

**National
Theatre**

2021–22 Annual Review



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(previous)
Cast Backstage
during *Small
Island*
Helen Murray

Back on stage – for everyone, and for the future

Welcome from Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre



For all its complexities, the key story of 2021–22 is one of joy: the National Theatre reopening and gradually returning to normal operation. After more than a year of intermittent closure, the Dorfman and Olivier theatres reopened permanently in June 2021, followed by the Lyttelton in September 2021. West End, touring, community, and in person learning activity also returned with gusto.

The show did go on – but in the truest sense of the adage, against a backdrop of challenges that asked every member of the National Theatre company for dedication and determination. Every area of our work faced disruption of some description. On stage, this meant interrupted rehearsals, cancelled performances, and cast and crew stepping in to cover all kinds of roles with minimal preparation and maximum professionalism.

**Sam Archer
(Edgar Linton),
Craig Johnson
(Mr Earnshaw)
and Nandi
Bhebhe
(The Moor)
in *Wuthering
Heights***

Steve Tanner

This perseverance was mirrored by the marathon effort from the wider staff – endlessly rearranging tickets, schedules and budgets, going above and beyond in all areas. The magic of the National Theatre has always been in its people, and I am grateful to everyone for their immense efforts. Inevitably such a period contained some changes in our workforce, and we welcomed many new staff as well as saying goodbye to a number of people who have made exemplary contributions to the theatre.

On a personal note, this financial year saw the departure of Lisa Burger. Her extraordinary tenure at the National Theatre began in 2001 as Finance Director, Chief Operating Officer in 2010, Executive Director in 2015, and then as Joint Chief Executive with me in 2019. Throughout this time, Lisa worked tirelessly to further our mission to make theatre for everyone – from establishing National Theatre Live in 2009, to the creation of National Theatre at Home in 2020. In the last year, she played a key role in advocating to the government about survival of the theatre industry and its freelance artists – work which led to the creation of the Cultural Recovery Fund. I was delighted to see Lisa’s contributions recognised with a CBE for services to the arts and a Special Olivier Award. I was also, of course, delighted to welcome Kate Varah as the new Executive Director.

Reopening our doors and ramping back up our work around the country has always been a work of reimagination, not just restoration. Thanks to our audiences and the extraordinary generosity of supporters, what could have been a cultural black hole in our history became a change to innovate and recalibrate. We are back in business in a changed world, and our priorities are sharpened. The centre of our work and purpose will always be the terrific range of work on our stages, but as we returned to full flight this year there were three

projects beyond our stages that struck me as representative of what we believe the National Theatre can be.

First was our rapid return to schools touring – 9000 children and young people in priority areas saw *Jekyll & Hyde* or *Hamlet* in their school hall. For many of them, it will have been their first-time seeing theatre, or discovering there are backstage careers – ‘Levelling Up in action’, as *The Times* rightly called it.

The second was the pilot phase of Speak Up – a new, co-creation programme developed for young people who wouldn’t normally engage with creative opportunities, in areas with deep seated socio-economic inequalities. It aims to empower young people with confidence, skills, teamwork, and a belief in the value of their self-expression. At its heart, it’s a programme that believes that creativity can be transformative for people and places.

The third has been the volume of our commitment to broadcast and digital, through National Theatre Live, National Theatre at Home, National Theatre Collection, and the creation of films and other content for broadcast and online. Digital was one of our biggest successes in the pandemic, continuing the work that National Theatre Live began in 2009 by breaking down geographical, access and financial barriers. Theatre is live, and only so many people can fit in a room, but digital access gives every piece of theatre a legacy.

I am hugely grateful to everyone who helped us meet the moment with our work this year – our staff, collaborators, audiences, members, donors. This is what theatre can be: inspiring, immediate, empowering, and unifying.

An extraordinary creative hub

Welcome from Kate Varah, Executive Director of the National Theatre

It was a privilege to join the National Theatre in spring 2022, and immediately begin talking to staff from all areas of the organisation. Over coffee and cake, I asked: when is the National Theatre at its best? I quickly learnt what our world class people loved about working at the theatre, what the pandemic and its aftermath had been like for them and what they hoped the future of the theatre could and should be at this crucial moment of reset.

I also had my own knowledge to draw on – A long admirer of the National Theatre, I was fortunate to have visited as a child and had my imagination sparked from an early age. More recently, I knew of its creative genius from global hits like *War Horse*, *Curious Incident*, *Small Island*, *The Lehman Trilogy* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. These collector’s items sit alongside the countless other National Theatre productions I have watched that offered moments of joy and reflection in person, in cinemas or online each year.

Added to this, The Old Vic, where I was previously Executive Director, is next door to the National Theatre’s Studio, it’s new work development lab on The Cut in Waterloo. I had over many years seen first-hand how busy that beehive space is with freelance artists from right across the country working on over 100 new commissions and plays in development each year. The form-shaping shows listed above all began life in the Studio. Through consistent investment in artists and ideas, and a

collaborative approach to working with other theatres, the Studio ensures that the National Theatre is a brilliant place to continue to define eras of popular theatre.

That work alone paints a picture of the National Theatre as an extraordinary creative hub – but as I spoke to our people, it became clear to me how much pride they also had in the theatre’s wider work and our mission.

Half of the National Theatre’s UK live and broadcast audience is typically from outside London, testament to a long held commitment to deliver on the ‘national’ in our name – and all before the introduction of our streaming service National Theatre at Home. We have direct collaborative partnerships with 100 UK theatres and a 700-screen network of National Theatre Live cinemas. There have been half a million engagements in our learning and participation programmes in the last year, and our free digital streaming service for schools is used by 80 per cent of state secondary schools across the UK. At our latest count, we had participatory work taking place in 71 of the government’s 109 Levelling Up for Culture areas across England.

