

National  
Theatre

# Annual Review 2020–2021





# A year like no other

Welcome from Rufus Norris and Lisa Burger,  
Joint Chief Executives of the National Theatre

Cover: Shubham Saraf as  
Benvolio, Josh O'Connor as  
Romeo and Fisayo Akinade as  
Mercutio, in *Romeo & Juliet*  
(Rob Youngson)

Illustrations throughout by Sol Cotti

If we have learned anything from the past year, it is that nothing brings us together like theatre. So, whatever challenges we face, the National Theatre will always continue to create and share unforgettable stories with millions of people across the UK and around the world - whether on our stages on London's South Bank, on tour, in schools, on cinema screens, or streaming at home.

In the 12 months following the start of the pandemic to March 2021, the National Theatre team have been extraordinary, delivering projects with deep commitment, passion for theatre and an endless capacity for innovation. Our twin goals were serving audiences - including young people and communities - and creating opportunities for our freelance workforce. We responded to the first lockdown by launching National Theatre at Home, a free-to-stream programme of plays on YouTube, reaching audiences of 15 million in 173 countries around the world over a 16-week period from April 2020. National Theatre at Home then became a paid streaming platform to help cover its costs. The Olivier Theatre was reconfigured in-the-round to enable socially distanced performances, and the National Theatre staged and filmed two extraordinary productions against the odds, creating work with freelancers and actors.

By turning the Lyttelton Theatre into a film studio, we were able to celebrate the skills and versatility of the National Theatre's theatre-makers and produce our first title, *Romeo & Juliet* for Sky Arts & PBS. Our work with young people and communities continued to inspire and engage people across the country - online for Connections, New Views, Let's Play and the Drama Teacher Conference, as well as through extraordinary feats of coordination, the delivery of pantomime activity packs to children across the country.

Despite these successes, there have also been substantial difficulties. There have been major job losses across the industry, including over a third of our workforce. We continue to feel a profound sense of loss for each of those members of staff. They were all greatly-valued colleagues and contributed to the National Theatre in so many different ways.

Behind the scenes we lobbied hard for Government support for the UK's vital culture sector. We worked with colleagues from across the theatre industry to make that argument, and undertook detailed financial modelling for the sector that contributed to the formation of the Culture Recovery Fund (CRF). That investment by Government, although sadly not able to reach everyone working in the sector, is crucial to its recovery. The extraordinary generosity of the National Theatre's donors and supporters - here in the UK and in the US through the American Associates of the National Theatre - in our moment of acute need is the second, equally large and significant plank in our recovery plan. Combined with the CRF loan, that support is allowing us to confidently return to making theatre at scale and employing as many people as possible.

Now more than ever, it is important to remind everyone that together is how theatre is made, and how it is experienced. We sit together in an auditorium and feel the liveness of a moment. Writers, producers, actors, designers and technicians work together to turn an empty space into place full of action, meaning and emotion. Committed periods of collaboration and imagination in schools and town halls can create extraordinary moments of community.

It will take a long time for the NT, and the theatre industry, to work through the impact and legacy of the pandemic. But it is clear to us that theatre has a huge amount to offer the nation as it recovers and embraces new opportunities that will shape culture for years to come, simply by doing what we have always set out to do - bringing people together through storytelling.



**Rufus Norris and Lisa Burger**  
Joint Chief Executives



# Theatre's coming home

Theatre has the power to bring us together, even when we have to be apart. Streaming and broadcasting our productions into homes around the world reached our largest ever audience, and changed the ways we'll share our work forever.







*Previous: Lights down on the Costume at the National Theatre exhibition (Cameron Slater Photography)*

*Left: James Corden as Francis Henshall in *One Man, Two Guvnors* (Johan Persson)*

*Right: The empty Olivier Stalls foyer during May 2020 (Cameron Slater Photography)*



On 16 March 2020, theatres across the UK closed their doors and cancelled performances in response to the rapid spread of Covid-19. That afternoon, the company of *The Visit* had been preparing to play their 38th show in the Olivier. In the Dorfman, *All of Us* was preparing to give its dress rehearsal. Audiences for that evening were contacted quickly, letting them know they shouldn't attend the theatre.

At the time, it was unclear if the closure would be a couple of weeks or a couple of months. We had never imagined a scenario in which the NT would be forced to stop every part of its work, and that the very thing at the heart of theatre – coming together in person – would be such an existential threat.

Within a week, a national lockdown had been imposed, and we swiftly turned to finding ways to continue to share our work with as many people as possible. The programme we created would make National Theatre productions available to watch at home for free on YouTube.

'We all thought that it was likely to be a shorter period than it has actually been, so we were trying to think of something we could do quickly and remotely,' recalls Flo Buckeridge, Senior Producer for NT Live and Digital. 'We were very fortunate that because of our cinema broadcast programme, NT Live, we have a back catalogue of high-quality recordings. We made a recording of *One Man, Two Guvnors* available on YouTube for free, it had a premiere moment at 7 o'clock on a Thursday, which was in keeping with the NT Live performance time, and we made it available for audiences to watch around the world from their homes.'

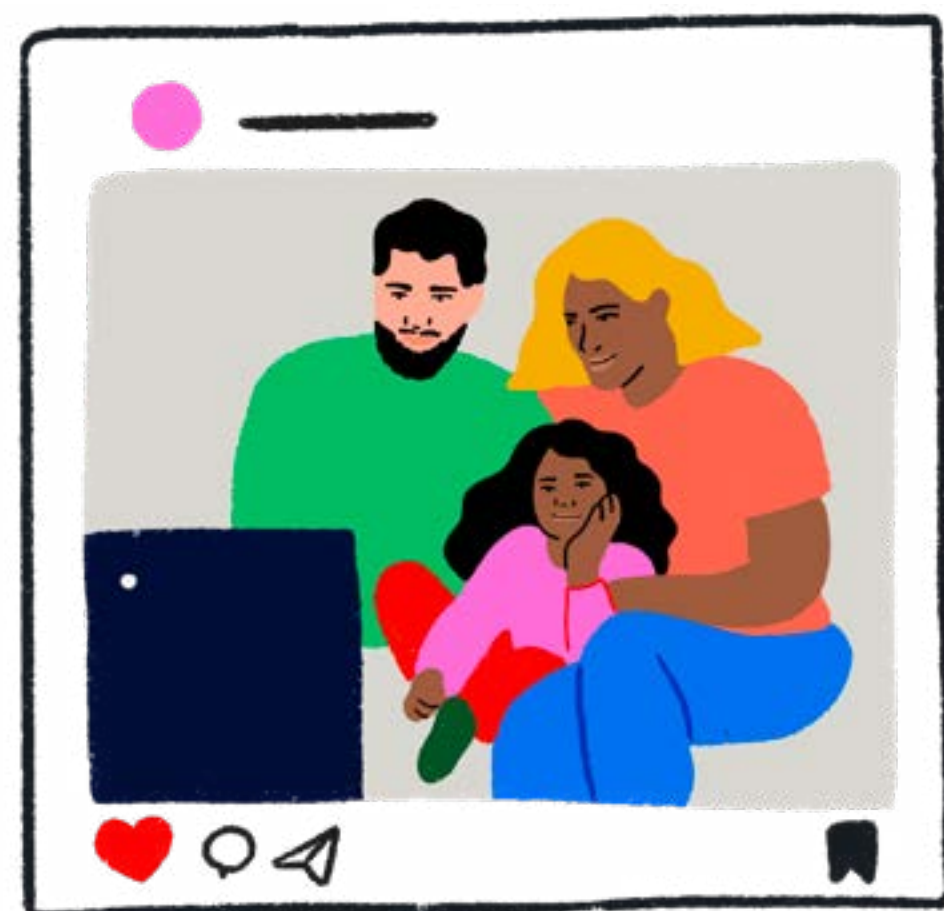
2 million people around the world came together digitally to enjoy the play. As well as a lively online conversation that led *One Man Two Guvnors* to trend on Twitter and YouTube, many audience members got into the spirit by making it an event at home – making special meals and drinks, creating home-made tickets, and hosting digital watch along parties with friends and family. As one of the first major streaming events of lockdown, this hit comedy brought some much-needed levity and a sense of togetherness for many.





