

BAFTA Breakthrough Brits 2018 – Press Bios

Paapa Essiedu – Actor

Paapa Essiedu, 28, grew up in Walthamstow, London, where he still lives.

Meeting like-minded people at the National Youth Theatre changed Paapa's life. He was ready to take up a prestigious place to study Medicine at UCL, but turned it down at the last minute to train as an actor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. After graduating, Paapa took on classical roles at the National Theatre, starring in Sam Mendes' production of *King Lear*, and the RSC, where he played Hamlet. Recently a string of high-profile television roles have propelled his career: Otto in BBC's *The Miniaturist*, Nate in Channel 4's acclaimed drama *Kiri* opposite Sarah Lancashire and ruthless reporter Ed in Mike Bartlett's BBC series *Press*. Paapa also featured in Kenneth Branagh's major film adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Paapa said: 'It feels amazing to be named a Breakthrough Brit, it's so surreal. My agent's office is just round the corner from BAFTA, so I've been walking past it for years without knowing it was here! BAFTA is such an amazing academy for recognising British talent – all of your favourite writers, directors and actors have been involved with BAFTA at some stage, so to join that list feels mad. I'm really excited to meet people who have done amazing work, and to talk to them about the challenges they've overcome in their careers.'

Luisa Omielan – Comedian

Luisa Omielan, 36, grew up in Farnborough in Hampshire and then moved to London, where she lived for 10 years. She now lives in Birmingham.

Luisa realised she wanted to be a stand-up comedian at the age of four, but didn't quite know how to make it happen. After auditioning for countless drama schools and struggling to get an agent, she realised Salford University taught a stand-up comedy module as part of its Performing Arts course, and she graduated not just with a First, but with the highest mark the institution had ever given.

Luisa started gigging, working as everything from a postwoman to a nursery teacher to pay for her travel to five-minute comedy spots, before taking her first solo show to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. She put down £50 to reserve a room in a pub, sent out press releases herself and hoped audiences would find her. The show was *What Would Beyonce Do?* and it was a smash hit, which went on to tour internationally and be shown on BBC iPlayer.

Luisa's next tour, *Am I Right Ladies?* featured a thigh gap joke that went viral, receiving more than 45 million views on YouTube. Luisa is now touring again, performing *Politics for Bitches* with her 1-year old Bernese Mountain Dog, Bernie by her side.

Luisa said: 'It feels incredible to be a Breakthrough Brit, it's such a privilege and I'm so excited to be the first stand-up comedian on the scheme. Stand-up never gets credit as an art-form, but it's changed my life and my shows tackle subjects from body dysmorphia to euthanasia. It's so wrong that it's not taken seriously, you can't get Arts Council funding for it but it makes such an impact. I've done it my way for so long and now to get this acknowledgement from BAFTA is a dream.'

Vanessa Whyte – Cinematographer

Vanessa Whyte, 35, grew up in Ladbrooke Grove, London and now lives in Camberwell.

Vanessa Whyte initially wanted to be a make-up artist, and then an actress. However, at the age of 14, her dad gave her a camera, and she became hooked on photography. Using a cupboard in the family home as her darkroom, she developed her skills before getting her first job as a camera trainee on TV show *NCS: Manhunt* with a young Michael Fassbender.

Vanessa gained experience on commercials and music videos, and worked as the second unit DoP on TV shows including series three of *Broadchurch* and *Strangers*, both for ITV. Her ambition was to make the jump to main unit, and since achieving that with BAFTA-winning BBC drama *Murdered for Being Different* she hasn't stopped working. Vanessa's recent projects include BBC Four comedy *There She Goes* with David Tennant and BBC Three comedy series *Enterprise*.

Vanessa said: 'It feels fantastic to be named as a Breakthrough Brit, I've always been very admiring of the people on the scheme, so I'm delighted to be included. I applied last year too, but this year has definitely felt like more of a breakthrough year for me – I have defeated more obstacles and barriers and I'm on an amazing run of work at the moment. I've always been really impressed by how BAFTA supports talent, and as a DoP a lot of it is about validation, it feels amazing to be taken seriously. I'm really excited to meet the other people from different disciplines.'

Fodhla Cronin O'Reilly – Producer

Fodhla Cronin O'Reilly, 32, grew up in County Kerry in Ireland and has been living in Chiswick, London since she was 18.

BAFTA nominee Fodhla always knew she wanted to work in film, but it took her a while to realise she wanted to produce. Her first taste of the industry was work shadowing with Irish special effects company Team FX, visiting the set of *The Tudors*. After moving

to London to study film, Fodhla started gaining experience making commercials, before gaining a Masters in Producing at the prestigious National Film and Television School.

