

Newsletter AUTUMN 2026

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Editorial

Welcome to another edition of ADA-S newsletter. From this year's Edinburgh Festival, Fringe and Tattoo, there are loads of photos and tales of happy challenges. I hope you enjoy them all. Any comments, please email me directly.

Thank you

Veronica veronica.kinahan@icloud.com

Notes from the Chair

Amanda Foster, Chair of ADA Scotland

First of all, thank you so much to all the describers who went to the Fringe this year. I hope that any visually impaired people who went to see anything had a lovely time.

I did go to one show, which was hosted by Extant. It was called '*How's Your Head?*', written and performed by Aarian Mehrabani, who is blind. He spoke a lot about himself and his experience of having brain cancer. It was funny and emotional at the same time. The touch tour was also performed by Aarian, and it was very good.

I also went to the Meet Extant session, which was hosted by Kirin and Neil from VICS. It was excellent, and it was lovely to meet some new people.

Also, Anna and I have done a Zoom session explaining audio description to people who are new to the field. As it was our first one, we didn't promote it very well, but Giles, our administrator, and Caroline, our former chair came along. We felt that it went well, and Anna and I really enjoyed doing it.

It will be on the website soon, and we'll let you know when it's available. There will be more Zoom sessions in the future, so please look out for them!

aburt123@sky.com

Irene Mackenzie

The Seat Dedication for Audio Describer Irene is now in place at the newly reopened Kings. [Seat H21](#).

ADA Scotland would like to thank everyone who donated and there's still time to make a contribution!
You can donate by bank transfer to:

Audio Description Association
(Scotland) Bank of Scotland
Sort Code 80-09-41
Account No 06001680

The Cure at Inghliston



Photograph captures an outdoor concert by The Cure. Amanda Drollinger, wearing a black “AUDIO DESCRIBER” gilet stands on an accessible audience area. She and a wheelchair user, face a crowded stage, lit red and pink, with large video screens, metal staging. A blue evening sky shows fantastic weather, appreciated by very full crowd.

The joy that is the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo



We're always fortunate to be part of the REMT from the start, including rehearsals at Redford Barracks, rain or shine.

This year was extra special as we were included in the line-up to meet HRH Princess Anne.

Photo- L to R, Veronica, Janette and Michael at Redford Barracks rehearsals- with Princess Anne in the very far RH corner.

Photo below: an Irish Drum Major, originally from the Caribbean, bending down to show his medals and bear skin to an admiring VIP. The bear skin is real, with a clawed paw appearing by his left elbow. His uniform is dark green as is the hackle attached to his beret by a silver badge.



Before the tattoo started, two players sounded the carnyx — an ancient bronzed Celtic war horn. It is very tall and heavy, with an animal shaped bell, held vertically and producing a dramatic and penetrating sound.

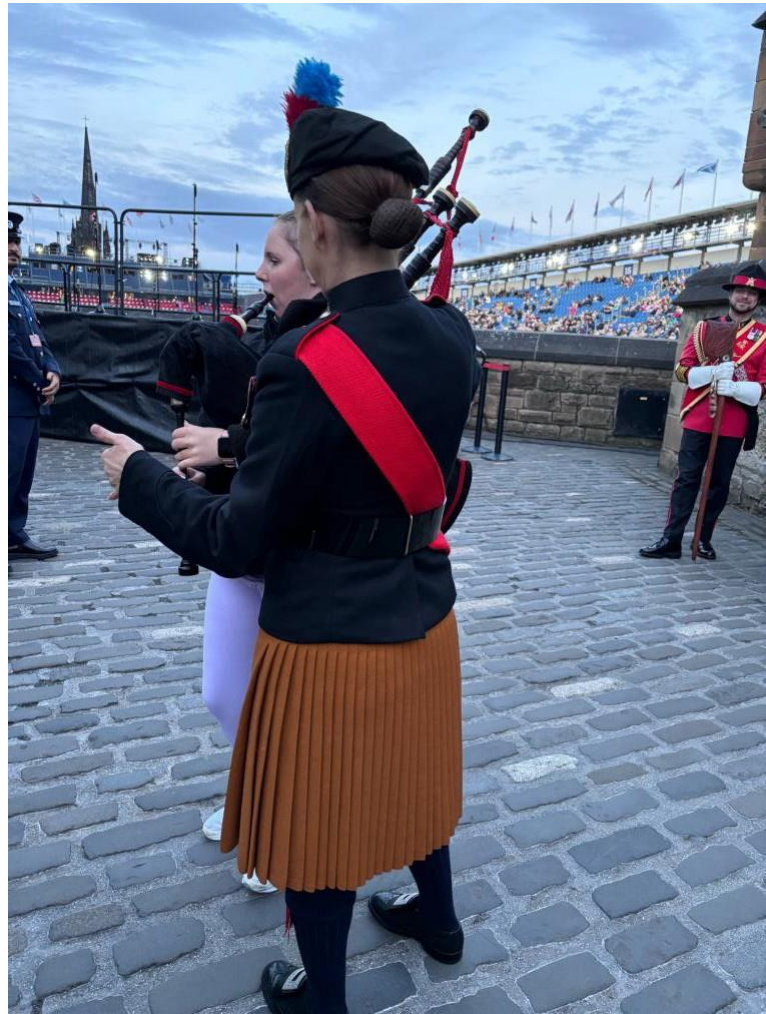
Picture left: a smiling RAF sergeant, allowing Veronica to hold the Carnyx