“Rare treat - whole family is watching #OneManTwoGuvnors. The 11 and 16 years olds are laughing even more than the grownups. Thank you so much!”

@msbroadheadgar



“Christine Patterson is the energy I’m channelling to survive coronavirus - caught off guard and continuously startled but my gosh she’s doing her bit.”

@henryegar



“Haven’t seen my parents laugh this much in so long. Makes me smile. Theatre has once again worked its magic.”

@theatrical\_anna

“The perfect temporary escape from real-life horrors. Genuinely haven’t laughed like this for a fortnight.”

@ed\_marriage



“We’ve turned our living room into a theatre for the @NationalTheatre broadcast this evening. Iconic.”

@LivvyParrot





Top left: Shiloh Coke as Celia and Leah Harvey as Hortense in *Small Island* (Brinkhoff/Moegenburg)

Bottom left: Tamara Lawrance as Viola and Oliver Chris as Orsino in *As You Like It* (Marc Brenner)

**“You have created new theatre fans across not just your country but worldwide. You have helped people such as me deal with the melancholy of the pandemic and seeing their families go through Covid. I did not get to see every single stream, but every single one I did watch was life impacting.”**

YouTube user Bisma, commenting from Pakistan

In total, we streamed 16 plays for free on YouTube under the title National Theatre at Home, including our productions of *Twelfth Night*, *Frankenstein*, and *Barber Shop Chronicles*, and the Bridge Theatre’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, and we were bowled over by the generosity of audiences donating from around the world. Over the course of the Spring, with a new title each week, the productions were watched 15 million times in 173 countries.

National Theatre at Home on YouTube overcame barriers of geography and accessibility – demonstrating the power and popularity of making theatre digitally available to as many people as possible.

40% of viewers for National Theatre at Home were under 35 years old. We offered captions for every title, which were used by around 3 million people (22% of viewers), and Audio Description for six titles, one of the first of such offers online from a theatre. Our digital reach increased enormously during this time, we saw an 817% increase in National Theatre YouTube subscribers and 1.6 billion impressions with our social media activity.

In response to the exceptional demand for our work online, we began working on a new streaming platform. In December 2020, National Theatre at Home launched worldwide, allowing theatre lovers to subscribe and enjoy unlimited productions or pay to access single plays.

The creation of National Theatre at Home allowed us to begin the complex process of licensing plays from the National Theatre Archive for commercial use, opening up a whole new treasure trove of plays to consider. And, crucially, the new National Theatre at Home platform was set up to prioritise paying the freelance creators and performers of the productions for their work – generating a welcome new income stream for many freelancers affected by the pandemic.

The platform launched with 12 titles available, with the plan to add more productions each month, including titles with audio description. By March 2021, the service offered 18 plays, including our epic production of *Angels in America*, Billie Piper’s Olivier-award winning performance in *Yerma*, and family favourite *I Want My Hat Back*.





“The topic of conversation with teachers, cleaners, support staff and the office staff became what shows we’d watched that week.”

A Manchester teacher recalls discussing National Theatre at Home with colleagues working to support key workers’ children.

*Left: A scene from  
Jane Eyre (Manuel Harlan)*



# Theatre on Demand

Matthew Amos, was the camera director of *Death of England: Delroy*. As the team prepared to film the production, he spoke about the demands of turning the capture around in time.

‘We found out about this on Saturday - it’s now Wednesday and we’re filming it. Normally we’d be looking at six to eight weeks as the shortest time, and months of preparation.

Live theatre is so vital and so important. Anything that we can do to keep the production alive and give people a chance to see things has got to be a positive. Out of adversity, things happen, don’t they? And we’re all finding our way through new ways of doing things. This isn’t the way anyone expected to capture a show like this, but doesn’t mean to say we can’t do it and we can’t make it work.’



Left: National Theatre at Home titles displayed on various devices  
Next: Dickie Beau as Sarah in *Dick Whittington* (The Other Richard)

In ordinary circumstances, the option for audiences to stream theatre from home might have taken years to negotiate and deliver. The pandemic precipitated a huge change in perspectives on digital theatre, building interest from audiences and artists. So, when both our new productions in Autumn 2020 were forced to close early, sharing them online was an obvious way to make sure that audiences didn’t miss out.

In November 2020, following Government advice about national Coronavirus measures we sadly had to cancel all remaining performances of our reopening show, *Death of England: Delroy*. We rapidly gathered a team to capture the production on what was to be both its opening and closing night.

*Death of England: Delroy* was streamed for free on the National Theatre YouTube channel on 27 November 2020. It was viewed over 80,000 times, with an estimated 29% of the audience aged under 35. We also shared a post-show discussion, featuring Michael Balogun, who played Delroy, writing and directing team Roy Williams and Clint Dyer, and National Theatre Associate Ola Animashawun. The discussion was viewed by over

25,000 people, and explored making theatre during the pandemic and the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020.

Meanwhile, plans were already afoot to stream our pantomime *Dick Whittington*, free of charge to families at home, alongside a Christmas run at the National Theatre. Pantomime is an essential part of our country’s theatre tradition, and many theatres across the country had to postpone their pantos last year. *Dick Whittington* was released on the National Theatre and The Show Must Go On YouTube channels between the 23 and 27 December 2020, and then on National Theatre at Home from January 2021, reaching over 200,000 households.

Filming and distributing these productions has been formative in how we now share work with our growing worldwide audience. Over the following year, National Theatre at Home has included releases of new productions like *Under Milk Wood* and *Paradise*. The breadth and diversity of work we can share digitally, compared with our longstanding cinema broadcast programme NT Live, makes it an exciting and distinct new offering that is an unexpected yet positive outcome of the pandemic.



“Even as a long-time panto sceptic, I felt immensely comforted. I wanted to stand up and applaud the very long list of people who brought it all together, in the name of cheering us up. It might not have been in exactly the way they’d planned, but they managed to put a smile on my face.”