It’s an impressive output, and the impacts of this work are more profound than they might first appear. Those same education, community and development programmes are building the future skills of the creative sector and many workplaces of the future. The National Theatre is a high productivity organisation, one of the largest generators of jobs and income in one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK. It neatly positions us to be at the forefront of nurturing the broad base of skills needed to equip the UK for the 21st century.

Creating world-class productions, generating new plays that build the canon of tomorrow and innovating new ways to share these across the globe digitally, offering jobs and skill development, we also play our part by attracting tourism, sustaining the UK’s built heritage, and promoting the UK nationally and oversees with the soft power of our creative output. As the new Executive Director of the National Theatre my main priority is to ensure we can be confident in the richness of the creative output and social impact of this theatre sustaining for




generations to come.

All of us are now deeply aware of the ways that national and global events can send ripple effects into every industry. Our current challenges – war, climate change, the cost of living – offer a tough reminder that we may need to navigate difficult times for many years. Perhaps it takes living and working in in permacrisis to face radical changes to the status-quo head on; this period has proven our capacity to innovate, to be resilient and to learn how to adapt. The history of theatre can be traced back to 6th century BC where the Ancient Greeks were the first to offer dramatic presentations. It has consistently evolved and pivoted over time, and it’s not going to fold or stop evolving on our watch.

And so, fittingly, the final section of this annual review reflects as much on the future as the past – the work taking place on our creative vision, financial stability, sustainability, supporting the UK theatre sector, propelling skills development in the next generation, and our deep commitment to inclusion and representation. These principles are interwoven through everything we do, and I’m full of optimism that they will be at the heart

Nia Towle
(Lettie) and
James Bamford
(the Boy) in *The
Ocean at the
End of the Lane
in the West End*

Manuel Harlan

A woman in a teal dress stands in the center of a stage, looking upwards. The background is dark with silhouettes of other people and palm trees. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the woman and her dress.

After an unprecedented 15-month closure, our theatres, West End, New York and touring work blossomed back to life.

On stage



(previous)
Leonie Elliott
(Hortense)
in *Small Island*;
(left) Olatunji
Ayofe (Obafemi)
in *After Life*.
(right) Karl
Johnson
(Richard
Jenkins) and
Michael Sheen
(Owain Jenkins)
in *Under
Milk Wood*

All images: Johan Persson

After the longest closure in our history, 2021 was the year that new productions returned to the National Theatre. The pandemic year that was 2020 exacted its tolls: financial instability for theatres like the National Theatre and our body of staff and makers; a lack of work and security for the freelance artists who are mobile across the industry, whilst also being its lifeblood.

In an effort to reopen in autumn 2020, we converted our largest space, the Olivier theatre, into an in-the-round auditorium which facilitated audience distancing and cohort visits. That period saw two productions, *Death of England: Delroy* and *Dick Whittington* close on or before their press nights due to the changing environment. Despite its challenges, the model for our safe return in June 2021 was strongly based on the new practices we developed in that period, both backstage and front of house.

With great joy, we reopened permanently in June 2021 with productions in the Dorfman and in the Olivier that reflected on community, mortality, and the ways in which we can care for others. *After Life* was a new play, adapted for the stage by award-winning writer Jack Thorne from the 1998 film of the same name by



‘I think you could see emotionally what it had taken to get us there that day... I think I’ll always remember that.’

Michael Sheen

Japanese filmmaker Hirokazu Kore-eda. The play takes place somewhere between life and death and asks the people passing through it to pick one special memory that they will live in for eternity. Meanwhile, Lyndsey Turner’s production of *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas reopened the Olivier. The production was set in a care home, featured a new surrounding text written by Sian Owen, and brought together a treasure of Welsh acting talent. Michael Sheen, who played the narrating role of voice 1 named Owain Jenkins for our production, reflected: ‘I remember Rufus Norris [the Director of the National Theatre] welcoming everyone on the first day of rehearsal. You could see what it had taken to get there that day because of all the paraphernalia of the restrictions. But I think you could see emotionally what it had taken to get us there that day in the way that Rufus talked about having actors, and crew, and front of house people coming back into the theatre again – I think I’ll always remember that.’

Both productions were also physically distanced on stage, measures designed to manage the risk to the production – creating contact cohorts within each show meant that if someone tested positive it limited the impact on the group at large. Movement director Shelley Maxwell reflected on the impact on this on stage in *After Life*: ‘If we are successful in our storytelling, you won’t get bogged down with that it’s a socially distanced production. We all move from within, so we can still move as a group even if we are not touching with our two-metre distancing; and we still have that sensation of being a unit.’

‘What’s paramount is that everyone is talking about [creating an] environmentally conscious production from the early stages of a design.’

Production and Technical Director,
Paul Handley



Following their reopening productions both the Dorfman and the Olivier continued with new productions and the use of distanced cohorts to limit risks to the stage teams and audiences. The Lyttelton theatre wasn’t brought back into operation as a theatre because the seating structure wasn’t suitable for social distancing. Instead, the Lyttelton was brought into operation as a production space for two new films and an interview series, allowing us to continue to produce work for our audiences that could weather the risk of building closure.

In the Dorfman theatre, Winsome Pinnock’s *Rockets and Blue Lights* played from August to October 2021. The play explores the legacy of slavery in Britain through a painting by JMW Turner, with a story that weaves together artists in the past and present. Winsome Pinnock developed the play while on artistic attachment at our New Work department. *Rockets and Blue Lights* had its premiere at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester in March 2020, a run that was cut short by the pandemic.

