



SUPERFAN

LITTLE TOP

A magical first circus experience for babies
0-18 months and their grown-ups

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2019



made in
SCOTLAND

LITTLE TOP

“From start to finish, it’s a gentle but hugely engaging series of skills, tricks and tumbles, which has its tiny audience members bright-eyed and itching to join in.” The Stage

In August 2019 *Little Top*, a magical first circus for babies and their grown-ups, was a sell-out at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, as part of the Made in Scotland Showcase 2019. It ran from 2nd August - 17th August 2019 at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC).

Little Top is a partnership between Starcatchers and SUPERFAN, bringing professional circus up close. Inside *Little Top*, in a specially-designed set that miniturises the magic of Big Top, professional circus performers execute spectacular balances, tumbles and juggling up close in babies’ line of sight, making eye contact, interacting and responding to their young audience.

This exciting work is the brainchild of award-winning circus artist Ellie Dubois and early years artist Kim Donohoe. *Little Top*’s talented circus performers and crew include former elite gymnast Gabbie Cook, acrobat Nat Whittingham and juggling artist Arron Sparks. Becky Minto, one of Scotland’s most prolific theatre designers, together with Kim Moore (Sound) and Michaela Fee (Lighting) create a comfortable and cosy set to transport its young audience into a playful, joyous, upside-down and topsy-turvy world where anything is possible.

[Watch the trailer](#)

Starcatchers

Starcatchers is Scotland’s National Arts and Early Years Organisation, specialising in creating performances and exploring creative activity for babies, toddlers and young children aged 0-5 and the adults who care for them.

We make beautiful, innovative productions with exceptional artists who specialise in work for the under 5s; deliver engagement projects across Scotland, placing artists directly into communities; and provide professional development for artists and early years practitioners to develop practice using arts and creativity with very young children.

www.starcatchers.org.uk

SUPERFAN

SUPERFAN is a collaboration between Ellie Dubois, Kim Donohoe and Pete Lannon. Superfan makes new performances for adult and young audiences. Their work blends theatre, performance art, circus and choreography.

www.superfanperformance.co.uk

Creators, cast and crew

Created by **Ellie Dubois and Kim Donohoe**, produced by **Starcatchers**

Director - **Ellie Dubois**

Sound Design - **Kim Moore**

Set and Costume Design - **Becky Minto**

Lighting Design - **Michaela Fee**

Performers: **Laura Bradshaw, Gabrielle Cook, Arron Sparks and Nat Whittingham.**



Context

The collaboration between Ellie Dubois and Kim Donohoe has resulted in a unique opportunity for babies and their adults to experience incredible physical feats, which are so integral to circus, up close.

The show’s creative development has been driven by Ellie’s passion for taking circus to new audiences and Kim’s passion for early years theatre.

During a week-long mini-residency at Arts Depot in London Ellie and Kim worked closely with circus performers to explore acrobatics, acro-balancing and juggling up close to an audience. “We spent lots of time getting down very low to the ground to explore what a baby would experience and found lots of fun opportunities to connect with them – reaching our feet out to the audience, balancing on one hand and playing with facial expressions, which are fascinating to even the youngest babies”, said Kim.

Ellie and Kim also ran open play sessions with babies and their parents where they played with balls and silks. They found that very young babies were fascinated by the patterns that black and white balls create whilst juggling. Older babies and toddlers also loved to hold, throw and roll the balls, and feel their texture.

The *Little Top* set creates a magical, cosy space for the audience and can be erected in a variety of different spaces from theatres to town halls.