Jessie Thompson, reviewing the stream of  
*Dick Whittington* for the Evening Standard



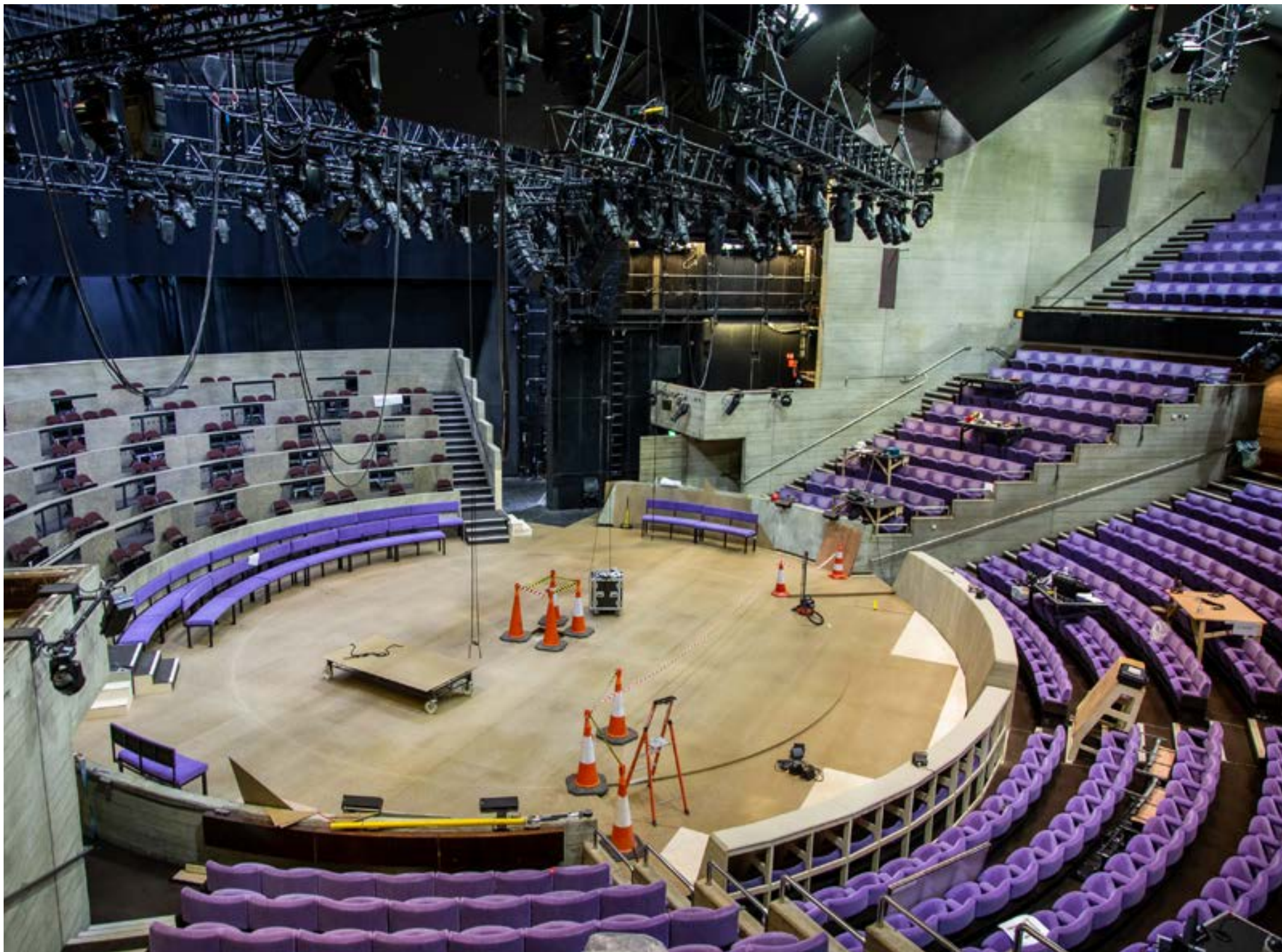


# Making work against the odds

Whether remodelling our spaces, finding new ways to make theatre, or keeping us safe, this year was all about the innovation and resilience of our staff and artists.







Previous: behind the scenes of filming *Romeo & Juliet* (Rob Youngson)

Left: Olivier Theatre being converted to in-the-round (Cameron Slater Photography)

Right: Audiences return to the Olivier (Cameron Slater Photography)



When theatres closed overnight in March 2020, our huge team of staff, freelance creatives and practitioners found themselves in uncharted territory.

Through the many openings and closings, the Facilities and Security teams kept the National Theatre building safe, not knowing what technical and practical issues we’d face when it closed for the first time ever.

Facilities Manager, Keiron Lilis, spoke to the New York Times about the challenges of looking after an empty National Theatre. ‘The amount of leaks we had over the past six months! Every week we had to flush every single tap, every single shower, every drinking fountain. Ordinarily, people like us, and security and housekeeping, we’re in the background. But our presence became much more known in lockdown. What I’d like to come out of this is for us to remain in people’s minds.’

Finding an innovative way to reopen to the public became an essential part of the National Theatre’s recovery process. As well as being the core of our mission, returning to production would mean that the National Theatre could begin to reemploy freelance

artists, many of whom had not been eligible for government support or furlough. The Olivier Theatre was significantly remodelled to stage a season of performances in-the-round – meaning it was possible to seat almost 500 people, while maintaining social distancing.

‘If we have to shut tomorrow, then a lot of the gambles we’re taking will not have paid off,’ said Director of the National Theatre, Rufus Norris. ‘But if we can reopen, we should, and we must.’

Our Visitor Engagement teams rose to the occasion of the complex choreography of welcoming audiences, with staggered entry times, new designated foyer tables, and social distancing. The Housekeeping team began an intensive regime of cleaning and fogging the theatre and front of house spaces.

The production chosen to reopen the Olivier was an urgent and explosive one-man show – *Death of England: Delroy*, written by Clint Dyer and Roy Williams. This new play was the sequel to *Death of England*, which finished





Above: Michael Balogun rehearsing  
*Death of England: Delroy*  
(Cameron Slater Photography)

**“You can’t beat those people, not like that, not with noise. You play dem boy, you play dem at their own game. You kill them with kindness. You don’t say a word, you don’t give them what they want. You know you didn’t do anything wrong, so it is all on them. You cannot beat them by going all loud. Yer nothing but a wurtless fool if you think you can. And I didn’t raise no fool.”**

from *Death of England: Delroy* by Roy Williams and Clint Dyer

its run in the Dorfman shortly before lockdown. *Death of England: Delroy* tells the story of a black working-class man searching for truth and confronting his relationship with Great Britain.

The intervening six months between the two productions had also seen the murder of George Floyd, and the international growth of the Black Lives Matter movement. ‘There’s a moment in *Death of England*, at his father’s funeral, where Michael tells Delroy, “You may act like us and speak like us, but you will never be one of us”’, Roy and Clint reflected. ‘In telling Delroy’s story, we wanted to take audiences on an illuminating journey into the Black British psyche and realities of a ‘tolerant’ England.’

The play was commissioned by our New Work Department at the start of lockdown and developed over the subsequent five months. The New Work Department had continued to provide vital support for artists, hosting virtual readings and socially distanced workshops for new plays under development.

Delroy’s path to the stage was by no means a smooth one, with staff across the building finding new ways

to create a piece of theatre safely amid Coronavirus distancing restrictions. The Health and Safety and Stage Management teams became Covid experts, finding new ways to keep rehearsals, construction and performances running. Then, part way through the rehearsal period, actor Giles Terera became ill, requiring understudy Michael Balogun to step up into the role.

It was meant to be a six-week rehearsal process, and we had two weeks,’ pointed out Michael, as he spoke about stepping into the role at short notice. ‘I had learnt some lines, but nowhere near all of the lines in that play. And I realised quite early in that rehearsal process that in a one-man show there is nowhere to hide.’

The production reopened the National Theatre on 21 October with a run of preview performances. However, following the introduction of new national Coronavirus measures, the theatre was forced to close its doors again. On Wednesday 4 November – the show’s opening and closing night – the *Death of England: Delroy* was filmed. It was shared as a special 24-hour release for free on YouTube, watched by 80,000 people worldwide.





“So, we went to work - I don’t think I’ve ever worked so hard in my life, it required something astronomical.”

Michael Balogun, on taking over the role of Delroy at short notice.