In the Olivier, *Under Milk Wood* was followed by *Paradise*, a new version of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, written by Kae Tempest. Centring on a wounded war hero now outcast to a desert island, the play tapped into themes of pride, hope, the harm that comes from isolation, and building new communities. It was also one of the first productions where we worked on implementing the Theatre Green Book, a new sustainability guideline for theatre production (more on p.36).

The use of the Theatre Green Book on *Paradise* was welcomed by all involved. ‘What’s paramount is that everyone is talking about [creating an] environmentally conscious production from the early stages of a design,’ said Production and Technical Director Paul

(left)
Lesley Sharp
(Philoctetes)
and members
of the company
in *Paradise*

Helen Murray

(right) Liz Carr
(Dr Emma
Brookner)
and Ben
Daniels (Ned
Weeks) in *The
Normal Heart*

Helen Maybanks



Handley. ‘We don’t have all the answers, this is an investigation that involves every department... there’s an opportunity for a new kind of creative language.’ We were able to come close to meeting the introductory baseline standard on the production. This was a great outcome for a task that demanded a total rethink of standard production practice, aided by the sympathetic themes of the play and the exploratory appetite of the team. ‘*Paradise* has its own environmental theme,’ agreed director Ian Rickson, ‘and the ethos of the play should be represented in the way we make the play.’

The final production to be staged in the round, in the Oliver was *The Normal Heart*. Larry Kramer’s largely autobiographical play

about the AIDS crisis in 1980s New York was directed by Dominic Cooke. The production gained four Olivier Award nominations including Best Revival, with Liz Carr winning the award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. Liz Carr was the first disabled actress in 35 years to professionally to play the role of Dr Emma Brookner, based on real-life wheelchair user and doctor, Dr Linda Laubenstein, who pioneered treatments for AIDS. Upon collecting her Olivier Award, Liz Carr advocated for better representation of disabled talent: ‘There’s so many fears of risk in employing disabled actors and I think this proves we can do it – we can project, we can fill a stage... thanks to the National for taking a chance on a disabled person in this role; it shouldn’t be a chance, it should be a right.’

(left) Kat Ronney (Rose) in *Hex*

(right) Amy-Leigh Hickman (Meenah), Gurjeet Singh (Tariq), Joeravar Sangha (Maneer), Adonis Jenieco (Saleem) in *East Is East*

Brinkhoff-Moegenburg

Pamela Raith Photography



In October 2021, Ayub Khan Din’s much-loved comedy drama *East Is East* reopened the Lyttelton theatre as part of a 25th anniversary tour, directed by Iqbal Khan. The play followed an British-Pakistani family grappling with generational culture clash, identity, and change. ‘Everyone is still asking these questions,’ reflected director Iqbal Khan, ‘what tribe do I belong to, how am I valued, how am I identified? It feels like these questions have never been more important. People are clashing, but there’s a kind of honesty and a generosity in people expressing the complexity of these issues.’ As a co-production with the Birmingham Rep, the company performed a run in Birmingham in September, before packing out busy houses in London. The production drew in a high proportion of audiences making their first visit to the National Theatre.

This was followed in February by *Wuthering Heights*, a co-production with Wise Children, Bristol Old Vic and York Theatre Royal. Adapted by Emma Rice, who transformed Emily Brontë’s masterpiece into a passionate, powerful and uniquely theatrical experience, the production featured a full musical score underpinned by a chorus of actors as the atmospheric, ever-present moorland. The production went on to tour across the UK throughout 2022 and transferred to New York for a US tour in October.

Trouble in Mind, Alice Childress’ exploration of the fight for racial equality in 1950s America played out in rehearsals for a new Broadway play, opened in the Dorfman theatre in December 2021, directed by Nancy Medina. Tanya Moodie played Willette, a talented black actress who begins rehearsals for a new play about racism, written and directed by two white men. When added to our streaming platform, National Theatre at Home, this production took on a second life as an unexpected hit with audiences. Meanwhile in the Lyttelton, Moira Buffini’s new play *Manor* examined the state of the nation through a group of strangers brought together unexpectedly in a violent storm – exploring climate change, religion, class, and the rise of far-right politics.



Unfortunately, an outbreak of the new Covid variant throughout December 2021 and into January 2022 caused profound disruption for our new musical, *Hex*. Written by Tanya Ronder, Jim Fortune and Rufus Norris, *Hex* was a fresh and colourful new take on the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale. Following three weeks of performances, *Hex* didn’t open to the press and was confirmed for a fresh run in December 2022.

The new year saw the return of *Small Island*, our acclaimed, five-star production of Andrea Levy’s prize-winning novel. Adapted by Helen Edmundson and directed by Rufus Norris, this play brought to life the tangled history of Jamaica and the UK. *Small Island* followed the lives of Hortense and Gilbert, and the romantic Brit Queenie through the Second World War until the arrival of HMT *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury, where hopes for the future soon met the stubborn reality of post-war Britain.