The Tattoo always brings surprises. For me this year, it was meeting two people: the first, a young VIP who asked to hold the bagpipes ‘because I love them’. A kind Irish piper wearing a saffron kilt, embroidered with shamrocks, allowed her not only to hold them, but to play the, And play them she certainly could – producing a wonderful tune which I’m sure could be heard all over the esplanade!

I encouraged her to apply for the Tattoo band next year, but she said she didn’t have enough confidence. Never say never... ! (see below!)

The second person was Alan Groom, a writer who lost his sight in 2018. Alan runs a website called <https://goanyway.uk/> and was such an interesting person to talk to. When he grades events he gives them stars – the more stars, the greater the challenge. This reassured me greatly when I saw that he’d given The Tattoo one star 🌟!

Please do take time to click on the link and read his website. <https://goanyway.uk/>, not just because he gives AD and the Tattoo a good review, but because his premise behind **Go anyway**, was to create an ‘honest field guide to high-energy events — motorsport, marathons, mountains — experienced with sight loss. Real barriers, real strategies, real joy.’



He named one of the Qatari police cadets in his review

(picture left, Rashid clapping Alan’s hands)

Rashid was incredibly proud of that – as were his family who came over to watch him one night and couldn’t believe he was ‘famous’!



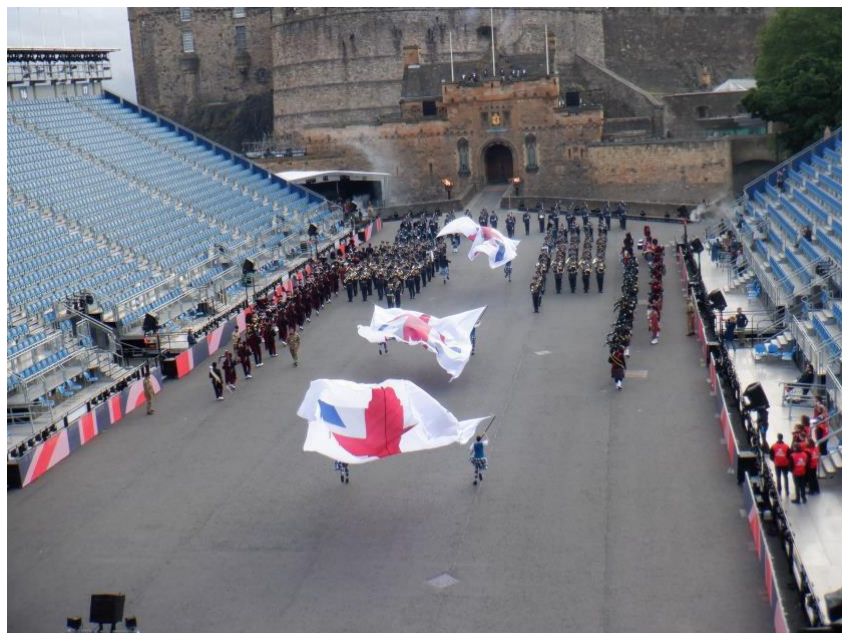
Final Tattoo photos – on the left, a delightful Sikh drum major from Canada who won my prize for the longest beard and glorious moustache (which he generously allowed people to touch!)

(below) The drum major from the New Zealand Army Band doesn't carry a mace, he carried a tewhatewha. Fortunately for me, it was pronounced TiffaTiffa.....



If you can't afford a fly-past every night, have a run through.....

Picture on right: Dancers practise sprinting down the esplanade, to empty grandstands. They are holding up huge flags emblazoned with images of RAF tailpieces.