Fodhla's Oscar-nominated animated short *Head Over Heels* won the Cartoon D'Or and an RTS award in 2013, but it wasn't until 2016 that her first feature was released. The BAFTA-nominated *Lady Macbeth* was made on a micro budget, which is precisely the reason Fodhla wanted to do it – she was told a period film couldn't be made for such a small amount, but she proved people wrong. Fodhla followed this success with *My Generation*, a documentary film starring Sir Michael Caine that took six years to make.

Fodhla said: 'It is a huge honour to be a Breakthrough Brit; what a beautiful present to get. My producing career started here and I owe a huge amount to this country. Being a producer can be quite isolating – everyone's dispersed across the country, sitting in their home offices talking on Skype, so the fact that BAFTA is pulling us together should never be underestimated. It's really important to me to access a new community, meet new people and exchange ideas. How wonderful to connect with others at a similar stage in their career and to be able to go for a cup of tea with them.'

Michael Pearce – Director

Michael Pearce, 37, grew up on Jersey and now lives in Hackney, London.

Michael was determined to be a film director since he watched *Seven Samurai* at the age of 17. But it took him the best part of two decades to make his first feature, *Beast* starring Johnny Flynn and Jessie Buckley. He was confident it would happen, but wanted to wait for the perfect story.

In the meantime, Michael learned his craft, earning his MA in Film Direction with Distinction from the prestigious National Film and Television School, before making a name for himself with a string of successful shorts. Among them both *Rite* and *Keeping Up With the Joneses* earned Michael BAFTA nominations. *Beast*, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, was filmed on Jersey, where Michael spent his childhood. He describes the experience of finally making his film as more exhausting and more exhilarating than he could have imagined, and notes how strange it was to be the only crew member on the project who had never made a film before!

Michael said: 'BAFTA is one of the most renowned film organisations in the world, so to get recognition from them is huge. It tells me I'm doing something right, anyway! So much of the film industry is about networks and getting to know people, so what BAFTA provides in terms of mentorship and creating connections is really great, particularly for directors who are often the least experienced person on set. I look forward to spending time with established directors and asking them questions.'

Annie Price – Presenter

Annie Price, 32, grew up in London and now lives in Weybridge, Surrey.

Annie loved her job as a personal trainer and had no ambitions of working in television. One of her friends spotted her talent though, and convinced her to take a meeting with an agent, who introduced her to a production company.

It took three years before they found an idea compelling enough to coax Annie away from her fitness career. In 2017, *Annie: Out of the Ashes* for BBC Three told Annie's story as a childhood burns survivor, and researched her family history. It also helped Annie to fall in love with the process of documentary making.

Two more programmes followed in quick succession, both on BBC Three: *Plastic Surgery Capital of the World* saw Annie explore the trend for cosmetic surgery in South Korea, while *Tiredness, Tears and Tantrums: Diary of a New Mum* followed her journey into motherhood with baby Sonny.

Annie said: 'To be a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit feels really special, I feel like I've been welcomed into the industry. I'm working hard and this is a really nice, encouraging nudge, like someone telling me it's going well and I can do this, so I'm really grateful. I'm quite excited about coming to the screenings, but the mentorship is what I'm really keen on. I'm looking forward to having someone I can put my questions to, and asking them about the decisions I'm making. I love people and stories, so there's a lot still to come from me, and it will be nice to have some guidance.'

Harry Nesbitt – Artist and Game Developer

Harry Nesbitt, 31, grew up in Staffordshire and Devon, and now lives in Camberwell, London.

Growing up, Harry was a big gamer, who loved playing *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Final Fantasy 7*. He had it in the back of his mind that game design could be a dream career, but first studied illustration and spent four years working as a successful freelance illustrator.

It was experimenting with innovative game engine Unity that rekindled Harry's ambition to launch his own game. *Alto's Adventure* launched in 2015, an endless snowboarding story with simple game play, and was a significant hit. It led to the release of hotly anticipated sequel *Alto's Odyssey* earlier this year.

Harry is proud of the impact the *Alto* series has made, and stresses his games aren't just designed for entertainment – he receives letters revealing they have helped players through difficult times in their lives including bereavement and anxiety. Harry hopes to build on his success by establishing his own games studio.