Lucy McCormick (Catherine) in *Wuthering Heights*

Steve Tanner



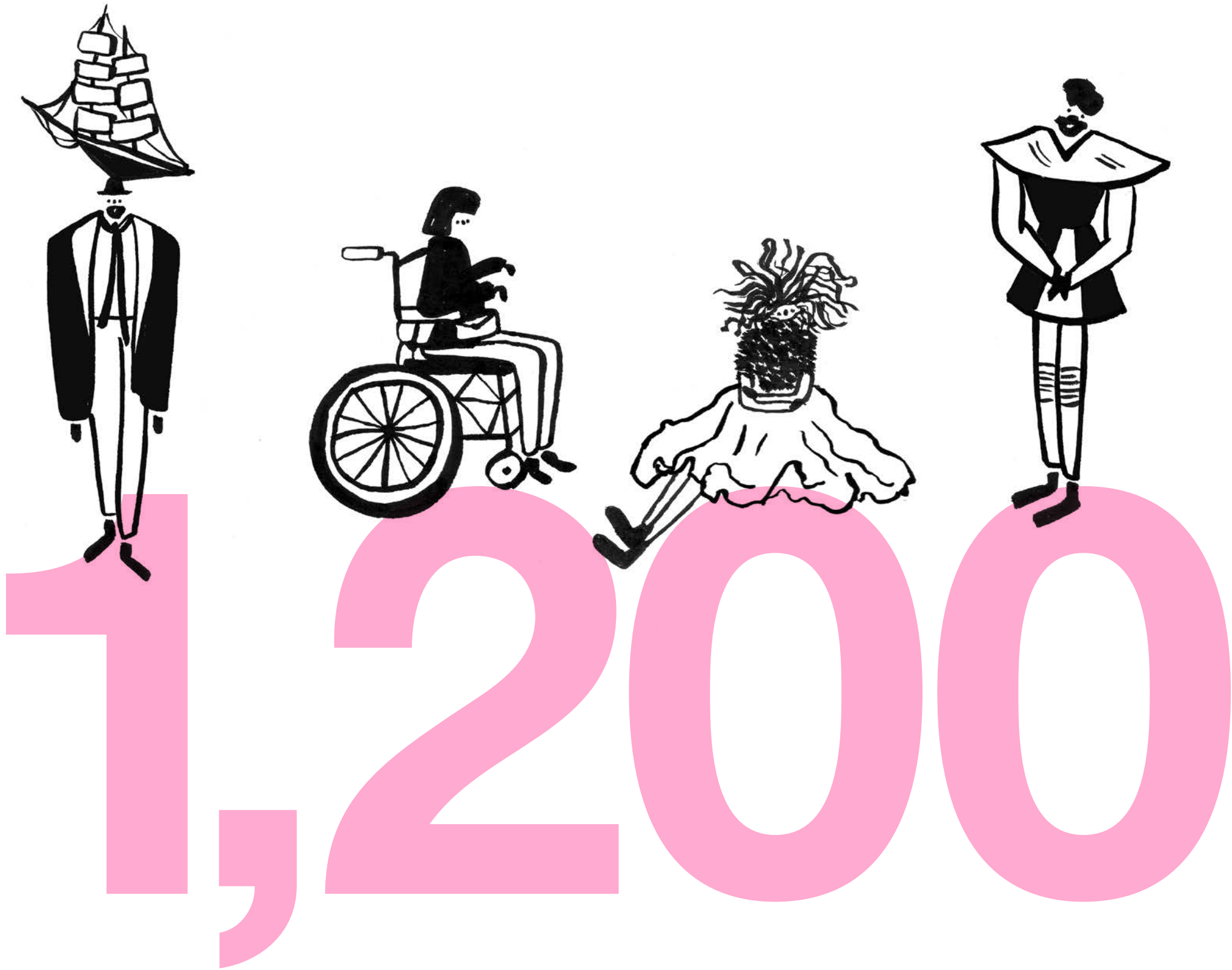
‘Atmospherically, it’s a triumph... it surges and crackles with energy: at moments of peak emotion, the music and the story howl like twin furies.’

Andrzej Łukowski, reviewing *Wuthering Heights* for *Time Out* (February 2022)

The final production to open in the 2021-22 financial year was *Our Generation*, a new verbatim play from writer of *London Road*, Alecky Blythe. Opening in the Dorfman theatre in February, *Our Generation* told the stories of a group of 12 real young people from across the UK, created from five years of interviews, offering a captivating portrait of their journey into adulthood. *Our Generation* was a co-production with Chichester Festival Theatre, where it went on to a second run of performances in April 2022.

Alecky Blythe began working on the project with our New Work department in 2014, with the aim of answering ‘what does it mean to grow up in the UK today?’. The verbatim material came from six interviews per year with each of the young people throughout that period. At the beginning of 2020, it wasn’t immediately clear what the throughline of the play would be, and then the pandemic interrupted many of the young people’s final years of childhood. *Our Generation* evolved into a timely reflection on change, challenge, power and independence.

The long-term investment in this play reflects the wider work we do in our New Work department to develop fresh productions for our three hungry stages. The department is a major creative hub for writers, directors and



freelance theatre-makers contracted

storytellers – over 100 projects are on the development slate at any one time, and over 1000 freelancers are contracted to write, direct and workshop these new ideas.

From reopening our South Bank theatres in June 2021, 60 per cent of our programme was made up of new plays or adaptations – demonstrating our continued commitment to developing new work and telling a range of stories on our stages.

The year of work also delivered on our vision for telling inclusive stories with a diverse range of artists. Back in 2015, we set targets to see the National Theatre through a period of evolution towards better representation of women and people from the global majority as writers, directors and performers on our stages, with the aim that lasting change could be achieved by 2021. Our planned 2020–21 season would have exceeded our five-year targets in all areas; the new programme we

made in 2021–22 exceeded targets for writers (50 per cent female writers, 35 per cent writers from global majority) and actors, and came close on directors. Bearing in mind the challenges of rescheduling and the impacts of safety measures that have followed the pandemic, it was great to see how this change has been baked into our commissioning. Our commitment to a balanced programme stands for the coming years.