FLYING BY THE SEAT OF OUR PANTS AT THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

by Bridget Stevens

Always up for a challenge, John Cummings and I agreed to describe one of the Edinburgh International Festival's flagship productions, *Four Walls and a Roof*, which was to be staged in the Festival Theatre's Studio Theatre. We had worked there together before so at least we knew the door codes, the location of the toilets, and how to access the room from where we would be broadcasting which is right at the top of the building up many flights of stairs (John suggested that because the room next door housed the company's washing machine this was a temptation to multi-task!), and who the technical director was with whom we'd be sharing the space. The challenge was that we knew there would be just two opportunities for us to see the show in advance, one from the auditorium and the other on a monitor specially set up for us in the attic tech room. There was to be no interval but John and I agreed a point where we could do a seamless handover from the first part to the second part. The real challenge came when we realised that in the first part there was a lot of talk but virtually nothing actually happened, apart from a table being used as a desk and being moved around the acting area - cue discussion between the two of us about whether to refer to it as a table or as a desk (only another audio describer would understand the need for such a niche discussion!); while in the second part a lot happened but as projections on to screens which were completely invisible to us on our monitor and were mostly in German. At the very last minute, an enormous, ceiling-mounted projector which was completely blocking our view of the screens was moved by the hugely helpful tech genius, Cormac, so that on the AD night we could actually see the screens for the first time. This proved quite a revelation! Also at the very last minute, the company at my request emailed a translation into English of the words of songs, poems and other projected material. It did all feel a bit like flying by the seat of our pants but the AD night started with a very helpful touch tour involving the two Lebanese creators/actors plus their German pianist. It wasn't really a *touch* tour because there was nothing to touch but the six individuals who turned up for it (three VIPs and three sighted guides, one of whom happened to be a describer herself) seemed to enjoy it and some very appreciative comments came our way afterwards both verbally and by email.

It would be great if somebody could come up with a way of encouraging *all* of our listeners to give us feedback, whether good or bad.

The EIF support staff, starting with Access Manager Callum Madge, were without exception fantastic, and the Festival is to be commended on his work in this regard. Callum's Access Panel has good representation on it of service users who, I'm reliably informed, come up with some excellent ideas, but there is still a need for further promotion of all provision for visually impaired audience members, and Callum is encouraging any describers to let him know if they'd be interested in meeting to discuss this. Contact him at :

Callum Madge

Access Manager

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Festival challenges - notes from the AD box... Caroline Jaquet

It is a real privilege to audio describe at the Edinburgh International Festival. The support from the access team, particularly the manager Callum Madge, is superb. The VIP audience is always enthusiastic and the Festival provide video interviews with theatre makers and audio introductions featuring creators and cast.

This year I was scheduled to work on a staging of Albanian theatre - [Taverna Miresia](#) - [Mario, Bella, Anastasia](#). Billed as “contemporary Greek drama, infused with Balkan tradition...striking and visceral”, the piece was to be performed without dialogue or speech. A series of vignettes were to take the audience on a journey beyond grief to catharsis; with performances by five actor/dancers, including the writer-director Mario Benushi and acclaimed Greek singer Savina Yannatou. What could be difficult about that? Plus it was late in the month, and only 70 minutes long - plenty of time to prepare.

I had been given a video to watch and was able to go and see two or three performances. We had an excellent touch tour with the assistant director, and the company were delightfully welcoming and friendly. The performance is set in a bathroom, complete with white ceramic tiles, a washing machine, working shower, sink, the sort of toilet where you stand or squat, and a space for a grave, filled with earth. Lighting is often subdued and hazy. During the performance cast members use the toilet, eat boiled eggs, and feed each other only to have the food spat back in their faces. They are often naked - taking a shower or sitting under the water, covering themselves in soil from the grave, or writhing in animalistic, ritualistic dance. It was necessary to describe pretty much the whole way through, as the music and sound effects did not give much clue to the action. This was also challenging as it was hard to see through the smoke and haze and some of the more bizarre action only became clear during the described performance.

Nevertheless, this strange and disturbing show was deeply popular with its audience, who gave it a standing ovation, and I realised how exciting it is to be offered something to describe which is so different and challenging!