*Left: Michael Balogun rehearsing  
Death of England: Delroy  
(Cameron Slater Photography)*





*Left:* Lawrence Hodgson-Mullings as Dick in *Dick Whittington* (The Other Richard)

*Right:* Melanie La Barrie as Bow Belles in *Dick Whittington* (The Other Richard)



By December 2020, London had emerged from lockdown, and the National Theatre was looking ahead to opening again with a pantomime, *Dick Whittington*. At a time when many other theatres across the country were still unable to open due to tiered restrictions, putting on a pantomime in the Olivier Theatre felt an appropriate way to honour the national tradition.

‘We’ll do all we can to keep the flame alive,’ said Rufus Norris, Director of the NT, in the announcement. ‘Brilliant theatre artists will serve up a slice of joy to families on the South Bank, and we’ll be asking everyone to support their local theatres by booking ahead for their 2021 pantomimes.’

*Dick Whittington* was a heartfelt and hilarious version of the famous story, written by Jude Christian and Cariad Lloyd. Originally commissioned for the Lyric Hammersmith in 2018, the pantomime was freshly updated for 2020, and reconceived as a distanced in-the-round production. ‘We set out to celebrate the heart of the *Dick Whittington*

story - that London has always been, and will always be, enriched by the brilliant brains and invigorating spirit of those who come from all over the world and call it home,’ reflected Jude Christian and Cariad Lloyd. ‘That’s a story we want to tell now more than ever, and in quintessentially British fashion: with irreverent jokes, talking animals, awesome songs, and wholesale destructive silliness.’

The cast and the production’s director, Ned Bennett, grappled with social distancing requirements, finding inventive ways to integrate practicalities into the comedy: from an independently steerable ride-on Henry the Hoover to the conception of a socially-distant pantomime horse.

The production opened on 14 December 2020. The production’s run was, again, sadly cut short by the return of national restrictions. However, the production was also shared digitally for families to watch over the Christmas period – ultimately reaching an audience of over 200,000 households.



# Safety on set

‘We had to find a way to bring together the very different Covid-safe codes of practice for theatre and film into hybrid project,’ said Wyn Williams, Covid Compliance Supervisor, who would normally work as a Company Stage Manager. ‘We created a matrix of bubbles, which mapped onto different parts of the building. The cast were grouped into cohorts, like ‘Capulets’ or ‘lovers’ or ‘fighters’.’

‘We had to choreograph everything. The Capulet party needed to look crowded and natural, and involved the addition of a dozen dancers. It looks care-free on camera, but in reality the movement directors wove a tapestry of safe movements, with dancers returning to their designated bases as they went.’

‘The hardest part was deterring the cast and crew from what would normally be good habits. People just help each other out - whether that’s resetting a prop in their scene, helping move a piece of furniture, or even just passing a script or sharing a pencil. Theatre is a collaborative, intimate process.’



Right & Next: Jessie Buckley and Josh O'Connor in *Romeo & Juliet* (Rob Youngson)



As audiences attended the first performances of *Dick Whittington* in December 2020, another team were hard at work in the huge backstage spaces of the Lyttelton Theatre. This team were working on a new kind of project - *Romeo & Juliet* as an original film.

Directed by National Theatre Associate Simon Godwin, and with Jessie Buckley and Josh O'Connor as the star-crossed lovers, the production had been planned for the Olivier stage in Summer 2020, only to be interrupted by the pandemic. But out of this disappointment came opportunity: the desire to make the most of the incredible creativity of our staff, freelancers and associates while the Lyttelton Theatre couldn't open, and the idea of creating work that could reach millions at home.

Presented by Sky Arts, PBS Great Performances and No Guarantees, *Romeo & Juliet* was produced by the National Theatre, in association with Sabel Productions and Cuba Pictures. The film saw a pioneering collaboration between theatre and film artists, craftspeople and technicians, who worked hand-in-hand to create a new hybrid form shot specifically for film but with the imaginative essence of a stage production.

In normal times the interconnected tangle of theatres, rehearsal rooms, work areas and foyers at the National Theatre is a boon for creatives. But with the building open to audiences, and everything from sets to wigs being made in-house, the task of making *Romeo & Juliet* safe to work on came with a number of challenges.

*Romeo & Juliet* was captured in just 17 days – an extremely quick turn-around for the average film. The film premiered on Easter Sunday in the UK on Sky Arts and 23 April 2021 on PBS in the USA, before moving to catch up and NOW TV services. In the months since, the film has been released in UK cinemas, and subsequently on our streaming platform, National Theatre at Home. *Romeo & Juliet* has now been seen by over 300,000 people.

The resulting film is an innovative, singular love letter to the imaginative and dramatic possibilities of both film and theatre - a unique product of the circumstances brought about by the pandemic.



“In theatre, we’re used to a single candle representing thousands, or a bit of music telling us we’re in Egypt, whereas in a film we’d have some establishing shots of the Nile. This film takes that idea and tussles with it. We’re hoping an audience at home will go on the same imaginative journey they might do in the theatre, but each image has also been constructed for them from the beginning.”

Emily Burns, adaptor of *Romeo & Juliet*





# Public acts of creativity

Creativity and community are never so important as in a crisis, so when the pandemic hit, we reshaped our long-term partnership with communities in Doncaster and Greater London to support them telling their own stories.







**“At the heart of the project is the idea that we want to use theatre to connect people who might never have met”**

Emily Lim, Director of Public Acts

*Previous: The Magic of Wild Heather (Sam Taylor)*

*Left: Stills from We Begin Again produced by the Guardian in partnership with the National Theatre*



The first national lockdown hit as our Public Acts community in Doncaster were about to begin work on *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle*, a version of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at Cast, adapted by Chris Bush, with music composed by Ruth Chan and directed by James Blakey.

The production, scheduled for August 2020, was meant to be the culmination of this cycle of Public Acts, our programme of sustained partnerships which use theatre as a tool for development in local communities. Since 2019, the National Theatre had been working in partnership with Cast across Doncaster and six community organisations: B:friend, Doncaster Conversation Club, Edlington Community Organisation, Cast Young Company, darts, and Right Up Our Street.

One of the main aims of our partnership with Cast has been to reach into the community and offer people who have had little engagement with the arts opportunities to develop new skills. Connecting people is at the heart of the programme and we work collaboratively with community groups and artists from a diverse range of backgrounds to create the most fulfilling experiences

and exciting outcomes for participants and audiences. Deborah Rees, Director of Cast said, ‘Having significant partnerships of this scale is good for Cast, and also good for Doncaster. It allows us to increase the scope of our work and ultimately, being able to raise the profile of the arts in this way can attract audiences and challenge negative views of Doncaster, and will contribute to Cast’s success in the future.’

Losing crucial months to lockdown meant that *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* would need to be postponed. A new date, Summer 2022, was chosen. However, with a two-year gap to bridge, the next challenge became overcoming the immense community and personal challenge of the pandemic, and continuing to build the confidence and cohesion of the group in Doncaster.

The group began working on a new storytelling project inspired by *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*’s central theme of resilience and care. Participants were supported to cultivate their own story, a source of inspiration to help people struggling through the pandemic. A series of 18 short stories were shared as a new podcast series called *Stories to Get Us Through*.





“It’s amazing to feel so connected in such a big, busy city, against the backdrop of a disconnected world.”

