-dance expert Andrey Dragunov, all the way from Russia. Andrey, aged 27 years old, has travelled in more than 34 countries and continues to tour now. John tours his hugely successful comedy shows throughout the UK, Europe and internationally, and Andrey has performed at Hip Hop International's 2016 World Hip Hop Dance Championship in Las Vegas, the World Hip Hop Dance Championship in Phoenix, Arizona in 2017 and has been on the 'Tahub!' Russian dance show on TV.

The students learned performance skills from the experts and built up their confidence trying out their newly acquired talents. There was lots of laughter, and the kids were inquisitive and willing to have a go!

Students also had the opportunity to meet and greet Deaffest's Guest of Honour – WFD (World Federation of the Deaf) President Colin Allen AM all the way from Australia.

On Saturday 18th the Young Deaffest event was hosted by Deaf teen Danny Murphy, who told the story of his own rise to fame. He inspired the young audience by talking about his videos and mainstream film acting. The event included award presentations for the Young Deaffest Film Award and the Create a Character Art Competition, presented by World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS) President Mark Berry. Winning film 'Bad Girl' was made by young Deaf people aged 14-17 from the Czech Republic. A total of 44 entries were received in the Art Competition, with winners decided by three high profile judges: Digital Artist Brittany Castle, Contemporary Artist



Olivier Jamin and Deputy Editor of Artists & Illustrators magazine Rachael Funnell. To top all of this, Deaffest commissioned a lively and funny performance by Solar Bear Deaf Youth Theatre from Scotland, with seven young Deaf actors taking part, aged 13 – 17 years old.

15-year-old Host Danny Murphy (right photo) taught himself to create comedy videos online and gained over 40,000 fans. He is now starring alongside Aaron Paul in new mainstream US thriller 'The Parts You Lose'. He is a confident comedian who strives to be creative and was a great role model for the younger generation, in his role as Young Deaffest MC. He also performed at the Festival Launch on Friday 17th, with his hero Deaf comedian John Smith for the very first time as part of the development of his comedy skills which proved to be a great hit with the audience!

A hands-on workshop called How to be an Amazing TV Presenter took place on Saturday, where young Deaf people aged 13 and above took part. Two Deaf professional TV presenters, Clive Mason and Rosie Benn gave young people top tips and advice in this exciting workshop. Clive, an influential figure in sign language and the media, is well known as the long-standing presenter and reporter on BBC's 'See Hear' programme. Rosie, known for her role as one of the presenters on BSL Zone's 'Up For It?' rose to prominence on BBC's 'See Hear' programme and has had her own series 'See Hear: On Tour' where she travelled and presented abroad.

Meanwhile on Saturday, Deaf children travelled from across the UK to Deaffest for the 4- 12 years old workshops. Handprint Theatre delivered a theatre and storytelling workshop and well-known CBeebies Deaf presenter of 'Magic Hands', Donna Mullings, led a storytelling session in BSL. Vamos Theatre's Mask Performance Workshop followed, then a fun-filled session with newly commissioned double act John Smith and Andrey Dragunov, bringing kids a hilarious mixture of comedy, dance and finger dance skills.

All in all, it was widely agreed that Deaffest's aim was achieved:

- to involve young Deaf people in expressing themselves, helping them tackle communication barriers and isolation experienced in their daily lives
- to offer inspiration by showcasing Deaf artists and Filmmakers as role models
- to widen the horizon of possibilities open to young Deaf people in Media and the Arts.

The achievements of talented Deaf artists are incredible and with Deaffest as a recognised platform, we aim to continue to inspire young Deaf people in the UK and to provide them with opportunities to showcase their work. ■



*Nikki Stratton is Co-founder of Deaffest.*

## BATOD Magazine

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