

Events calendar

Die with laughter

Comedian Andrew Lawrence is bringing his sell-out Edinburgh Fringe 2014 show to The Lemon Tree in Aberdeen on 20 April. *Reasons to Kill Yourself* sees Lawrence raging about payday loans, vegans and the comedy world itself.

Short and sweet

The Glasgow Short Film Festival takes place from 11 to 15 March at venues including the Centre for Contemporary Arts and the Glasgow Film Theatre. This festival includes Vertical Cinema, a screening of 10 works by experimental filmmakers in the courtyard of the Victorian Briggait building.



Fashion's future

Final-year fashion, textiles and performance costume students from the Edinburgh College of Art present their creations at SHOW 2015, a series of runway shows in the college's Sculpture Court (23-25 April). Past ECA graduates have gone on to work for designer labels such as Prada, Vivienne Westwood and Sonia Rykiel, making this an opportunity to check out the design names of tomorrow.

Angelic voices

Witness choral music at its very best when London's world-renowned Westminster Cathedral Choir performs Bach's *Mass in B Minor* at Westminster Cathedral, 7.30pm on 26 March. Tickets starting at £15 are available from [ticketmaster.co.uk](http://ticketmaster.co.uk).



# Election fever

Two timely political plays get the theatre critic's vote

Words Jo Caird

With the UK General Election being the talk of the nation, two of London's West End theatres are staging plays with political themes.

*The Audience*, staged at the Apollo Theatre from 21 April to 25 July, stars Kristen Scott Thomas as Queen Elizabeth II, and focuses on the monarch's weekly meetings at Buckingham Palace with the Prime Minister of the day. From Winston Churchill to David Cameron, the Queen has held these private audiences with no fewer than six PMs so far.

*The Vote*, at the Donmar Warehouse from 24 April until Election Day on 7 May, is even more topical, imagining events in a London polling station in the final 90 minutes of polling day. The final performance of the real-time drama will be broadcast on Channel 4's More4 during the last hours before ballot boxes close, a unique technological collaboration between the stage and the screen.

In *The Audience*, Scott Thomas, who was made a Dame in the New Year honours list, inherits the regal role from Dame Helen Mirren, who took the lead when the play premiered in 2013. Peter Morgan wrote the play as a spin-off from his 2006 film, *The Queen*, which also starred Mirren. He became fascinated by the meetings between Crown and State, which are neither recorded nor minuted.

Morgan started out suspicious of





Tick here for  
The Vote  
playwright  
James Graham  
and director  
Josie Rourke



this tradition. 'Any influence over our PM needs to be examined closely,' he said. However, the play remains a work of entertainment, with the director, Stephen Daldry, acknowledging that the Queen holds such a special place in the nation's heart that 'the audience just wouldn't buy it' if she was presented in a negative light.

This spring's revival of *The Audience* is billed as a 'new version' of Morgan's play, reflecting the current political situation. Mirren had to adapt to last-minute script changes throughout the first London run and bagged herself a best actress Olivier Award for her troubles - no doubt Scott Thomas will acquit herself with similar panache.

Likewise, those watching *The Vote*, whether in the run-up to polling day or on election night itself, will notice that what is being presented on stage is an exact parallel to what is going on in real life. This is a bold experiment between Donmar Warehouse artistic director Josie Rourke and playwright James Graham.

Another parallel with *The Audience* is that Graham looks for the positive aspects of the political process. 'A lot of people feel that if you're doing a political play it has to be quite angry and cynical,' he says. 'There's a default where we think political theatre has to be negative, where we go, 'everything's crap, everyone in power is rubbish and I'm really cross!'

What Graham seeks to do instead is make *The Vote* 'the kind of theatre where you leave believing that there is a chance that people can be good and that the system could work if we fought to make it work'.

Whatever changes result from the General Election, it's certainly a good time for political theatre (both on and off stage). ●

[apollotheatrelondon.co.uk](http://apollotheatrelondon.co.uk)  
[donmarwarehouse.com](http://donmarwarehouse.com)