



National Theatre announces epic nationwide production of *The Odyssey* across five UK locations, in collaboration with communities and artists across the country

- A new landmark nationwide community project celebrating five years of Public Acts
- *The Odyssey* will be reimagined by five writers from across the country and told in five episodes at partner venues nationwide



Wednesday 20th April 2022

Today the National Theatre announces a new multi-location nationwide production of *The Odyssey* produced in partnership with local communities, theatres and artists across the country. Taking place in 2023, the production will form part of the National Theatre's 60th anniversary programme.

In celebration of the fifth anniversary of *Public Acts*, the NT's nationwide programme to create extraordinary acts of theatre and community, *The Odyssey* will be an epic, multi-venue production made in collaboration with hundreds of community members and professional artists from across the country. Through this landmark project, the adventures of Odysseus will be reimagined for today with community companies as a universal story of resilience, loss, healing and hope.

The Odyssey will be told in four episodes taking place across the country in Spring 2023, culminating with a fifth and final episode on the Olivier stage at the National Theatre in August 2023. The lead creative team for the project is Director of Public Acts **Emily Lim**, playwright and lyricist **Chris Bush**, who will write the final episode and act as Dramaturg for the first four episodes in collaboration with playwrights from across the country, and music composer **Jim**

Fortune who will compose music for the final episode and write a finale song that will feature across all five episodes.

The first four episodes will be created and performed by local artists and communities in four partner organisations across the country in April 2023: **Restoke** in Stoke-on-Trent, **Cast** in Doncaster, **Trowbridge Town Hall** in Trowbridge and The Fire Station (for **Sunderland Culture** in partnership with **Sunderland Empire**) in Sunderland.

The four artists writing each of these four episodes in co-creation with their communities are **Gabriella Gay** (Stoke), **Tajinder Singh Hayer** (Doncaster), **Florence Espeut-Nickless** (Trowbridge) and **Lindsay Rodden** (Sunderland).

The culmination of the *Odyssey* journey, the fifth episode, will be staged as an epic full-scale musical production at the National Theatre on 27-29 August 2023. This final production will feature community performers from all four nationwide companies, as well as members recruited through Public Acts founding community partners in London, founding theatre partner Queen's Theatre Hornchurch, and Trybe House Theatre in London who are working with Public Acts for the first time this year. The performance will feature a total of 140 people including six professional actors, six live musicians and three cameo performance groups from across the UK.

Emily Lim, Director of Public Acts said, "We are so excited to be bringing The Odyssey to life with such an inspiring group of theatre-makers. In light of everything that's happened over the past two years it feels incredibly special, and right, to be coming together from all corners of the country to tell a story about how we heal and move forwards after a period of profound loss and change. We hope the project will create an unforgettable gesture of unity, creativity and radical joy which everyone can feel a part of."

Public Acts is supported by Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Mosawi Foundation and Wates Foundation.

Schedule of performances

Dates	Episode	Venue
1-2 April 2023	Episode 1 – The Lotus Eaters	Restoke
15-16 April 2023	Episode 2 – The Cyclops	Cast in Doncaster
22-23 April 2023	Episode 3 – The Four Winds	Trowbridge Town Hall
28-29 April 2023	Episode 4 – The Island of the Sun	The Fire Station (For Sunderland Culture in partnership with Sunderland Empire)
27 – 29 August 2023	Episode 5 – The Underworld	Oliver theatre, National Theatre

ENDS

For images please click [here](#)

For press enquiries and more information, please contact Rhian Bennett, NT Press Officer on rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk

Notes to Editors

About the National Theatre

The National Theatre's mission is to make world-class theatre, for everyone.

The NT creates and shares unforgettable stories with audiences across the UK and around the world. On its own stages, on tour, in schools, on cinema screens and streaming at home, it strives to be accessible, inclusive and sustainable.

The National Theatre empowers artists and craftspeople to make world-leading work, investing in talent and developing new productions with a wide range of theatre companies at its New Work Department.

Our nation thrives on fresh talent and new ideas, so the National Theatre works with young people and teachers right across the UK through performance, writing and technical programmes to ignite the creativity of the next generation.