I was also asked to fill in at short notice for the description of [Death of Gesualdo](#) at the Queen's Hall. This extraordinary concert featured the sublime polyphonic madrigals of Carlo Gesualdo, a sixteenth century Italian prince, performed by the Gesualdo Six singers. Bill Barclay, the director, states “I wanted to avoid the blood and violence usually associated with Gesualdo's own story and ask: Can we separate the art from the artist? Gesualdo was infamous for murdering his wife and her lover and was also one of the great composers of the Renaissance”. Comparisons are drawn with other artists with questionable morals or dodgy past lives, including Picasso, Eric Gill and Michael Jackson.

This piece, a portrait of Gesualdo's life and descent into psychosis, used the art of *tableaux vivants*, where actors, richly dressed in Renaissance costume, form living portraits of scenes in his life, including birth and murder. There was also a beautiful puppet depicting Gesualdo as a child, and the singers themselves were dressed in grubby black smocks.

The challenge for the describer was not in the ravishing tableaux, but in the age-old problem of almost continuous music. Aware that the audience were there principally for the magnificent music, the describer had to make the most of the introduction time (no touch tour here!). I left clues, so that interjecting phrases such as 'the marriage bed' or 'naked lovers wrapped in blood red silk' were sufficient to give the VIP audience almost as rich an experience as those who could see it all.

A little postscript to that performance. I was packing up after the show, standing in the anteroom to the green room behind the stage, when the door from the auditorium opened and Nicola Benedetti walked in. "That was astonishing!" she murmured and turned to the familiar-looking man coming in behind her. "Extraordinary!" said he, looking round to congratulate the singers. Luckily I didn't ask him where I knew him from, as he offered a handshake to each singer and introduced himself - Prince Edward. Waiting for the actors to emerge, I was still stuck standing beside him, so we had a wee chat and I explained what I was doing. "Fantastic, well done" he said - "at least someone knows exactly what was going on". He seemed genuinely interested in the art of AD...

.....

A little unprofessional I know, but at the (rather turgid) dress rehearsal of Act 3 / 'A Masked Ball' at the Festival Theatre, I remarked to Trina Gillies, in between giggles, that they reminded me of my auntie's friend who used frilly covers to cover her loo rolls.



A week later, Trina arrived at my door with a classic memento; now I just need explain it to the family!



Wow! Just Wow! Veronica Kinahan

Jonathan and I were asked to describe an opera called [The Galloping Cure](#). It is an allegorical work based on the opioid crisis in the US. A world premiere, at the time of the dress rehearsal it was still being (re-)written by composer Missy Mazzoli, librettist Royce Vavreck, and director Tom Morris (of War Horse fame)

I admit to having a sinking heart when I opened the score to see the words 'CHORUS HOWLS', followed a few pages later by 'BAA, BAA' and then 'WOOF WOOF YAP.' However, all became clearer – if not tuneful – as the rehearsals progressed.

The residents of a small US town suffer from a lot of pain; their GP can do nothing. A 'snake oil salesman', called Lucky Mack comes to town, bringing a carousel of horses. Your pain disappears when you sit on a horse – and of course the first ride is free.

The sheep ba-aa-d, the two dogs (voiced by opera singers Edward Jowle and Catriona Hewitson) were fantastic at singing 'doglish' and they also provided some light relief when the story became graphically gruesome.

Lighting and digital media played a central role in transforming the stage. Suspended LED light strips descended introducing vivid bursts of neon white, yellow, blue, green, and pink. Their flickering colours accompanied every horse ride, creating a druggy carnival atmosphere before later synchronising with electronic music in pulsing rhythmic patterns – and the music was very, very loud!

Scottish Opera stage manager Donny and the costume staff were, as usual, generous of their time and also allowed us on stage to feel the horses – including a decapitated horse head. Adrienne scoffed at the 'entrails' (which looked like strings of sausages!) because they were in the wrong place, but apart from that, everyone had a wonderful, if gory, time



(Picture right, above/vivid deep blue background. Opening Night - composer Mizzy Massoli and Librettist Royce Vavreck spotted my gilet and wondered what an 'AUDIO DESCRIBER' was. I told them all about it - but had to get a picture of course!)



Picture left:
VIPs feel a life-
size brilliant white
horse in gallop stride.

Photo credit –
Jess Shurte/Edinburgh
International Festival

Picture below: Lucky Mack, in white suit and stetson, sings while LED lights pulse around him. Susan Bullock, playing old woman Ivona, sings sitting on the back of a carousel horse, suspended in the air



Behind the Scenes -AD at the Royal Opera House

Just before travelling to London recently to see Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* at the Royal Opera House (oops, sorry – **Royal Ballet and Opera!**), I noticed that the performance I had booked was to be Audio Described. I thought it might be interesting to link up with the describers and compare notes, so I contacted the Box Office. I received a quick response saying that they had forwarded my email to the describers and, as a bonus, attached a ticket for the Touch Tour.