Public Acts Participant

*Left: Portraits of Stories To Get Us Through participants. Left to right, top to bottom: Aaron and Beth, Bipolar Abdul, Samani, Mal, Mike, Frankie (Rasha Kotaiche)*

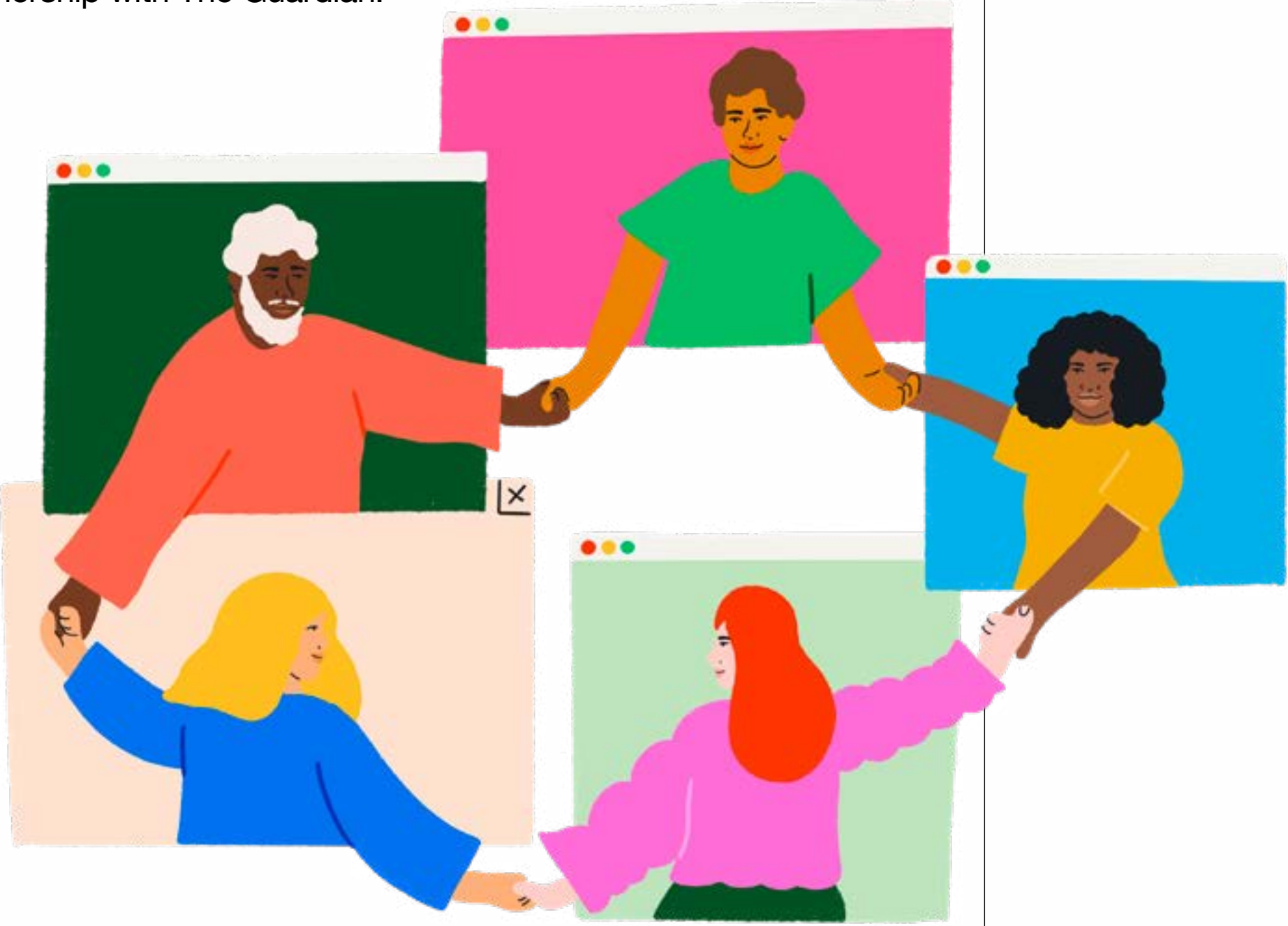


# We Begin Again

The Public Acts community came together to create a film, *We Begin Again*. The film was commissioned by The Guardian who invited over 100 of our Public Acts community members from Doncaster and London to take part. This short musical film was a unifying song about taking stock of an extraordinary year and resetting for the year ahead.

‘It was the first time we’ve ever made a film,’ enthused Director of Public Acts, Emily Lim, ‘and it was the first time our community members in Doncaster and London had united to collaborate together, cross-country! It felt so important to stay creative and connected with one another at this time, despite all the restrictions. We couldn’t wait to share this message of renewal and hope with everyone at the end of such a difficult year.’

*We Begin Again* was filmed both on location and remotely. Directed by Amy Hodge, and written by James Graham with music by Jim Fortune, the film was produced in partnership with The Guardian.



Left, and next:  
*The Magic of Wild Heather*  
(Sam Taylor)

‘I was sceptical at first,’ said Sam, one of the participants. ‘I didn’t have a single story in mind that would instil inspiration or start a conversation. But then it occurred to me that in sharing stories, we are sharing lives and it is that which gets us through, it’s that you should hold on for. You can learn so much from listening to a person’s story.’

The stories are a collection of personal anecdotes, snapshot memories and poetry. James Blakey, Associate Director of Public Acts, explained: ‘The podcast is a time capsule of the moment our Public Acts Doncaster community convened around a digital campfire in lockdown to tell their stories to each other and the world. Stories have the power to make us feel as though we’re together, even when we are apart. Despite the challenges and restrictions lockdown posed, we came together as a community.’ The series consists of five episodes which explore different themes including imagination, change, fear, friendship and heroes.

Following a year of meeting digitally, the Doncaster Public Acts community were keen to meet in real life. They had remained connected, supportive, creative

and hopeful throughout the year - working and creating together at distance. With the possibility of reopening ahead, we committed to supporting the participants to create and stage a community devised production.

The company began working towards a new production at Cast for August 2021 - an immersive community cabaret inspired by a forgotten Doncastrian myth called *The Tale of Wild Heather*. Written by Jasmin Mandi-Ghomi and designed by Hannah Sibai, the story would be co-created by the community company and features performances from local artists. One participant reflected that ‘being part of the cast of *Wild Heather* has been life-changing for me. From the very first rehearsal I felt accepted, and of value.’

Public Acts in 2022-23 will continue to be a pioneering programme of collaboration, profile, reach and impact. Activity will connect a new, extensive network of social change and theatre organisations across the country, contributing to the rebuilding of communities post-Covid by investing in local artists, relationships and infrastructure.



**“2020 will no doubt be remembered for many things, but for those of us who had the privilege of working alongside Public Acts, it has been a truly memorable one, full of growth, stronger relationships, much creative activity and empathy!”**

