

**Thrown**

**Audio Introduction: Transcription**

**Tom Service**: This is the Edinburgh International Festival podcast; *All You Need To Know*. I'm Tom Service. Well, this time, the National Theatre of Scotland's *Thrown* from Nat McCleary and Johnny McKnight. This is on at the Traverse Theatre from the 3rd until the 27th of August, all the way through this year's Edinburgh International Festival. An hour and 20 minutes, and there's no interval. We're going to hear from Nat McCleary and Johnny McKnight themselves. But now here's Edinburgh International Festival's Director, Nicola Benedetti.

**Nicola**: So I'm really excited about this cause this is a premier and Nat McCleary and Johnny McKnight, two absolutely unique voices. Uh, I mean just the kind of fun and play, but also the fearlessness and raw roughness of exploration of Highland Games but it's five women that are gathered, backhold wrestling. I mean Scottish backhold wrestling, honestly. And you know, the text description talks about sweat and breath and opposition and negotiation and fear and how long can you hold on. So there's a real sort of challenge and a threat and in really unusual circumstances.

**Johnny**: My name is Johnny McKnight and I'm the Director of *Thrown*.

**Nat**: I'm Nat McCleary and I have written *Thrown*. *Thrown* is a play that at its heart questions, belonging and identity, I think. But all through the prism of Scottish Nationalism and the way in which we perceive ourselves in Scotland as Scottish and what Scottishness is. I think the reason that I wanted to write this now is partly because of where I am in my own journey of questioning, um, my own identity, but also because I feel like Scotland's identity is so influx as well. We're coming into a time of a national redefinition and it feels pertinent time to ask the question, what it is to be Scottish now.

**Johnny**: I think the story is really pertinent from now just because I think in the world in which we live, the idea of us coexisting alongside each other with differences seems to be rarer and rarer and less accepted. And I think when that's done brilliant in this play is using the, I guess, Trojan Horse of backhold wrestling, of how do we work together as a team? How do these group of women, very completely different backgrounds, come together to compete at the Highland Games? But actually, it's talking about much bigger universal themes about how do we as a nation, how do we as a country, how do we as an international world citizen come together and exist in the same space?

And it's done with like such humour and wit and lyricism and it's more vital than ever that we get different, you know, perspectives and empathy into where people are coming from in our lives. Because I think more and more we're starting to coexist in echo chambers where we just have our same thought or ideals repeated back to us and there's no room for debate or shifting in ideologies. So I think that's why it's more pertinent than ever that this show is happening and it's happening now.

**Nat**: Well, I'd never heard of backhold wrestling before. A conversation with an absolute legend that called Heather Nielsen, who is actually-- well her family basically help facilitate backhold wrestling at the Highland Games, um, and have done for many-many years. And it was when I started to look into first of all the obscure subset that it is of the Highland Games, um, but also the real sense of community around this sport. It felt like a really obvious metaphor for exploring things and ideas of belonging and identity within Scotland.

**Johnny**: I think the other thing that's interesting about the backhold wrestling, because I didn't even know really anything about it at all, if I'm being honest, until I started working in the project. I knew about the Highland Games because I kind of grew up with that as a kind of summer, a day out that we had at summertime was usually the Highland Games. And our-- the rules of backhold wrestling are, of course, there's rules, but the main rule is hold on tight and try and not let go. And I think there's a brilliant metaphor about that, about how everybody's trying to navigate life right now. It's like, try and keep a grip, try and not let go, try and not get thrown into the floor. Which I think is why it works so brilliantly in this show, the metaphor cause I think that the sport and how we as humans go about our day-to-day lives totally. You know, it merges perfectly for this.

**Nat**: I went to the Highland Games with my pal Frankie the other week, and it was the first Highland Games I'd ever been to. I think it was the first Highland Games he'd ever been to as well. But what was

insane was it was a presentation of Scottish or Scotland that I didn't feel I recognized or related to in a day-to-day kind of way. You know, it felt very much presentational, almost super like the superficial representations of Scotland; bagpipes everywhere, tartan everywhere, haggis everywhere. And these sports that you really don't see or engage with in any other context other than the Highland Games. For me, that felt like a really clear, yeah, really clear context with which to explore these ideas.

**Tom Service:** Nat McCleary and Johnny McKnight, and Nicola Benedetti on the National Theatre of Scotland's *Thrown*. It's on at the Traverse Theatre from the 3rd to the 27th. 80 minutes, runs all the way through without an interval and it's gonna be one of those experiences you're never going to forget, *Thrown*.