Harry said: 'It's an incredible honour to be named a Breakthrough Brit. For a while I was very unsure and apprehensive about being part of this industry – I was living a very quiet life in Devon and happy doing my own thing, but then I got thrown in the deep end when *Alto's Adventure* took off and it was a baptism of fire. I feel I have grown in the last few years, learned lots and embraced it all. It's amazing to be recognised for what I've been doing and to get that validation.'

Lottie Bevan – Co-Founder & COO

Lottie Bevan, 29, grew up in Buckinghamshire and now lives in North Greenwich, London.

Lottie thought she might like to be a journalist or work at an advertising agency. She had enjoyed playing games with her dad as a child, but only thought of it as a leisure activity.

Four years ago she had a revelation – why not make a career out of gaming? Trying out different roles at independent studios, Lottie soon realised she was best suited to producing, and co-founded pioneering narrative studio, Weather Factory. They released their first game *Cultist Simulator* in May, which surpassed Lottie's expectations.

Lottie is a powerful advocate for women in the gaming industry and always aims to feature a diverse mix of women in her narrative games, avoiding the cliché of 'strong and sexy' female characters. She loves the fact that games offer the kind of interactivity that isn't possible in films or novels, and that she can be part of an industry that makes people so happy.

Lottie said: 'It feels unbelievable to be a Breakthrough Brit, especially doing a photo shoot alongside Luisa Omielan who has performed on *Live at the Apollo!* BAFTA seeing something in me is a really big vote of confidence, so I'm just delighted. Since co-founding Weather Factory I've suddenly found myself doing lots of jobs that I have never done before, from marketing to art. I'm really looking forward to meeting some established people through BAFTA, and getting their advice on the parts of the job I'm not experienced in.'

Chris Walley – Actor

Chris Walley, 23, grew up in Cork and now lives in Tooting, South London.

Chris has always been a performer, from dressing up and entertaining the family at his granny's house to learning his craft at the Cork School of Music. It was while playing both Flute and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that he first felt the rush and buzz of being on stage in front of an audience.

Just before Chris moved to London to take up a prestigious place at RADA, he was cast as Jock in the Irish comedy film, *The Young Offenders*, which earned him an IFTA nomination. In his final year at drama school he heard that the BBC and RTE wanted him to reprise that role for a TV version, and RADA gave him the time off to film the series. They also released him early at the end of his studies to allow him to take up the role of Davey in *The Lieutenant or Inishmore* opposite Aiden Turner in London's West End.

Chris said: 'It means an awful lot to me to be named a Breakthrough Brit – BAFTA is such an incredible organisation and I hugely admire the people who have come before me on this scheme, so to be grouped in with them is a big honour. I'm excited for the support system the scheme offers and the mentorship – the industry can be very difficult so to have someone there to talk you through things is brilliant. Also I'm excited about the free cinema and screenings!'

Adrienne Law – Games Producer

Adrienne Law, 27, grew up in the Midlands before moving to Walworth, London.

Adrienne was looking for production assistant roles in film and television, before stumbling across a similar role at a small games company, ustwo Games. Despite having no professional games experience, she gave an impressive interview and got the job, becoming the first woman in the company.

The first game she worked on was accessible VR game *Land's End*, which saw her move up to assistant producer. In 2016 Adrienne began work on puzzle game *Monument Valley 2*, her first producer role. It was developed in secrecy and then announced and released on the same day in San Francisco, and suddenly the industry became aware of Adrienne's work. She hopes to continue being the best producer she can be and also move into games writing at the same time.

Adrienne said: 'I'm stunned to be a Breakthrough Brit so early in my career! I'm really interested in the way that games are now coming up alongside film and TV as a creative medium, and telling a broader range of stories. I work at a company that cares about that, and now to have this opportunity to represent that more publicly is really exciting. I'm looking forward to the mentoring, I'll take everything I can get my hands on. You can learn so much from asking questions and listening to people with lots of experience.'

Jessica Barden – Actress

Jessica Barden, 26, grew up in West Yorkshire and now lives in London.

Jessica began her career very young. After starring in musicals as a child with her Monday night drama group, she started working as an extra on children's TV programmes. At the age of 14 she landed her first major role, as Kayleigh Morton in

Coronation Street, where she realised she definitely wanted to be an actress. Two years later, she was cast in the critically acclaimed Royal Court Theatre production of *Jerusalem*, opposite Mark Rylance and Mackenzie Crook.

Jessica's biggest role to date is as Alyssa in the BAFTA-nominated C4 TV series *The End of the F***ing World*. Originally written as a film, the story of two rebellious teenagers looking to escape the world immediately stood out to Jessica, and she knew it was a project she had to be part of.