Evaluation

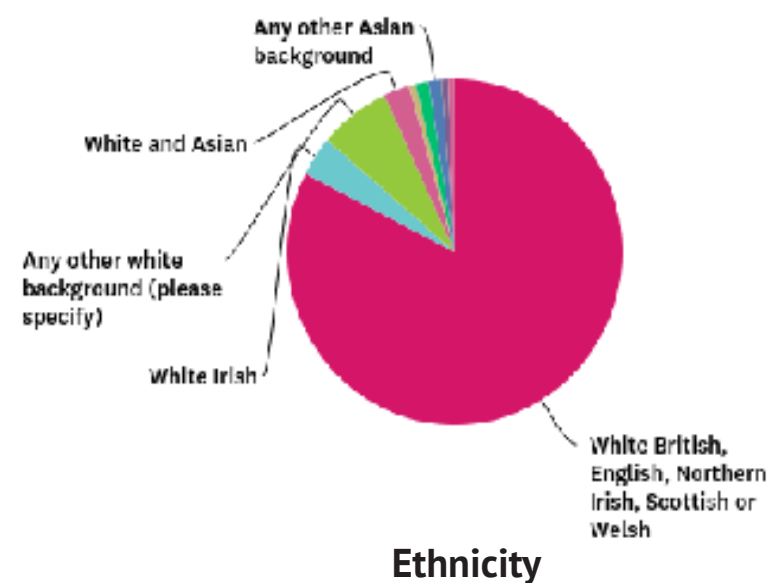
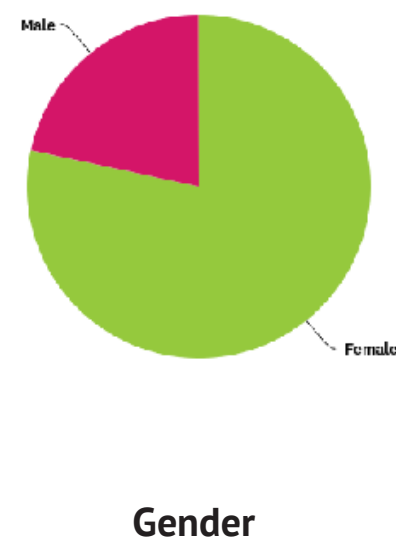
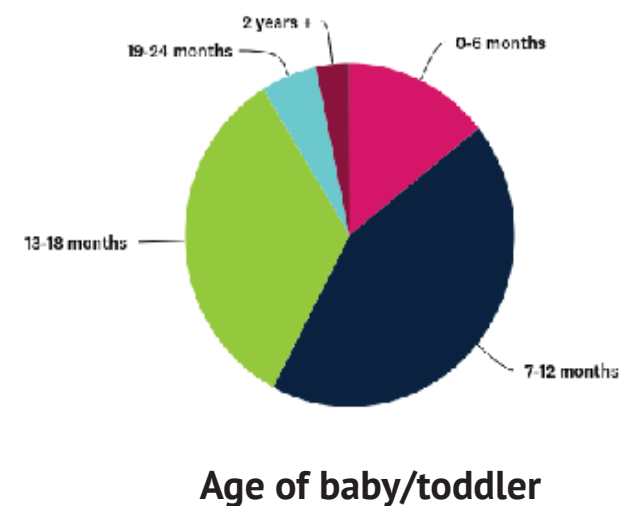
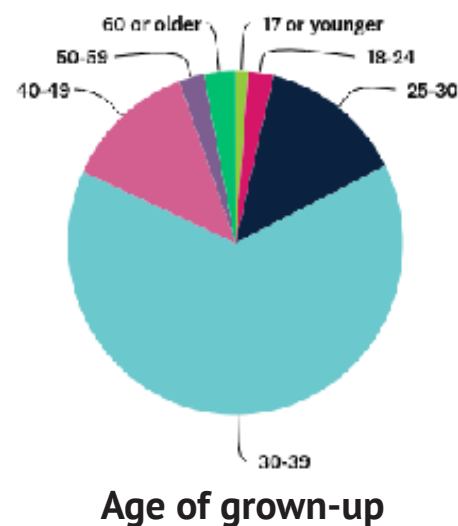
1341
children &
their families
reached

Over
28
performances

Feedback overview

We asked audiences to complete a short survey about their experiences directly after the performances.
188 adults completed the survey.