Public Acts Participant



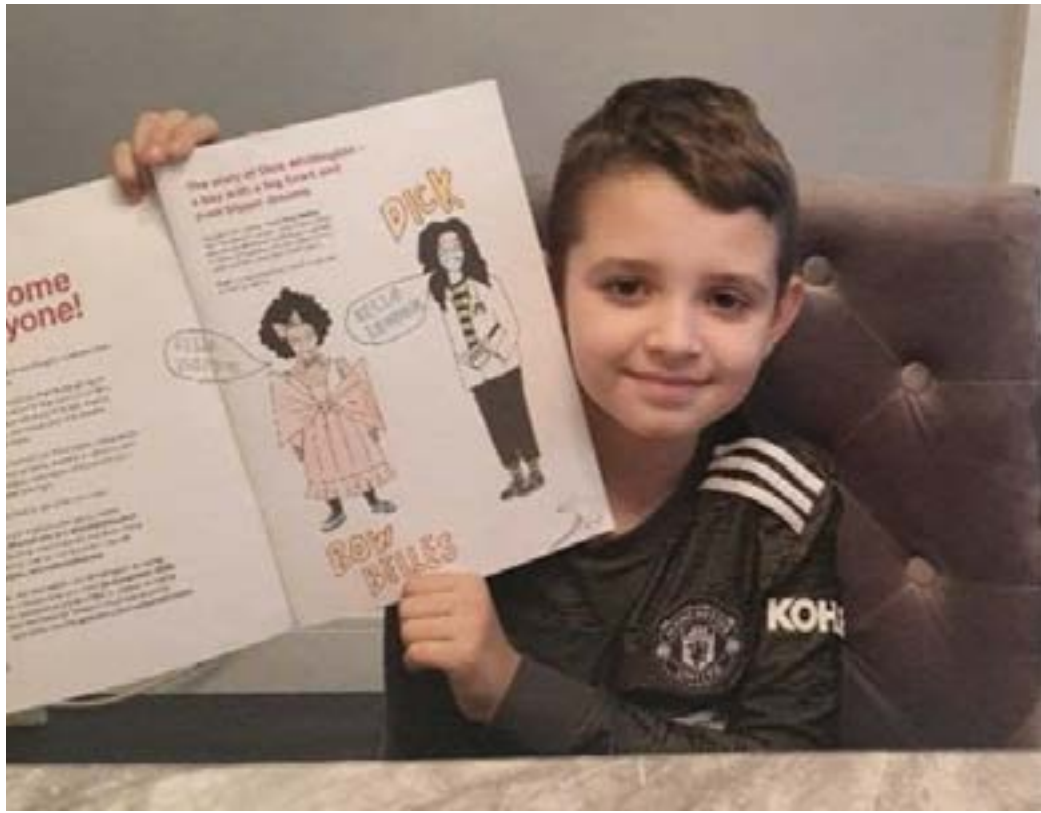


# Learning and Young People

When learning online became the new normal, we adapted our programmes to continue enabling young people to explore every aspect of theatre making.







Previous: JJ Green as Leo in  
New Views winning play  
Perspective by Mackenzie Wellfare  
(Cameron Slater Photography)  
Above: Young people enjoying  
the filmed production of  
*Dick Whittington* and completing  
the accompanying activity pack

“Every single child at each of our schools received an activity pack through the post delivered to their homes and personally addressed to them. We have truly missed our annual trip to the Christmas Pantomime and this went along way to replicate this experience for our children.”

Executive Headteacher of three primary schools in Salford and Eccles

When the pandemic hit the UK in March 2020 one of the key groups we reached out to first were teachers, who faced the immense task of pivoting learning to online. Teachers had to grapple with rethinking lessons and resources, rapidly become experts in online platforms, and try to support pupils facing emergencies and inequalities at home. Our Learning team sprang into action to share the resources and support we had available.

We enabled remote access for students from home, to the National Theatre Collection - the largest freely available collection of theatre films for schools, universities and libraries worldwide, available via Bloomsbury Publishing’s Drama Online and ProQuest. The Collection became a vital resource for teachers and students, offering a means of engaging with theatre – whether as the starting point for discussion, a tool for studying play texts, or exploring world-craft stagecraft. State schools in the UK can access the platform for free. There were over 1.2m views of our productions on National Theatre Collection, including 26 titles such as *Peter Pan*, *Treasure Island* and *Yerma*.

As of April 2021, 71% of all UK state secondary schools had signed up to use the service.

In December 2020 and January 2021, we ran a programme around our production of *Dick Whittington* for schools, communities and families across the UK. An activity pack was created for children, filled with ways to design costume and props from the show to create their own performances at home. This was free to download and physical copies were sent out to families, venues, community centres, schools, youth theatres, childcare providers and charities across London and our Theatre Nation Partnership areas – Doncaster, Greater Manchester, Hornchurch, Sunderland, Wakefield and Wolverhampton, where we’ve been working in partnership for three years.

With the help of National Theatre at Home, a free stream of the show was also made available throughout January 2021 to 385 targeted schools across the country. This was watched in school by children of key workers and vulnerable students, and by students who were learning remotely.





“This has been an absolute treat the kids have been so responsive thank you to you and your team for making the tasks fun and accessible for all!”

Drama Teacher at Chorlton High School

*Left: Georgina Onuorah as  
Alice in Dick Whittington  
(The Other Richard)*



# Supporting drama teachers

In February 2021, we welcomed a record 500 teachers to our annual Drama Teachers Conference. Reimagining the conference virtually meant teachers from Aberdeen to St Ives were able to work with some leading artists, makers, and companies in theatre, and explore new ways of sharing theatre with young people across the country.

‘I loved every minute,’ said one of the teachers who attended. ‘The range of experts and sessions were inspiring. There was a wonderful atmosphere created last week, even on Twitter the positivity and sharing of ideas after each session was amazing and it is all down to the NT bringing us together.’

Artists including Katie Mitchell, Matthew Xia, and Marianne Elliott provided masterclasses covering a wide range of theatre practice such as how to use theatre as a tool for activism and how to rehearse and perform whilst maintaining social distance.



**“The arrival of the crate created so much excitement in a time when fun was rather limited. I loved observing the students’ creative responses.”**

**A Drama Teacher at Oxclose Community Academy, Sunderland**

The success of this approach would later inspire our approach to *Romeo & Juliet*, which was streamed to 50 schools in Theatre Nation Partnership areas with specially created digital resources and a crate including replica props, scripts, art materials and a resource pack for teachers.

One teacher reflected on how the creative activity had helped their students engage with the play much more deeply: ‘Whether they produced an original monologue or put the characters on trial for culpability, their understanding of the text and performance was fantastic due to the wonderful production.’

Young people faced an unprecedented period of disruption to their education, social and personal development. Nonetheless, against the odds, the young people who took part in our existing programmes in 2020-21 produced remarkable creative work.

We adapted our Young People’s programmes and moved to digital delivery of Young Technicians, Young Producers and our playwriting course, reaching young people nationwide with targeted recruitment from

groups under-represented at the National Theatre: young people from the global majority, young people from working class backgrounds, and disabled young people.

Connections is the National Theatre’s annual nationwide youth theatre festival. Each year we commission ten new plays for young people to perform, bringing together some of the UK’s most exciting writers with the theatre-makers of tomorrow. The pandemic brought the 2020 cycle of Connections festivals, held in partner theatres around the UK, to a halt although the majority of the 294 school and youth theatre groups taking part were able to perform at their home venues.

The 2021 Connections cycle launched in Autumn 2021, with a flexible on and offline approach, to adapt to the constantly changing environment of the 20-21 school year. A digital Directors Weekend gave directors the opportunity to work with the writer of their chosen play before starting rehearsals, and Zoom sessions also connected Connections playwrights with the young people performing their play.



# Theatre in bubbles

The Let’s Play primary school programme became difficult to continue during the first lockdown and so we adapted Let’s Play scripts to make them easier to rehearse in primary school ‘bubbles’ and smaller groups.

We also created a ‘Let’s Play at Home’ resource for teachers to share with their pupils, so that they can still connect with theatre making at home.

‘The children grew as individuals and became stars in their own right,’ said a teacher from a Liverpool Primary school. ‘Many of our children struggle with confidence but after this opportunity you could visibly see the children change and become more confident, outgoing and animated.’

As schools planned to reopen in September 2020, the National Theatre consulted with teachers and school leaders to find out how Let’s Play could support the recovery curriculum and Covid-secure teaching measures. As a result, we developed Let’s Make It Up, an exciting toolkit full of additional resources to help teachers continue to incorporate theatre into the school curriculum.