Together with communities, the NT creates ambitious works of participatory theatre in deep partnerships that unite theatres and local organisations – showing that nothing brings us together like theatre.

The National Theatre needs your support to shape a bright, creative future. For more information, please visit www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

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About Public Acts

Public Acts is the National Theatre's nationwide initiative to create extraordinary acts of theatre and community. We make artistically excellent, ambitious and inclusive participatory theatre in partnership with those who share our vision for change.

The programme was first established in 2017, with our founding partners Queens Theatre Hornchurch and eight brilliant community partners: the Bromley by Bow Centre, Body & Soul, Coram, DABD, Havering Asian Social Welfare Association (HASWA), Open Age, Thames Reach and the Faith & Belief Forum.

Public Acts produced *Pericles* (National Theatre) in 2018 and *As You Like It* (produced by Queens Theatre Hornchurch in partnership with the NT) in 2019. In August 2022, the team will present *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* in Doncaster in partnership with Cast.

Throughout the pandemic we continued to connect with our community members through online activity including a podcast project called *Stories To Get Us Through* and a new musical film, *We Begin Again*, created in partnership with The Guardian. In 2021 we produced *The Magic of Wild Heather*, a community cabaret, in Doncaster.

Public Acts is inspired by Public Works at the Public Theater, described as a 'ground-breaking programme of participatory theatre in New York', and the visionary participatory work of many theatre companies across the UK in the past decades.

About the Writers

About Gabriella Gay

Gabriella Gay is a Trinidad-born page-stage poet, artist, teacher and creative producer who is regularly commissioned to perform, write, organise events and facilitate workshops for a wide range of organisations include the BBC and the NHS. She is the founder of Stoke's Roaming Poets and Kwanzaa Collective UK*. She is an associate artist at B-arts and Restoke, and a trustee of the New Vic Theatre. Gabriella Gay has made numerous TV and radio appearances and her work features in shows, exhibitions, advertisements and the official Visit Stoke video. Underlying all of Gabriella Gay's written, performed and socially engaged work, is the power of building strong connections and community.

About Lindsay Rodden

Lindsay Rodden was born in Scotland and grew up on Merseyside and in Donegal. She lives in North Shields, and was writer-in-residence at Live Theatre, Newcastle. Her play Here, for Northern Stage and Curious Monkey, was produced in March 2022. Her play-with-songs Red Sky at Night tours this summer 2022. The Marians, her newest work in development, was longlisted for The Bruntwood Prize. Other work includes The Story Giant (Liverpool Everyman), Cartographers(Theatre by the Lake), A Modest Proposal and Sunday Morning, Dandelion Seeds (Agent 160) and Man With Bicycle, '73 (The Miniaturists).

About Tajinder Singh Hayer

Tajinder Singh Hayer was born in Bradford in 1980. He is now based in Walsall and lectures in Creative Writing at Lancaster University. He has written plays for Freedom Studios, Leeds Playhouse and Menagerie. He has written audio dramas for BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, the BBC Asian Network, Big Finish Productions and Ragged Edge Productions. He has also written for CBeebies. He has been a writer on attachment at Leeds Playhouse, BBC Radio Drama Manchester and the National Theatre. He was one of three winners of the 2021 Papatango Prize with Ghost Stories from an Old Country.

About Florence Espeut-Nickless

Florence is a writer and actor from Chippenham in Wiltshire, with a big love for Trowbridge! She got into theatre after studying at Trowbridge College, and co-wrote Miracle on 34 Seymour Street for Trowbridge Town Hall in 2021, a Christmas play for adults, inspired by conversations with Trowbridge residents. Her award-winning debut play, Destiny toured last year to critical acclaim. She is currently developing a new play, Blinded by Your Grace, as well as some original ideas for TV. She is the Writer in Residence at Pentabus Theatre, an Open Session Writer at Bristol Old Vic and an associate artist at Strike a Light.