Audience profile



For 55% of parents/carers attending *Little Top*, this was the first live show they had seen with their child

98% of parents and carers would take their child to another live performance after seeing *Little Top*

90% of parents/carers felt connected to their child during the performance

100% of our audiences enjoyed the *Little Top* experience

Audience feedback

“Really magical performance - we loved it! Very special experience with my little son.”

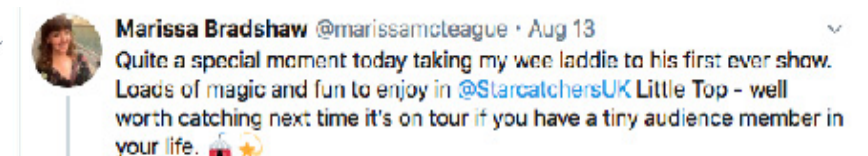
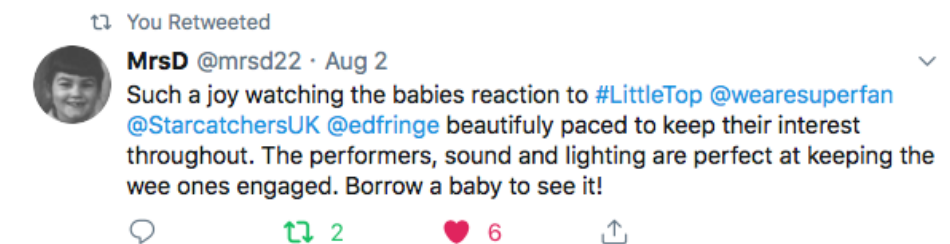
“I loved it, this was our second time and highly recommended to friends - thank you!”

“Gorgeous interactive elements: glowing balls etc. Loved the stay and play. Performers were so gentle and lovely with the babies 10/10”

“When lights dimmed she lay down and watched the lights. Was more animated with the acrobatics. Excellent! (Also mummy was a bit emotional!!!)”

“When the green man used balls to make the pink & blue performer raise their arms & touch ground, Jackson copied the movements! Thank you! Excellent!”

Feedback on social media



Press

The Stage

Ellie Dubois and Kim Donohoe's new circus show for babies is a delight. From start to finish, it's a gentle but hugely engaging series of skills, tricks and tumbles, which has its tiny audience members bright-eyed and itching to join in.

There's a dotted line separating the performance space from the audience's brightly coloured cushions (design by Becky Minto) and the more mobile babies are desperately toeing it, squawking and straining to be allowed to join in with the captivating performers. All four – Arron Sparks, Gabrielle Cook, Nat Whittingham and Kim Donohoe – are impressive both in their circus skills and their baby-enchanted ones.

It's a particularly nice touch that they all stay and play with the babies at the end of the show.

My 10-month-old stood transfixed throughout the show, bouncing and pointing, completely entranced by the tumbling, juggling, gentle silliness and sweet skits. Minto's design puts the audience and performers inside a miniature circus tent – a *Little Top* – and the swirling light patterns are particularly enjoyable for the babies. Read more: <https://bit.ly/2Msg1iP>



Families Edinburgh

One of our wee-est wee reviewers went to see Starcatchers *Little Top* at Pleasance at EICC - 4 Stars.

"A magical circus experience for babies[...]I was worried about how he (son) would be in the show. But I needn't worry because as soon as the performance started he was mesmerised with their amazing balance and movement, calming music and very inventive juggling.

Little Top are four very talented performers who did a wonderful job of bringing the professional circus to a young audience. As I watched all of the babies and grown-ups faces in the audience I could see how they were all gripped by the movement, colourful props and their friendly and funny facial expressions. I liked how they set each part to the music and I really felt they were trying to interact with each and every one of us. The show is perfectly aimed at 0 - 18 months, older children may get restless. At the end of the performance there is a chance to stay and play. The light-up balls were a big hit with Josh!"