# 12,000 young people took part in Connections in 2020; the largest cohort in the programme’s history



Above: Hele’s School performing Find a Partner! As part of the National Theatre digital Connections Festival 2021 (Dom Moore)

The plays covered themes including society’s obsession with reality TV, the climate crisis, Britain’s colonial past, friendship, identity, grief, love and mental health. 201 companies took part in the programme. 27 Partner Festivals around the UK took place both digitally and in-person in April-July 2021. Cast in Doncaster welcomed audiences back for the first time in 2021 with an in-person socially distanced Connections Festival in May; a brilliant way to show the importance of young voices. Performances were also filmed and streamed online for a week after the festival.

The young people who took part in Connections reported increased feelings of confidence in their abilities and pride in sharing their performances. With most young people out of school and reporting increased feelings of isolation, these digital connections have helped to maintain the community and support that is so intrinsic to theatre making. Indeed, a teacher in West Sussex fed back that ‘in such terrible times for the arts, Connections was truly a lifeline, a candle in the dark for schools and kids that without it might have missed a whole year of performing.’

Since its inception Connections has culminated in a festival at the National Theatre, inviting a production of each play to be performed by young people across the country on our stages. For the 2021 Connections Festival we sent a camera crew to 10 chosen companies, from the Shetlands to Cornwall and filmed 10 of the brilliant productions for release online.

Meanwhile, our New Views playwrighting programme for secondary schools also made the leap to digital. As part of this change, the course offered online workshops and masterclasses with professional writers and the opportunity to watch our productions for free online, as well as a pre-recorded masterclass on writing for audio with Audible. Students wrote their own original 30-minute plays, exploring topical issues from mental health and the pandemic to politics and relationships.

Reflecting on New Views, a teacher at Ecole Jeannine Manuel in London said, ‘It really is such an amazing opportunity for my students and gives them an incredible education in the work of theatre making, for which there is sadly so little time in our normal school curriculum.’



# Preserving the future

During many ‘quiet’ months the National Theatre Archive stormed forward with its digital preservation strategy, protecting 91 terabytes of data that capture the rich history of the National Theatre for future generations.

We also launched *That Black Theatre Podcast*, which delves into the Black Plays Archive to celebrate the leaders of Black British theatre in the context of the socio-political events that have influenced their work.

Beginning with the earliest black theatre practitioners Una Marson and Errol John, the podcast discussed the works of these trailblazers and the writers who followed, Mustapha Matura and Alfred Fagon, who wrote against the backdrop of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements both in Britain and America.

The podcast is a partnership between National Theatre, The Royal Central School for Speech and Drama, University of London and the AHRC London Arts and Humanities Partnership.



Above: National Theatre Archive (James Bellorini)



Right: JJ Green rehearsing *Perspective* (Cameron Slater Photography)  
Next: JJ Green as Leo and Kwaku Mills as Shaun in *Perspective* (Cameron Slater Photography)

117 schools across England took part in New Views - almost 1,000 young people and nearly 100 teachers. Over 450 students submitted first drafts in February 2021 – the highest number of first draft submissions in the ten years the programme has run.

Eight plays were shortlisted by a panel of judges including our Head of Play Development, Nina Steiger, playwright and screenwriter Beth Steel, playwright and performer Mojisola Adebayo and Jenny Sealey, Artistic Director of Graeae Theatre Company. The shortlisted plays were shared with participating schools as pre-recorded Zoom rehearsed readings with professional actors and directors. Each rehearsed reading was also captioned and BSL interpreted.

*Perspective* by 16-year-old Mackenzie Wellfare was selected as the winning New Views play in May 2021. Due to the lifting of restrictions, we were able to produce and film this play onstage in the Dorfman Theatre with a professional company, directed by Audrey Sheffield. Natalie Radal, Mackenzie’s teacher who attending the filming with him, commented that it was ‘such a positive, life-affirming experience.’ She

said that, ‘from watching the play, seeing the stage and filming crew in action to meeting the wonderful cast and creatives, it was both motivational and inspirational.’

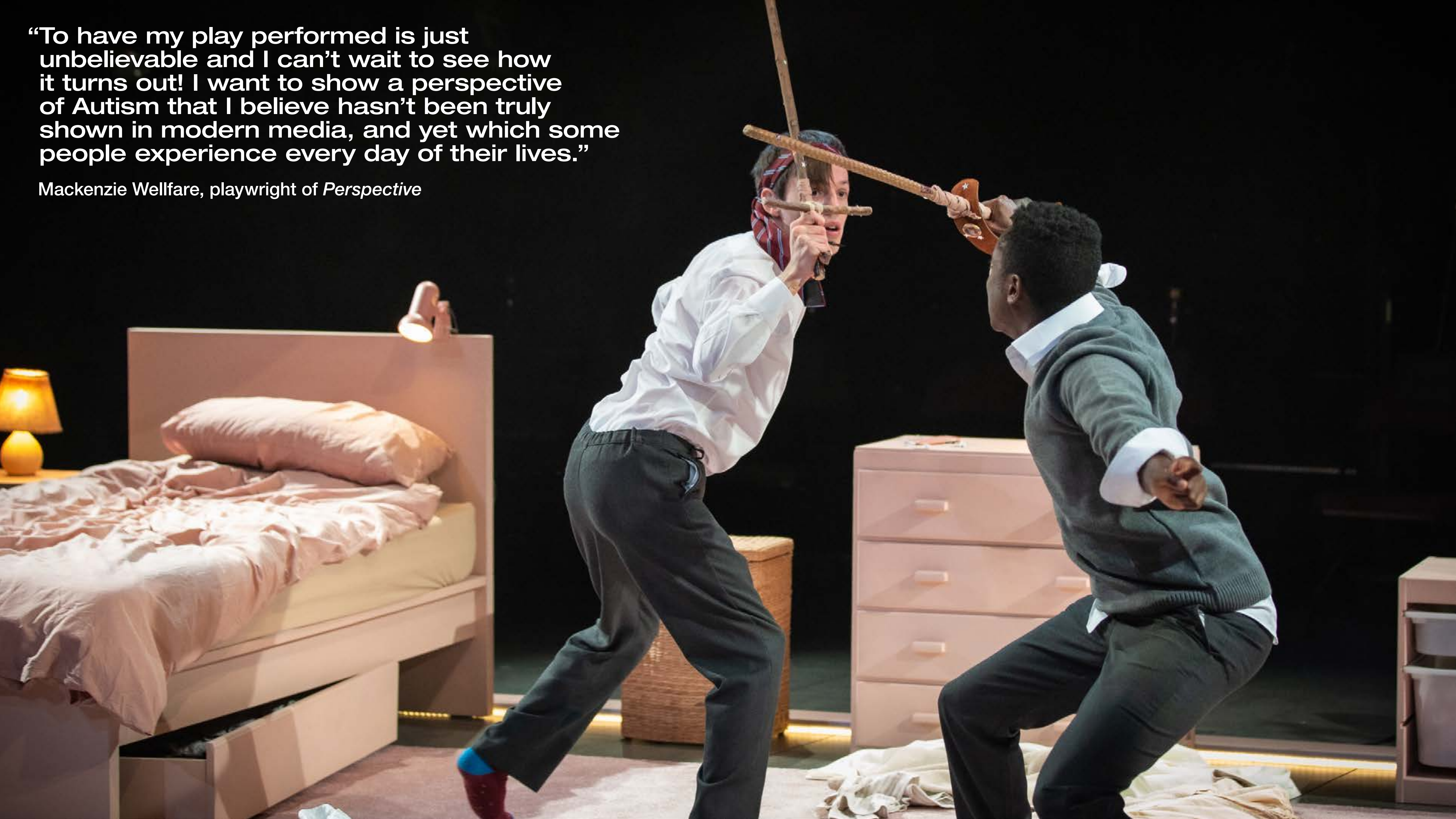
Mackenzie was inspired to write the play to share his own and others’ experience of Autism. The play, set in his bedroom, explores the experience of an autistic teenage boy, Leo, through conversations with his best friend, Shaun. The problems Leo encounters are seen from his perspective and are drawn from different experiences of many autistic people, including the writer’s own. Leo’s big imagination fills the stage as he considers how the world sees him.