About Chris Bush

Chris Bush is an award-winning playwright and lyricist, and an Associate Director at Sheffield Theatres. Past work includes Pericles (National Theatre: Olivier), Fantastically Great Women Who Changed The World (Kenny Wax, UK tour), Hungry (Paines Plough), Kein Weltuntergang (Schaubühne, Berlin), Standing at the Sky's Edge (Sheffield Theatres – Best Theatre: South Bank Sky Arts Awards, Best Musical: UK Theatre Awards), Nine Lessons and Carols (Almeida

Theatre), Faustus: That Damned Woman (Headlong/Lyric Hammersmith/Birmingham Rep), The Assassination of Katie Hopkins (Theatr Clwyd – Best Musical: UK Theatre Awards), The Changing Room (NT Connections) and Steel (Sheffield Theatres).

Partner theatres

About Cast

Cast in Doncaster welcomes over 100,000 audience members every year, runs a vibrant participation programme, engaging with people of all ages from communities across Doncaster. It also supports and commissions work with exciting local artists. Still young and nifty, it has established itself as a distinctive arts centre, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The 620 theatre presents a wide-ranging programme throughout the year, including music, dance, children's shows, comedy and drama. As well as the main auditorium, the second space can accommodate up to 200 people and features the very best of small-scale touring shows. There is also an increasingly ambitious programme of outdoor work taking place within the town centre, from large scale spectacles with Global Streets, to rooted audience development through the pop-up Roundabout theatre in partnership with Paines Plough.

Through Cast's creative partnerships with theatres and artists across the region and country they offer the very best in performing arts, with long term programmes of engagement and performances from world renowned companies such as the National Theatre and The Royal Opera House, taking place alongside the newest freshest work from early career artists.

Cast strives to be an inclusive organisation, open and welcoming to everyone.

About Sunderland Culture

Sunderland Culture was set up in 2016 to bring together the cultural programmes of Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust into a single, independent, delivery model. Sunderland Culture delivers the programme in National Glass Centre and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Arts Centre Washington and The Fire Station, as well as cultural engagement and events in communities across the city. It works to ensure the power of great art, culture and creativity is harnessed for the benefit of Sunderland, its residents and visitors. Sunderland Culture is a registered charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. Its mission is to improve life for everyone in Sunderland through culture.

About Sunderland Empire

Sunderland Empire, operated by Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG), is the North East's premiere entertainment venue captivating audiences across the north east and beyond ever since its foundation stone was laid by Vesta Tilley in 1906. This opulent Edwardian theatre has played host to everything from massive West End theatrical productions, to the nation's favourite comedy and music artistes, to opera, ballet and more, whilst its Creative Learning team is highly regarded for participation projects within the local community.

About Restoke

Restoke puts the people of Stoke-on-Trent at the heart of creative adventures. We make performances, plan events and run workshops alongside people who may not usually meet, forming new bonds of friendship, understanding and solidarity in the city.

Our performances respond to issues and themes relevant to our communities. These performances centre diverse stories and speak from lived-experiences not opinions, affirming differences and using singing and dancing to celebrate our shared humanity.

Restoke have recently restored and reopened a Ballroom in a former Town Hall, which had been converted into Magistrates courtrooms in the 1960's, and will become a civic arts centre sharing free creative experiences with our local community.

About Trowbridge Town Hall

Trowbridge Town Hall was built in the late 19th century, at the height of the town's reputation as the main cloth weaving centre in south-west England. From the mid-1960s until the early 1970s, the building's Great Hall became a major venue for music, with artists such as The Who, The Small Faces, and America all appearing there. However, its glory days were short-lived after it was decided to turn the Victorian architectural masterpiece into a magistrates' court for the next 30 years. After the court was finally closed, the Town Hall remained abandoned until 2011 at which time a group of Trowbridge residents got together to restore the building for the benefit of the community. The aim was to provide opportunities that would enrich people's lives, utilising every space in the Town Hall to host performances, support local arts groups, and provide space for a wide range of activities from yoga classes through to toddlers' groups. As the Town Hall has morphed into a vibrant hub for the community, its importance to Trowbridge was recognised in 2021 when it became the recipient of a grant of £8.1million from the Government's Future High Streets Fund, money that will allow the building to be transformed over the next two and a half years to become a leading performance venue and incubator of local talent.