Returning to a changed world has also seen a shift in our audiences at the South Bank. An estimated 24 per cent of audiences were aged under 35, the largest proportion in many years; 15 per cent were from global majority backgrounds, which is our largest proportion for a whole year of performances ever. We also saw a ten-year high for first-time visitors at 37 per cent. The mission of the National Theatre is to make theatre for everyone, so it is fantastic to see audiences that reflect the demographics of the nation. As we recover, it is a sign of health that theatre continues to be relevant, resonate and enjoyable.

All illustrations
by Carolina
Celas



‘A joyously Theatrical piece. Reminds us of just what live theatre can do.’

Sarah Hemming reviewing *After Life* for the *Financial Times* (June, 2021)

‘In that moment she is every Black actress who overcame obstacles to success [...] she is Wiletta Mayer as embodied by Tanya Moodie, one of this country’s finest, spearheading a major Black play on one of the UK’s foremost stages. Rejoice, it’s spine-tingling.’

Alun Hood reviewing *Trouble in Mind* for *WhatsOnStage* (December, 2021)



(left) Members of the company in *After Life*; (middle) Gary Lilburn (Henry), Tanya Moodie (Wiletta Mayer) in *Trouble In Mind*; (right) Member of the company in *Our Generation*

All images: Johan Persson



‘This magnificent project honours the period of youth it captures on stage: a time of energy, passion, warmth and humour.’

Emma John reviewing *Our Generation* for the *Guardian* (March 2022)

Beyond the walls of the National Theatre, other parts of our ambitious national and international work continued to come back to life.

Following a sold-out run at the National Theatre in 2019, our magical production of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* transferred to the West End's Duke of York's Theatre from October 2021. Adapted by Joel Horwood from the best-selling novel by Neil Gaiman and directed by Katy Rudd. This spectacular and unsettling adventure told the story of a boy grappling with grief, family, and encroaching ancient forces that threaten to destroy everything. This story is universal; it's about family in all its complexity, grief, bravery, friendship and resilience.

The team kept this popular production running robustly throughout the tricky third Covid winter wave, meaning that 105,000 people were able to return to the West End to see the show, including 5,000 young people in school groups. Looking ahead, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* will tour to 29 towns and cities throughout the UK in 2023.



Adam Godley (Mayer Lehman), Simon Russell Beale (Henry Lehman), Adrian Lester (Emanuel Lehman) in *The Lehman Trilogy*

Julieta Cervantes

In November 2021, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* began its own UK and Ireland tour, beginning with a run at Troubadour Wembley Park Theatre in November. The production remained a firm favourite, and one of the early major titles to return to the UK touring circuit. For venues up to April 2022, it attracted a combined audience of 100,000 people.

Meanwhile, *The Lehman Trilogy* continued its success in the USA. Adapted by Ben Power from Stefano Massini's play, *The Lehman Trilogy* weaves through nearly two centuries of Lehman lineage, starting with brothers Mayer, Emanuel and Henry Lehman from their 1844 arrival in New York City to the 2008 collapse of the financial firm bearing their name. It had its premiere at the Lyttelton theatre in 2018, transferred to the West End, and was broadcast across the UK and internationally on National Theatre Live. The production transferred to Park Avenue Armory in New York in 2019. After a Covid-induced hiatus, it transferred again to Broadway's Nederlander Theatre in April 2021. Directed by Sam Mendes, the Broadway run featured Simon Russell Beale, Adam Godley and Adrian Lester as the Lehman brothers, their sons, and grandsons.

The Lehman Trilogy received hugely positive critical reception, and became the year's most Tony-nominated play with eight nominations, acknowledging the entire creative team and Best Leading Actor nominations for all three performers. The production won five Tony Awards in June 2022, including Best Play. *The Lehman Trilogy* also appeared at the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles in a limited engagement from 3 March to 10 April 2022, with Godley, Beale, and Howard W. Overhoun who had previously understudied Adrian Lester on Broadway.

A photograph of a man and a woman in a dark room, surrounded by numerous lit candles. The woman is wearing a teal dress and the man is wearing a brown jacket and light-colored trousers. They are kneeling and facing each other, looking down at their hands which are clasped together. The candles are of various heights and are lit, creating a warm, intimate atmosphere. The background is dark, and the floor is covered with many more candles, some of which are also lit.

It was a big year for digital theatre – whether it was streaming our shows into homes, classrooms and libraries, broadcasting into local cinemas, or sharing our original films on television.

On screens

Romeo & Juliet

While theatres were forced to close in winter 2020, some of the National Theatre team were hard at work in the huge backstage spaces of the Lyttelton theatre, working on a new kind of project: an original film of *Romeo & Juliet*. Directed by 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.

This was the first time the National Theatre has made a piece of theatre specifically for screen only. This production blended theatre and film to capture the atmosphere of a final rehearsal room run of a show; a moment that theatre-makers love so much, yet never share with



(previous)
Jessie Buckley
(Juliet) and
Josh O'Connor
(Romeo) in the
filmed version of
Romeo & Juliet

Rob Youngson

an audience. The film began with a group of actors meeting, as if in a rehearsal room, to tell the story. As part-play, part-film, new technical processes were introduced, including camera testing for hair, textures, make-up and costume alongside lighting tests to achieve the effect of stripped backstage lights that also give the shadow and depth of a cinematic piece. The production was shot across three weeks in November 2020, against the odds, under strict working guidelines to protect the group and the production from Covid.

Over the course of 2021, *Romeo & Juliet* went on a long global release journey, reaching audiences across television, cinema and streaming. On Easter Sunday in April 2021, this new 90-minute version of Shakespeare's classic tale had its premiere on Sky Arts in the UK. Following two repeats and availability to catch up on NOW TV, UK premiere audiences were estimated at over half a million households. *Romeo & Juliet* also screened in the US on 23 April on PBS, with catch up on the PBS Video app, amassing audiences of 400,000. In September 2021, the film was released in 298 cinemas across the UK and Ireland through our National Theatre Live programme. Given our direct relationship with local cinemas across the country, we were proud to support them during this tough pandemic period with the distribution of a new film. Finally, we released *Romeo & Juliet* on our streaming service, National Theatre at Home.