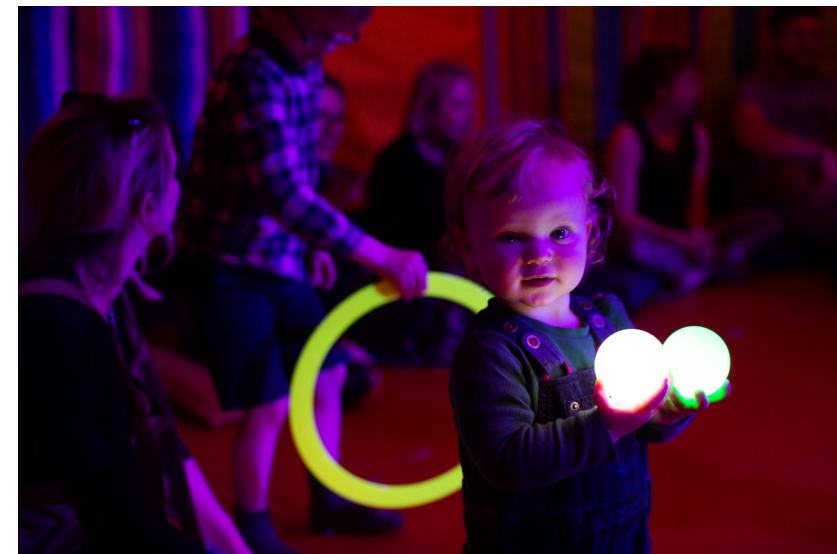
"My
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The Circus Diaries

A ring of tiny engrossed faces makes *Little Top* a delight for accompanying charmed adults as much as for the babies and toddlers the experience is aimed at. It's a new intimate circus show from Ellie Dubois and her collaborator Kim Donohoe of Superfan, a partnership with Scotland's National Arts and Early Years organisation Starcatchers. I count 20 little ones in today's performance, and at any point I check around the circle at least half of them have their eyes fixed on the colours and movement in front of them, often many more.

I wish my nieces could be here to join in. 18-month-old Rose would be one of the big girls, at the top end of the recommended age range, whilst her 7-month-old cousin Amber would fit right in with the gurgling, wriggling majority, testing out their voices and their own physical skills in response to the performance and environment around them. Read more: <https://bit.ly/35hsOuW>

"This show
should be part of
every child's early
development. And
every parent's"



The List

It seems an ambitious task that early years specialists Starcatchers (along with circus-theatre group SUPERFAN) have set themselves: creating a circus for babies, surely the pickiest group of customers out there. But it also makes sense – circus is made of colour, light, bodies doing extraordinary things, creating beautiful patterns. Babies love these, and there are plenty of all of them in *Little Top*. Read more: <https://bit.ly/2ANXWnx>

Edinburgh Festival for Kids

This is probably my favourite baby show of the fringe so far! After gathering in a pre-show room to take off shoes and leave all of your belongings in a safe space, we were led through to a magical, beautifully recreated circus tent. Babies and parents were asked to sit on the floor around the perimeter of the performance space allowing for wonderfully natural interactions between the performers and babies throughout the show. *Little Top* had a gentle mix of juggling, acrobatics, yo yoing, tumbling and physical theatre perfectly targeted for 0 – 18 months, but don't let that fool you as it is equally engaging for adults! All the performers in this show were incredibly talented and obviously very experienced working with babies as they played upon their reactions throughout. Read more: <https://bit.ly/2YI7A9C>

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Edfestmag

Circus for babies? As far as Ellie Dubois is concerned, you're never too young to enjoy the whirligig fun of bravura juggling, or the sight of grown-ups tumbling head over heels in acrobatic partnerships. Her *Little Top* show for the 0 to 18 months age range – a SUPERFAN production presented in cahoots with Starcatchers – offers a close encounter with some very accomplished skills, delivered in an intimate circus ring designed by Becky Minto. Read more: <https://bit.ly/2nnUzRc>



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