On being named a BAFTA Breakthrough Brit, Jessica said: 'I feel massively grateful and very privileged to be here with so many other talented people. The industry is so competitive, especially for women, so it's a huge honour to be included, especially because BAFTA is an institution that stands the test of time – you see it moving with the times every single year and embracing the fact that the industry is constantly changing. I want to really use my opportunities to build a considered career and be an intelligent person in the industry.'

Ria Zmitrowicz – Actress

Ria Zmitrowicz, 28, grew up in Hampshire and now splits her time between South London and Margate.

Ria has always really enjoyed performing, acting with amateur dramatics groups and starring in pantomimes as a child. She auditioned for lots of drama schools, but in the end it was to be the National Youth Theatre that supported her career, where she worked on various projects up until the age of 21.

After appearing at the Edinburgh Festival and securing an agent, Ria was cast as Miss Ellis in ITV drama *Mr Selfridge*. She then starred in hard-hitting, BAFTA-winning drama series *Three Girls*, about the Rochdale grooming scandal, working alongside Maxine Peake and Lesley Sharp. It was a long process to bring the story to the screen, and a complicated role to do justice to, but Ria counts it as a project very close to her heart.

On being named a Breakthrough Brit, Ria said: 'This is really encouraging, because being an actor can be quite a lonely existence, sitting at home self-taping auditions. I'm so excited to meet the other Breakthrough Brits, it's a lovely feeling being part of something with like-minded people. Being at BAFTA makes me feel like there is less distance between me and all of the actors I admire and idolise so much. I would like to be mentored because you have a lot of questions and you don't always know where to direct them, it will be amazing to have someone experienced to thrash things out with.'

Daniel Lawrence Taylor – Actor/Writer

Daniel Lawrence Taylor, 35, is a life-long Londoner currently living in Sydenham, South London

Daniel is a writer and performer, whose breakthrough E4 scripted comedy series *Timewasters* was nominated for a BAFTA this year. He had always envisaged a career in dramatic acting, but found himself in comedy plays and sketch shows at university. After a great experience at the Edinburgh Festival he formed double act *Ginger and Black* with Eri Jackson, and started writing more comedy.

Daniel feels television is starting to take diversity seriously. He is particularly proud to be writing the kind of black characters rarely seen on television and hopes to inspire and provide opportunities for black actors. He credits his family with giving him his sense of humour and has named many of his characters after his siblings.

On learning he'd been named a Breakthrough Brit, Daniel said: 'It blows my mind that I've been selected for this! A few friends have done the scheme in the past and said how helpful it's been. I'm at that stage in my career where a helping hand could be quite nice. Sometimes you have to navigate your way through the dark and take risks, which can be exciting, but to have a mentor sending you in the right direction will be really useful. I didn't want to get my hopes up too much so I booked a holiday during the announcement period... I've had to return early but it's totally worth it!'

Ellena Wood – Director

Ellena Wood, 38, grew up in Norfolk and now lives in Hackney, London.

Ellena has worked her way up from researcher to self-shooting director, making films including a one hour episode of BBC One's acclaimed *Life and Death Row – 'Truth'* and a series for BBC3, *'Excluded: Kicked out of School'*, which she series directed.

She was then invited by the BBC to direct and produce *Louis Theroux: Talking to Anorexia*, which appealed to her because it was an opportunity to take a subject that people think they understand and present it in a new way. Despite her interest in the subject matter, and a long research process, she was still taken aback by the profound impact the documentary made. It was nominated for a BAFTA, which Ellena describes as an amazing feeling.

Ellena is open about the challenges and frustrations she faces attempting to smash the glass ceiling as a female director. She hopes the mentorship she receives from BAFTA will make a real difference to her career.

Ellena said: 'It's amazing to be a Breakthrough Brit – having BAFTA behind me is just the boost I was looking for at this stage of my career when I just want to feel re-inspired and like I'm learning new things. Hopefully it will make a big difference getting my name out

there. I've never had any formal training in my career, I've just had to learn things on the job and I think I could still get better, so I'm looking forward to being pushed by people who have more experience than me.'

Lucy Cohen – Writer/Director

Lucy Cohen, 37, grew up in the Midlands and now lives in Tottenham, London.

Lucy always wanted to tell people's stories, but initially thought she might become a foreign correspondent. After completing a postgraduate diploma in magazine journalism she realised the written word wasn't enough, and she wanted to move into documentary films. Her work include Channel 4's *First Cut: Watch Me Disappear*, *Dispatches: Secret NHS Diaries*, Channel 4's *Watch Me The Fried Chicken Shop* and BBC *Two Modern Times: The Great British Garden Watch*.