The reception to the film reflected the innovative work that went into exploring this new hybrid creative form. *Romeo & Juliet* won the 2022 Stage Award for Digital Project of the Year. *The Hollywood Reporter* said in its review: 'it's a beguiling hybrid experiment in which a four century-old drama appears before our very eyes to dismantle and reassemble itself spontaneously as a living, breathing, timeless love story.'

Jessie Buckley
(Juliet) and
Josh O'Connor
(Romeo) in the
filmed version
of *Romeo
& Juliet*

Rob Youngson



**‘Riveting... at its
core, it’s about
stripping away
artifice, to reach
something
honest, trusting,
abandoned.’**

Dominic Cavendish reviewing
for *Telegraph* (April, 2021)

Life in Stages

Temporarily turning the Lyttelton stage into a film studio also enabled us to create more original and free content for our global YouTube audience.

Our interview series, Life in Stages profiled some of the biggest names in British theatre. Each episode featured a pair of creatives interviewing one another, reflecting on their theatre careers, and revealing the funny, personal and poignant stories behind everything from their earliest theatre memory to their biggest professional highs and lows.

The weekly series began on our YouTube channel on 22 April 2021. The first series presented six episodes and featured conversations between Rufus Norris and Olivia Colman, Jessie Buckley and Josh O'Connor, Adrian Lester and Meera Syal, Bill Nighy, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Andrew Lincoln, Sophie Okonedo and Dominic Cooke, and Clint Dyer and Kae Tempest.

The series proved exceptionally popular, with over 500,000 episode views in the initial launch period. On top of this, clips from the interviews shared on social media reached 7 million views and 32 million impressions.

Making *Death of England: Face to Face*

Steffan Hill



Death of England: Face to Face

At the same time as rehearsals were underway for reopening productions in the Olivier and Dorfman, rehearsals were also taking place for an original feature film, *Death of England: Face to Face*. The film was the third entry in a trilogy of *Death of England* stories in which best friends Michael and Delroy come to terms with their experiences of race, class and family, and how this has shaped their relationship.

The first two stories were presented as searing monologues that unpacked the experiences of each character. The first played in February 2020 in the Dorfman, and focused on Michael's furious, conflicted

grief for his white, working-class father, whose racist views loomed large over his family and friends. The second play relaunched the socially distanced Olivier theatre in October 2020 with Delroy's side of the story, including his racial-profiling by the police sparking a reckoning with his own politics, feeling of belonging, and relationship with Michael.

This third film instalment portrayed an explosive afternoon at Delroy's East London flat, in which Michael and Delroy are forced to confront the difficulties of their relationships with one another and with their country. All three parts of the *Death of England* story were directed by Clint Dyer and co-written with Roy Williams. Speaking to *The Upcoming*, Clint Dyer reflected that the film aimed to capture the complexity of systemic racism in England and 'to talk about the subject via people who have love for each other, as opposed to hate – that way we could dig into the nuanced and really heartbreaking scenarios. We never see reflections of this kind of story, we only see stories of hatred and abuse.'

Like *Romeo & Juliet*, the creative backbone of *Death of England: Face to Face* came from the team's background in theatre, and the previous two parts of the story as Filming took place across 15 days from 7 June 2021, with post-production taking place throughout July and August. The film had its premiere at a screening on 26 October in London and was broadcast on Sky Arts on 25 November. Following its broadcast, the film received great critical acclaim. It received four and five star reviews in major newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*; was nominated for a BAFTA and won the 2022 Visionary Honours Play of the Year.

‘A fast, furious flaying and anatomisation of the state we’re in, laid out in alternate narratives from each man... and, thanks to the hyper-eloquence of the characters and the actors’ extraordinary mastery of it, covering enormous amounts of ground.’

Lucy Mangan, reviewing *Death of England: Face to Face* for the *Guardian* (October 2021)



Making *Death of England: Face to Face*

Steffan Hill

National Theatre Live and National Theatre at Home

In January 2022, National Theatre Live returned to cinemas with its first full programme since before the pandemic. Our broadcast programme shares the best of British Theatre at local cinemas and community screens of all shapes and sizes, and is a hugely important part of making theatre accessible right across the country. The initial broadcasts included Philip Pullman’s *The Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage* from the Bridge Theatre, Tom Stoppard’s Olivier Award-winning *Leopoldstadt* from Wyndham’s Theatre and Kit Harrington in *Henry V* from the Donmar Warehouse. Across the year, five titles screened 2,941 times in the UK to audiences of 98,256; internationally 22 titles were screened 640 times to 51,563 people.

Meanwhile, our digital streaming platforms continued their huge rise in popularity. National Theatre at Home offers an exclusive collection of unforgettable British theatre – available to watch any time, anywhere – with more fantastic

plays added every few months. Many of our productions are now rapidly available on National Theatre at Home after their runs – in 2021–22, this included *Under Milk Wood*, *The Normal Heart*, *Paradise*, *Rockets and Blue Lights*, and *Trouble in Mind*. This significant shift into online has meant a greater diversity and variety in the titles we are able to capture than we have previously for solely National Theatre Live distribution.

National Theatre at Home finished the year with 52 titles available – all captioned and 23 audio-described. Audiences from around the world watched 358,587 hours of theatre. Perhaps most importantly, the platform also continued to support the freelance creatives at the heart of the theatre industry, with over £1 million paid to theatre-makers in fees and royalties.