On the evening, I arrived for the Touch Tour at 6.30pm. There was already a member of staff standing behind a table with a box of headsets and a large sign saying: *"This performance is being Audio Described. Please ask a member of staff for information."* So far, so good!

I asked at the programme desk about the Touch Tour, and the member of staff knew exactly what I was talking about. I was directed through to the café/cloakroom area, where Lily from Front of House was ready and waiting for the clients. She wasn't taking an active part in the tour, but was there to guide people safely there and back.

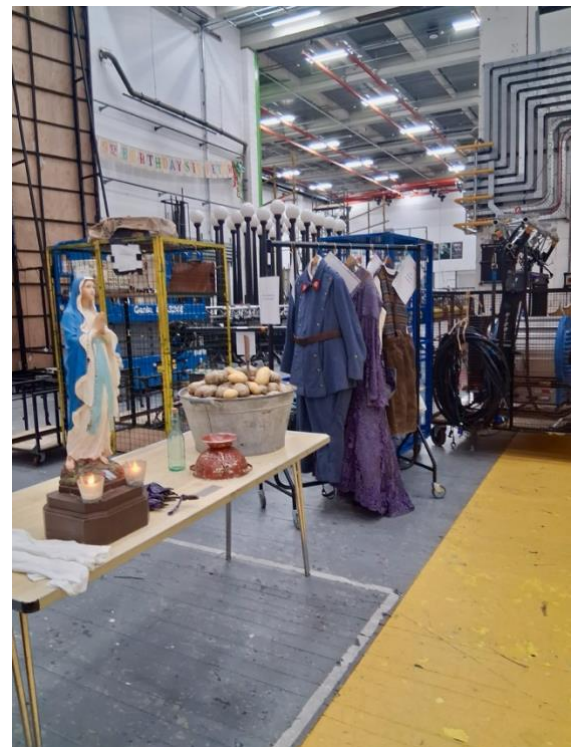


The describers, Willie Elliott and Jane Brambley, were there talking to people about the tour, and we had a chance for a brief chat before going backstage. They are not solely opera describers, but are part of **VocalEyes**, the organisation providing audio description across arts venues.

There were six of us on the tour, including me: one visually impaired lady with her companion, and a French (I think) mother with her two young children, who were on holiday and had asked if they could join us.

The first impression was – **wow, what a size!** The backstage and wings area is HUGE. In fact, the entire set for Act 2 was already sitting in place, ready to be wheeled on at the interval. There was also a full-sized model tank which was used in Act 2.

Willie did the first part of the tour standing on the Act 2 set, as he could walk around it and point out its main features. Some of the stage-management and costume crew were also there to show us props and costumes.



We then moved onto the stage itself to view the very complicated set.

The first act takes place in the Tyrolean mountains, and the whole area was undulating and covered with detailed maps. There were also piles of old furniture, mattresses and assorted other objects – lots to describe, but wonderful to be able to deal with them properly on a Touch Tour.

As the tour finished, those who wanted headsets were given them backstage, before we returned to the foyer.



I then went with Willie and Jane to see their Audio Description room. It is deep in the basement of the building, surrounded by lots of other technical boards, and has two monitors – one showing the stage and the other the conductor. The latter must be particularly helpful for timing the descriptions.

Interestingly, they don't work on all productions – only those which are revivals. For other productions, the Audio Description provision consists of a recorded introduction to the opera, with no running description during the performance.

I thoroughly enjoyed the performance, but I was very glad that I wasn't having to describe it!

It was a great experience and fascinating to see how everything works behind the scenes. I did, however, come away thinking about just how much more provision is made for Audio Description at Scottish Opera – and how well the Scottish Opera describers are treated!

ADA(S) SPOTLIGHT – Michael Stewart

Who are you and where are you from?

I'm Michael, an Audio Descriptor based in Ayr. My career has taken a few unexpected turns, from food science and Environmental Health to theatre management.



I first joined the Gaiety Theatre in Ayr in 1995 for the pantomime *Cinderella*, starring Johnny Beattie. Over the years I progressed to managing Front of House, the Café Bar and Administration. After leaving before the theatre closed, I was self-employed as a hypnotherapist while also working seasonally with VisitScotland and part-time as a duty manager at another theatre, before returning to the Gaiety when it reopened as a charity.

I now enjoy being self-employed as an Audio Descriptor, while maintaining strong links with the Gaiety through both audio description and working on shows.