Last year saw the release of Lucy's critically acclaimed Netflix original feature documentary *Kingdom of Us*, the story of a family dealing with a traumatic past. The film was BAFTA-nominated and opened doors for Lucy, who feels the project is a real breakthrough moment. Notably, it was a busy time in Lucy's personal life too – she attended the premiere only four days after giving birth to her first child, Joseph! Lucy is now looking to move into narrative fiction and has a project in development with BBC Films.

On being named a Breakthrough Brit, Lucy said: 'It feels like a really special privilege and I'm in great company. As a freelance filmmaker I sometimes feel quite isolated, so I'm really excited to meet everyone. It's really nice to feel like I'm part of something and that there are going to be people looking out for me and offering me guidance, particularly at this juncture where I'm branching into areas that I haven't worked in before.'

Jay Armstrong – Game Developer

Jay Armstrong, 32, grew up in Hong Kong but now lives in Islington, London.

Jay has a Masters from Kings College London in Geopolitics, Territory and Security; it's not the typical starting point for most creative careers! Despite having no formal training, Jay has always loved drawing and as soon as he discovered how to animate his sketches on the computer, a games designer was born. He began by making free web browser games as a hobby, before teaming up with Massive Monster and making the transition to Xbox and PlayStation.

His first release *Adventure Pals* was met with rave reviews and quickly became a smash hit. Jay is proud to be responsible for a family-friendly game that players of all ages can

enjoy, without blood or violence. His next game *Never Give Up* is coming to console very soon. He hopes to continue to make educational games that are full of personality.

Jay said: 'It's absolutely unbelievable to be named a Breakthrough Brit. A lot of what I do is staring at code on a computer by myself, so it's hard to believe that anybody knows what I'm doing! For BAFTA to recognise all the hard work is beyond my wildest dreams, I'm still pinching myself. We're expanding and I want the development studio, Massive Monster, to be successful and to provide jobs for other UK developers, so the mentorship comes at a crucial time for us. I'm excited to have access to incredibly inspirational people.'

John Campbell and Katie Goode – Technical Director & Creative Director

John Campbell, 35, grew up in Manchester and Katie, 31 spent her childhood in Birmingham. The husband and wife team now live together in Bude, Cornwall.

John and Katie met through their mutual love of games, when they were thrown together working on the potions brewing team for the Harry Potter game *Book of Spells* and then *Book of Potions*. After realising they worked incredibly well together, and discovering a similar taste in games, the couple co-founded Triangular Pixels in 2014.

John, who has been developing games since secondary school, and Katie, who turned a degree in Physics and Space Research into a career in game design, wanted to explore how they could use VR technology to create exciting new games. Last year, their spy game *Unseen Diplomacy* was nominated for a BAFTA for Game Innovation and they have just released their latest game *Smash Hit Plunder*.

After hearing they had been selected as 2018 BAFTA Breakthrough Brits, John said: 'This is validation that we're doing good stuff. It's very easy to feel like it's just us in a room with a computer but this makes it all seem more real.' Katie said: 'For BAFTA to respect what we do, for them to take it seriously and not just see us as a couple of kids is great recognition for us. We're looking forward to the networking because being down in Cornwall there aren't too many games developers around. It would be really cool to get a games community going down there.'

Daniel Kokotajlo – Writer/Director

Daniel Kokotajlo, 37, grew up in Manchester and now lives in East London.

Daniel was always inspired by the power of film to start conversations. He remembers sitting as a child with his mum, watching films about subjects they would never normally discuss. But it was only in his mid-twenties, after studying textiles and working as a painter, that Daniel realised he wanted to become a filmmaker himself.

After a series of successful shorts, self-taught director Daniel started writing his first feature film *Apostasy*, with the support of Creative England's iFeatures scheme, which was released in cinemas earlier this year. It's a deeply personal film inspired by his life growing up as a Jehovah's Witness, and one that Daniel admits was challenging – he knew it was an important story to tell, but worried about how his friends and family might react. The film has made a huge impact on viewers and critics alike.

On hearing he had been named a Breakthrough Brit, Daniel said: 'This is great news, I'm excited! I know some of last year's Breakthrough Brits and I've heard good things about the mentoring and support that BAFTA offers, so I'm looking forward to making good use of it. I'm working on that tricky second film on now, looking at the best way to realise it, while also getting that family/career balance right too. I want to use the momentum I've got to have a career making films, and I think with the support Breakthrough Brits offers I can do that.'