The last year has been extremely challenging for young people and yet, students and teachers across the country have continued to do extraordinary work. We are incredibly proud to have been able to support young people to create new work and spark new conversations in classrooms and online. Even in the most difficult of circumstances we believe fostering the talent of the next generation should always be a priority.



“To have my play performed is just unbelievable and I can’t wait to see how it turns out! I want to show a perspective of Autism that I believe hasn’t been truly shown in modern media, and yet which some people experience every day of their lives.”

Mackenzie Wellfare, playwright of *Perspective*





+ Together

# The road to recovery

2020 was one of the most challenging years in the National Theatre's history. The pandemic - and its financial and emotional impacts - will have a long legacy as we begin the work of recovery.







*Previous: Millicent Wong as Four in  
After Life (Johan Persson)*

*Left: Part of the Missing Live  
Theatre installation by Freelancers  
Make Theatre Work (Cameron  
Slater Photography)*

The National Theatre is, fundamentally, in the mass-gathering business. In a normal year, we generate 75% of our income by putting on productions - leading to ticket sales, cinema broadcasts, and other kinds of in-person business like restaurants and cafes. All that was cut off overnight, quickly contributing to a major financial hole of £80m.

At the same time as this crisis was affecting theatre buildings and staff across the UK, the closures were also having a dire impact on the freelance creatives and makers who are the lifeblood of our industry. Throughout the Spring and Summer of 2020, we worked intensively to make the case for a package of support for the cultural sector to the Government. We advocated both for our national infrastructure of cultural organisations and buildings, and for support for creative freelancers.

The creation of the Culture Recovery Fund of grants and loans was an important moment, because it showed that the Government recognised the importance of culture to the UK, and pulled us back from the potential collapse of the industry. We were proud to support its creation.

However, we look to the future with worry for the organisations and individuals who were not supported: UK theatre is so successful because it's an ecosystem that needs everything from national companies like us to grassroots community theatres.

The National Theatre was approved for a loan of £19.7m from the Culture Recovery Fund, which will need to be paid back over the course of twenty years. The decision to apply for a loan of this scale was not taken lightly - but it was the bedrock upon which we were able to begin to recover by reopening, producing new work, and employing theatre-makers.

We had to make big savings in support of our loan application. We were able to find £20m in cost savings, through temporary wage reductions, radically reshaping resources and halving our production budgets. One of the unavoidable components of those reductions were also job losses. In this very difficult period, we lost more than a third of staff to redundancies. This huge change in the fabric of the organisation remains a major emotional and practical challenge for the National Theatre as we look to the future.





“As we reimagine, rebuild and reopen, the arts have a vital role to play in the UK’s economic and emotional recovery from the pandemic.”

Lisa Burger, Joint Chief Executive of the National Theatre

*Left:* The National Theatre  
reopens, October 2020  
(Cameron Slater Photography)





Above: Kayla Meikle as Tayir in *Paradise* (Helen Murray)

**“The feeling in the room is like nothing I’ve ever experienced. It’s the best summer of my life. The things I’m learning about what actors are capable of doing, and how they approach text, it’s just blowing my mind.”**

Kae Tempest, during rehearsals for their new play, *Paradise*, in summer 2021

While the challenges of this pandemic are not over, we can now begin to rebuild the National Theatre with a renewed commitment to make world-class theatre for everyone that celebrates the diversity of our nation. Generous support from our audiences and supporters is enabling us to secure the remaining £40m we need to fundraise to deliver our ambitious programme.

Through the National Theatre Together campaign, we have begun to explore a new vision for the National Theatre – a strategy which will employ as many freelance theatre-makers as possible, which can reach audiences across the UK and around the world, can support the recovery of communities, and inspire young people. We are widening digital access, and growing opportunities for every child in the country to experience theatre, helping to develop the next generation of talent.

All three theatres at our South Bank home have finally reopened. Productions have included Kae Tempest’s poetic exploration of survival and pride, *Paradise*, Ayub Khan Din’s much-loved culture clash comedy, *East is East*, and Winsome Pinnock’s investigation of the malleability of history, *Rockets and Blue Lights*.

Many of these productions are now available on National Theatre at Home, which continues to make our work radically accessible to people all over the world from their homes. NT Live has recently announced four new major titles to be broadcast worldwide to cinemas. Our production of *The Lehman Trilogy* has finally opened on Broadway, as well as *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* in the West End, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* readies itself for a substantial UK tour.

We strongly believe that theatre can be part of the UK’s recovery, and nowhere is this potential impact clearer than in our work with young people, where we have introduced two new programmes.

The first is Story Seekers, a free creative literacy project for 8-11 year olds, who join us on a quest to rediscover storytelling. Created with the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education and the Unicorn Theatre, Story Seekers supports children to develop their communication and language skills post-pandemic. It will become an established part of our Let’s Play programme, offering a whole host of ways for primary schools to integrate creative practice across the curriculum.





Above: Peter-Nehemiah Scott working on scenery with new distancing regulations (Cameron Slater Photography)



Left: Michael Sheen during rehearsals for *Under Milk Wood* (Cameron Slater Photography)

Next: *Doors to the Weston Terrace*, from inside an empty National Theatre (Cameron Slater Photography)

Another new programme is *Speak Up*, a collaboration with young people who have experienced disruption to school and personal development. The programme has started as a pilot in Greater Manchester, Sunderland and Wakefield, where young people will design and realise their own creative projects, strengthening their wellbeing, confidence, and leadership skills in the process.

Our work with communities continues strongly, with the Doncaster Public Acts participants back on track to create their major production of *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* in August 2022. Meanwhile, plans are coming together for new Public Acts partnerships across the country.

Artists and craftspeople are the lifeblood of our industry, and one of our biggest opportunities to support the sector is in supporting the creation of new pieces of theatre. Pre-pandemic, our New Work Department was already a major hub of invention, with over 100 projects on the development slate. Formalised by a new programme, *Generate*, we're now even more committed to opening up our doors to theatre-makers from across the whole of the UK. We'll partner with artists, venues and producers to use at least a third of our capacity

and resource each year to develop ideas and work to be produced outside London.

As the National Theatre comes back from the extreme difficulties of the pandemic, the ask on our resources is a huge one. We have weathered the first 18 months of crisis, but the storm isn't over. We must repay a substantial loan of £20m; Brexit will continue to change the landscape; and the threat of climate crisis demands a radical reimagining of how all business operates.

However, we believe in the power and potential of the mission we've identified, and that the health of the theatre sector and the nation lies in ambitious investment in each of our beneficiary groups: theatre-makers, communities, young people and audiences. The National Theatre is a place full of amazing people and elicits enormous affection, pride and passion in audiences around the world. It is this vital energy and support that keeps the lights on and the ideas flowing. The National Theatre extends a huge thank you to everyone who has stood with us in the story so far, helping us to shape a bright, creative future.



# Supporters

**We would like to thank all the individuals, corporates and trusts who support our work with theatre-makers and communities, young people and our audiences. We are also very grateful to those who support the American Associates of the National Theatre. The generosity of our donors over this time helped to secure the future of the National Theatre.**

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