

# STAGE PRESENCE

The Jaguar F-PACE has burst onto the SUV scene to widespread critical acclaim. What better way to transport the judges of *The Stage* Debut Awards as they lift the curtain on standout newcomer performances

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**ALISTAIR SMITH**  
Editor of *The Stage*, Smith has worked on the title since 2004 and is the author of two major industry reports, the *London Theatre Report* and the *Theatre Workforce Review*

**SAM MARLOWE**  
Freelance arts journalist and theatre critic for *The Times*, *Metro* and the *Chicago Tribune*, Marlowe worked previously for *The Independent* and is a judge of the UK Theatre Awards

**LYN GARDNER**  
Associate Editor of *The Stage* and theatre critic for *The Guardian*, Gardner is the author of an influential theatre blog and set to lead a new MA in Dramatic Writing at Central Saint Martins

**NATASHA TRIPNEY**  
Reviews Editor and Joint Lead Critic of *The Stage*, and a reviews contributor to *The Guardian*, Tripney was founder of the online theatre magazine *Exeunt*

**MARK SHENTON**  
Associate Editor and Joint Lead Critic of *The Stage*, Shenton was previously chief Theatre Critic for the *Sunday Express* for over a decade and is the chairman of The Critics' Circle



“See him now, because he is going to be lost to film.” Leading theatre critic Mark Shenton can still remember the moment he first saw Andrew Garfield perform at the National Theatre in London. It was his professional debut, but Shenton knew he was looking at a future star. The rest is history as *The Amazing Spider-Man* actor received Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for his performance in *Hacksaw Ridge*.

There is something about catching talent at the moment it bursts onto the scene. You see a star at their most hungry, when they are still striving to achieve. “We like the idea in theatre that people come from nowhere,” says experienced critic Lyn Gardner of that first big debutant splash. In reality, it’s often not the case. That is where *The Stage* Debut Awards are different. “I think this is genuinely catching people right at the beginning of their careers,” says Gardner. “That’s what’s so good about it.”

With the UK and London’s West End in particular a world renowned hotbed of theatrical talent, this is the inaugural year of a new awards ceremony that is the UK’s first focused solely on recognising debut theatrical talent. Editor Alistair Smith has assembled the leading critics in UK theatre at the headquarters of *The Stage* magazine – the world’s longest-

running publication for the performing arts – in London’s Bermondsey Street. Appropriately they arrive in the new Jaguar F-PACE, itself an award-winning debutant, having already picked up 56 awards globally, including World Car of the Year 2017 and World Car Design of the Year 2017.

They are here to scrutinise the nominees in nine categories, some of which are a reminder that a production is much more than its leading actor. Alongside spotlight winners such as Best Actor and Actress in a play and a musical, and Best Director, there are awards for less visible roles that are nonetheless vital to great theatre. They include Best Writer, Best Composer, and most significantly, Best Designer. The design and direction of a theatrical production, from the visual impact of the set, to the lighting, sound, costumes, hair and makeup, is vital to contributing to a truly standout performance – theatre engages more deeply when all the elements come together seamlessly with the actors on stage.

“These awards include people who for the first time have designed a set, designed the lighting for a show,” says Smith. “Most of them will have trained and been involved with student productions, and a lot of them will have assisted before,” adds *The Stage* Joint Lead Critic, Natasha Tripney, “but this is them taking the lead.”

#### STAR SPOTTING

Everyone has a debut moment that they cherish, where they were there and saw a star in the making. For Alistair Smith, this includes Hollywood favourite and Jaguar ambassador Tom Hiddleston. “I remember seeing Tom Hiddleston in *Yørgjin Oxo* at Theatre 503 – a pub theatre on the Battersea Park Road,” recalls Smith. “It was an extraordinary piece of writing about a warrior mouse and it was Hiddleston’s first thing. He gave an outstanding central performance.” “Mine was Gemma Arterton in a small role in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* at the Globe,” offers Gardner.

Although this may sound like the benefit of hindsight, all of these critics passionately believe in the power of awards to nurture new talent. “The winners of the Critics’ Circle Most Promising Newcomer award have pretty much all gone on to become stars. Rachel Weisz won in 1994,” says Shenton, who is chairman of the Circle. “And actually, awards are important, because before Weisz won that, she picked up *The Guardian* Youth Theatre Award,” adds Gardner.

“We felt that there are a lot of awards in theatre that go to people who, while very deserving, don’t have much room on their mantelpiece for more awards,” says Smith of the impetus behind the Debut Awards. “We wanted to create an awards ceremony where the awards can actually make a difference to their careers. Public recognition at a time when it could actually be the difference between having success or not.”

Live theatre performances offer an electrifying encounter for those on either side of the curtain that’s hard to replicate. “I think young people are hungry for shared experiences,” says arts journalist Sam Marlowe. “Live theatre is a truly engaging communal experience, and you only have to go to festivals to see how much hunger there is for it. I was at Latitude recently and there were people queuing in droves to see the theatre events.” This enthusiasm, along with the numerous nominations received for *The Stage* Debut Awards, proves that the art of live theatrical performance is thriving, and will continue to draw the next generation.

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**OFFICIAL EU FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR THE F-PACE in l/100km (mpg): Urban 5.8-12.2 (49.1-23.2); Extra urban 4.2-7.1 (67.7-39.8); Combined 4.8-8.9 (59.2-31.7); CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (combined) g/km: 126-209; For comparison purposes only. Real world figures may differ.**

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#### THE STAGE DEBUT AWARDS 2017 WINNERS

##### BEST ACTOR IN A PLAY

ABRAHAM POPOOLA for *Othello* at Tobacco Factory, Bristol

##### BEST ACTRESS IN A PLAY

GRACE MOLONY in *The Country Girls* at the Minerva Theatre, Chichester

##### BEST ACTOR IN A MUSICAL

SAMUEL THOMAS for *Allegro* at Southwark Playhouse, London

##### BEST ACTRESS IN A MUSICAL

MIRIAM-TEAK LEE for *On the Town* at Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre, London

##### BEST DIRECTOR

LEKAN LAWAL for *Betrayal* at Derby Theatre, Derby

##### BEST DESIGNER

ROSIE ELNILE for *The Convert* at the Gate Theatre, London

##### BEST COMPOSER

DAN GILLESPIE SELLS for *Everybody’s Talking About Jamie*, Crucible, Sheffield

##### BEST WRITER

KATHERINE SOPER for *Wish List* at the Royal Exchange, Manchester

##### BEST WEST END DEBUT

TBC for TBC at TBC  
TBC for TBC at TBC

Visit [thestage.com](http://thestage.com) to discover the full list of nominees, and why the above individuals are worthy debut winners

“I REMEMBER SEEING TOM HIDDLESTON IN YØRGJIN OXO AT A PUB THEATRE. IT WAS HIS FIRST THING”

ALISTAIR SMITH, EDITOR *THE STAGE*