What led you to join AD committee?

We ran an AD training course at the Gaiety and after the training, I had coffee with Sheena who saw my interest and then put me forward to join the committee

What is your role as a committee member?

I started out as a Theatre Representative but have increasingly become the technical person, keeping up with developments in audio description equipment. I've also advised theatres, cinemas, sports grounds, event companies, festivals and amateur groups on equipment and systems best suited to their needs.

What are the main challenges of providing live AD?

The main challenge for me is travel. Although I describe shows and events in Ayr, much of the work I'm offered is in Edinburgh. That can mean early starts, very late finishes and the dreaded Edinburgh Bypass at the wrong time of day!

I try to plan my journeys around the traffic as best I can, but I always travel prepared — with a bottle of water and an oat bar handy for the long-haul home.

What keeps you motivated to work in AD?

One of the things I enjoy most about audio description is meeting the people I'm describing for, as well as the cast and crew. I also love exploring new opportunities for AD. There are so many places and events where it could make a real difference, and I enjoy approaching organisations, building relationships and showing them what a great service audio description can be.

Most memorable AD experiences, good or bad?

I've had quite a few good experiences with audio description. I can't really think of any bad ones — just challenges, and anyone who knows me knows I love a challenge! Last year, I was describing a play at the Fringe with lots of quiet, emotional moments. The venue was small and intimate, with nowhere suitable to describe from.

Luckily, I'd faced a similar situation earlier that year. The solution was to write and record the description, load it into QLab and transmit it to the audience's headphones. It had worked really well.

On the day, the company had been sent different equipment, including a microphone that couldn't connect to my MacBook. With the producer's help, I found a movable bar that I could position where I could see through the curtains into the performance space. I set up my iPad with the script and cues and my MacBook with the recorded descriptions.

After testing that I could be heard, I spent the next hour crouched behind the bar, with just my eyes and nose showing, quietly speaking into the microphone. Apart from a slight crick in the neck, it worked perfectly — another challenge successfully overcome!

Something no-one would guess about you!

When I was at school and university, I had long red hair that reached halfway down my back. Sadly, these days it's short — and the red has faded away! As any redhead will tell you, we don't really go grey; the colour just gradually disappears, usually ending up white. I did love having red hair though! **(Photo please, Michael!!! Ed.)**

Test Match Special commentator Dan Norcross told “An evening with The Spectator” event about a problem he once had with pronunciation. Norcross was tipped off that commentators had been mispronouncing the name of the South African Andile Phehlukwayo for years. So he went onto YouTube and found a clip of Phehlukwayo saying his name, then got all his colleagues to copy it. After the game, a journalist messaged to say: “You can't pronounce his name like that!” Norcross explained this was how Phehlukwayo said it himself. “Yes,” said the journalist, “but he's got a speech impediment!”

Farewell to Edinburgh Festival, Fringe and Tattoo 2026 -

with a glorious photo which Trina took from North Bridge on the way to the bus station. It shows laser beams radiating from the castle, raking a cloudy sky. The old town is lit up behind the illuminated glass roof of Waverly Station



Next newsletter will be in January/February 2027!
Meanwhile, I hope you all have a great Christmas and New Year- Ed

Reminder from the ADA(S) Administrator

Email: - admin@adascotland.com

Theatre Contacts

	Name of theatre	Telephone number
Aberdeen	His Majesty's Theatre	01224 641122
Ayr	The Gaiety Theatre	01292 270920
Cumbernauld	Cumbernauld Theatre	01236 737235
Dundee	Dundee Rep	01382 223530
Edinburgh	Festival and Kings	0131 529 6000
	Royal Lyceum	0131 248 4848
	Playhouse	0131 557 2692
	Assembly Roxy	0131 623 3001
	Edinburgh International Festival	0131 473 2000.
	Scottish Storytelling Centre	0131 556 9579
	Traverse	0131 228 3223
Glasgow	King's	0141 332 3321
	Theatre Royal	0141 332 3321
	Tron	0141 552 4267
	Citizens	0141 429 0022
Greenock	Beacon Arts Centre	01475 723723
Inverness	Eden Court	01463 234234
Perth	Perth Theatre	01738 621031
Peebles	Eastgate Theatre	01721 725777
Pitlochry	Pitlochry Festival Theatre	01796 484626
St. Andrew	Byre Theatre	01334 475000
Stirling	Macrobert Arts Centre	01786 466666

For updated information check our website www.adascotland.com

Scottish Charity Number SC02939

