

Category: Open**Candidate: Andrew Girvan Haden**

As an Edinburgh local and arts professional, I am standing in the Open Category to join the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society Board and would be incredibly grateful for your vote.

My professional involvement at the Fringe started in 2003 and has continued nearly every year since. It spans running a one-show venue in a church hall on Easter Road, to multiple years managing box offices and front of house for a multi-venue operator, to being Head of Operations for the Red61 ticketing system for multiple Fringes to 2018.

I have seen the Fringe from the perspective of someone making and promoting shows, worked directly with multiple venue operators, and have also viewed this incredible festival working hand-in-hand with the Fringe Society.

Crucially, I have also had the privilege of working with fringe and festival organisers around the world. I know that the Edinburgh Fringe is unique. Its open access model, its unwavering commitment to allowing any artists at any venue to be counted as part of the “official” Fringe is taken as the inspiration for events around the world. It is sometimes imitated, but never bettered.

The Edinburgh Fringe, and indeed Edinburgh’s festivals as a whole, are a finely balanced ecosystem. I firmly believe the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society plays a key role at the centre of that, as an advocate, publisher, ticket agent, facilitator, educator and agitator. It is crucial that the Board of the Fringe Society is able to provide a voice for the diverse community which makes up, participates and contributes to this ecosystem. The Fringe Society is uniquely placed at the heart of debate about the Fringe and Edinburgh’s festivals. It has a responsibility on behalf of participants of all types to endeavor to shape both local and national public policy for the benefit of our city and its festivals.

I have seen a combination of slow and immediate changes in the Fringe over the past twenty-plus years of my involvement. The ebb and flow of venues and the use of public realm across the geography of our city; the changing attitudes and working practices for staff in both venues and individual shows; Scottish Government legislation towards renting and short term lets which has fundamentally changed the landscape for accommodation in August.

Each has impacted the Fringe both directly and indirectly. Local attitudes towards “overtourism” and extreme commercialisation of our festivals cannot and should not be ignored. The Fringe needs to genuinely feel like it is something that belongs to everyone in Edinburgh, not a chosen few. I have watched friends and colleagues change their Fringe plans, bringing shorter and shorter runs because accommodation costs no longer make a month at Edinburgh a viable financial undertaking.

I am acutely aware that the Edinburgh Fringe is the environment where I gained my formative professional experiences. I gained invaluable skills making and promoting work with local companies, but had the opportunities later the same day to work with some of the UK's leading comedians and theatremakers. As the industry recalibrates in a post-pandemic world, we cannot overlook the importance of Edinburgh as both the training ground for the next generation of technicians, venue managers, marketers, box office professionals and producers, in addition to the opportunities that our unique festival landscape allows for performers.

I have spent my career working at the intersection of the arts and digital, specialising in ticketing and arts marketing technology since graduating with a degree in arts management. I am lucky enough to work every day with clients across the West End, Broadway, leading UK and US arts centres, and play and opera houses across Europe.

I see the Fringe in a global context. Our artists and our audiences do too - when choosing where and when to travel, where to bring work, where to invest, and where to spend their time and money.

While the Fringe and the environment that it operates in may be ever-changing, it is key that the Fringe Society and its Board facilitate and enable conversations across the community of participants about what our shared future can and should be. It would be an incredible privilege to help shape that future as a Director of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society.