It was also a great year for the National Theatre Collection, which offers schools, universities and libraries access a curriculum-linked selection of productions and supporting learning materials. 80 per cent of UK state secondary schools are now signed up to use the service for free. At a time of stretched school budgets and pressures on the curriculum this free resource is a very relevant and accessible classroom aid. We are delighted that we have been able to open up access to pupils and teachers across the UK and ensure young people are able to continue to explore world-class productions and all aspects of theatre-making from their homes.

In April 2021, we launched the pilot year of National Theatre Collection in New York City public schools. We worked in collaboration with the Department of Education and Bloomsbury Publishing to create a three-year programme of free access. Thirty schools took part in the pilot year, which has now expanded to 90 New York City public middle and high schools across the five city boroughs.



358,587

hours of theatre viewed on National Theatre at Home

£1m

paid to freelance theatre-makers in the first year of National Theatre at Home

2,841


screenings of National Theatre Live productions in the UK

80%

of UK state secondary schools use National Theatre Collection for free

481

UK towns and cities had a National Theatre Live screening



We believe theatre can be a powerful tool for change. We're using our resources to collaborate with local theatres, organisations and artists who know their towns best.

In local partnerships

Theatre Nation Partnerships

The National Theatre's mission is to make theatre for everyone; that means striving hard and in partnership to reach communities and young people across the country with opportunities to engage. Across lots of different areas of our work – broadcast, new work development, or opportunities for young people – we are increasingly using our resources to collaborate with local theatres, organisations and artists who know their towns best. This year, we calculated that we had supportive, direct relationships with 100 UK theatres, the operators of 700 UK screens and local cinemas who take National Theatre Live, 18 community organisations, and 635 schools.

In 2017, we created a formal network to facilitate even deeper collaborations that would span across all our different areas of work: Theatre Nation Partnerships (TNP). With the support of Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Fund, we set out to broaden and grow local audiences for drama, catalysing change through a targeted programme of touring, work with schools, and community creativity.

Over 2017–21, TNP demonstrated the positive role theatre can play in people's lives and in local communities. Addressing the troubling decline of drama and creativity in schools

(previous) John Partridge and company in rehearsal for *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* at Cast in Doncaster

Robling Photography



UK theatres work with us on collaborative projects including commissioning and learning programmes

is a huge priority for us, and Theatre Nation Partnerships has shown that designing an engagement pathway back to the theatre for schools can catalyse change. Developing relationships with local communities has been core to how the network has approached growing drama audiences.

In 2021–22, we came together with all our partners to conclude the work of the first phase of Theatre Nation Partnerships, and to conceive how we could work equitably with one another in a second and even more ambitious phase. We were delighted to get a catalysing project grant from the Arts Council to support this work in August 2022.

Some of our most in-depth programmes for young people and communities are part of the Theatre Nation Partnerships collaborations, all of which hit the ground running with work this year. Speak Up is a new, targeted co-creation programme for young people who wouldn't normally engage with creative opportunities. It aims to empower young people with confidence, skills, teamwork, and a belief in the value of their self-expression. Public Acts is our community theatre-making project, which works with local social change organisations to offer creative activity in community settings, before bringing together everyone to create amazing large-scale productions at their local theatre.

What is Theatre Nation Partnerships?

Theatre Nation Partnerships (TNP) is our network of theatres and arts organisations located in 11 areas of England with lower levels of cultural engagement. Through touring, digital, learning and community programming we engage under-served audiences, build relationships with local communities, young people and schools, develop theatres as vibrant community hubs and extend local reach, and test approaches to audience development.

Theatre Nation Partnerships has become a crucial programme to the mission of the National Theatre, which influences our wider approach to working in priority areas across the UK with strategic partner theatres, cinemas, schools and community organisations.

Partner organisations 2017–22

- Cast in Doncaster
- The Lowry in Salford and working across Rochdale and Wigan
- Queen's Theatre Hornchurch in Outer East London
- Sunderland Empire and Sunderland Culture's The Fire Station
- Theatre Royal in Wakefield
- Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre

In autumn 2022, we were delighted to welcome:

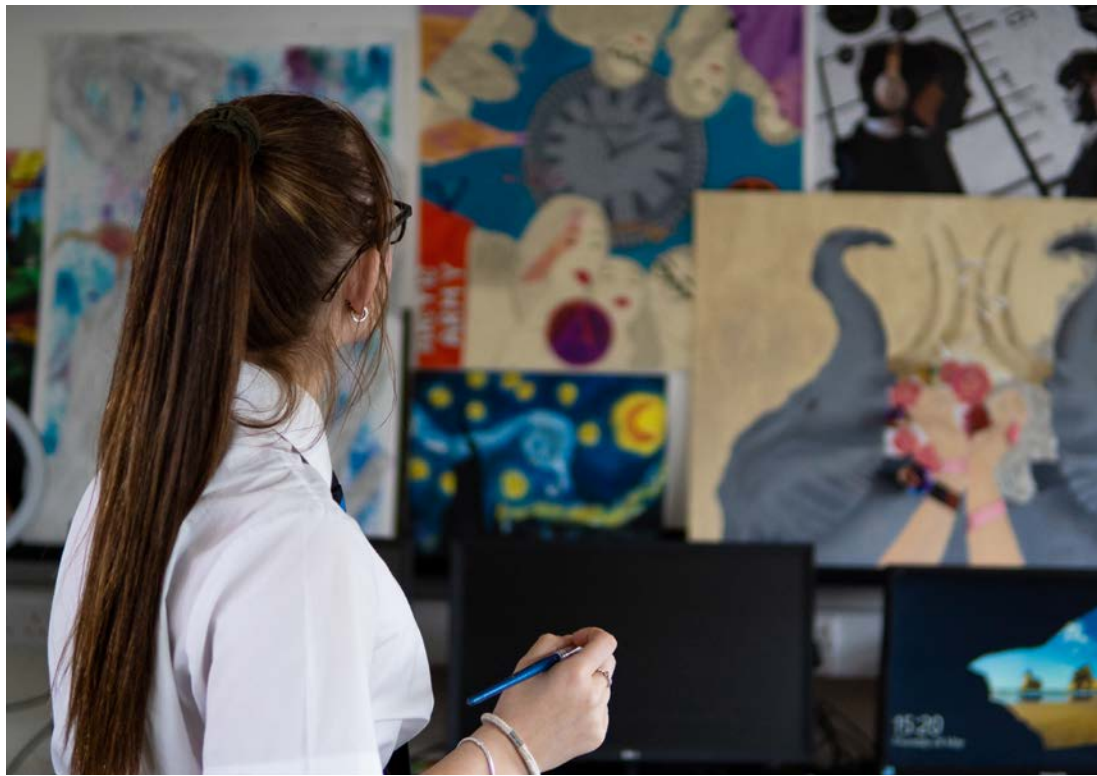
- Curve in Leicester
- Peterborough's Selladoor venues, New Theatre and Key Theatre
- Restoke, Regent Theatre and Victoria Hall in Stoke-on-Trent
- North Devon's Selladoor venues, Queen's Theatre and The Landmark
- Trowbridge Town Hall

(top) **Speak Up session at Trinity Academy Cathedral, Wakefield with Matt Woodhead, Co-Artistic Director of LUNG**

Robling Photography

(left and right) **Speak Up session at Bedford High School, Wigan**

Tom Doona



Speak Up

We launched our new co-creation programme, Speak Up, in collaboration with our Theatre Nation Partnership network. The programme provides opportunities for young people to work alongside local artists and teachers to lead creative projects in response to issues that are most important to them. Speak Up is for young people who have been most affected by the pandemic, local inequalities, or who might not be thriving at school.

Through the co-created programme of work, the young people will develop capacity for leadership, agency and vital skills like communication, confidence, teamwork and creativity. The aim is that young people build a belief in the importance of their own self-expression and voice and feel more connected to their school and local communities. They will build connections to a network of young people and artists across the country, and have the opportunity to create and collaborate on public creative projects in their local area.

To pilot the new programme, we started working alongside venues in three of our Theatre Nation Partnership areas from

September to December 2021: Sunderland Empire and Sunderland Culture, The Lowry in Greater Manchester, and Theatre Royal in Wakefield. Piloting this work in two or three local schools, we tested this exploratory programme model with local artists and practitioners and 175 participants. In January 2022, we started working with three more of our partners; Doncaster, with Cast, Wolverhampton with Wolverhampton Grand Theatre and Outer East London with Queen’s Theatre Hornchurch – as well as expanding the local reach of the other partners. We are now working with 40 schools, and with the second round of Theatre Nation Partnerships now confirmed, we are about to begin this work in three more partnership areas – 55 schools in total.

The degree of ownership the young people had over what topics and which arts forms they wanted to explore makes Speak Up a very different programme to any we’ve previously ran at this scale. The young people have chosen to explore subjects like identity and art as protest through workshops such as creative writing, making and recording music, animation and comedy. ‘I had, foolishly, expectations that some students might struggle with some activities,’ said Drama Lead Iain Thompson at Oxclose Community Academy in Sunderland. ‘It hasn’t worked out like that. I’ve learnt that if you give students real and meaningful ownership then they can surprise you with their resilience, focus and outcomes.’

Oxclose’s Head of School, Amanda Parkes agreed with this assessment. ‘Speak Up has reignited a love for group creativity that Covid decimated,’ she said. ‘One of the most magical memories I will have of Speak Up is seeing the confidence grow in some of our most vulnerable learners who struggle with “normal” academic life; they have embraced the experience with both arms.’



Speak Up
session at
Oxclose
Community
Academy,
Sunderland

Colin Davison

‘Whenever I go to visit the groups, their energy and engagement is electric. Pupils have stepped up to the challenge, taken risks and found their voice.’

Amanda Parkes, Head of School at
Oxclose Community Academy, Sunderland

Public Acts

The Public Acts programme makes artistically excellent, ambitious and inclusive participatory theatre in partnership with organisations who share our vision of theatre as a force for change. At the heart of the programme is our belief that theatre-making can be a powerful form of community action.

The Doncaster phase of the Public Acts partnership began in late 2019, working with the Doncaster community and Cast Theatre. It centred on work with a range of community groups – including LGBT+ youth, adults with mental health challenges, isolated or older people, and refugees and asylum seekers. Following months of workshops and special events for the groups, we had planned to work with them to create a new adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, adapted by Chris Bush and directed by James Blakey, to be staged at Cast in Doncaster in August 2020.

Following the outbreak of the pandemic, and advice around social distancing, we paused workshops with the groups, additionally mindful that many of the participants were members of high-risk or vulnerable groups.



Drag Queen Bipolar Abdul and members of the company in *The Magic of Wild Heather*

Sam Taylor

‘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.’

A member of the Doncaster community

Having initially postponed *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* until August 2021, we took the difficult decision to further delay the performance to summer 2022, with the expectation that in-person activity would continue to be limited throughout 2021. Throughout this new bridging period, we continued to engage and support our community groups and participants with online workshops in singing, dancing, puppetry and creative writing. We also ran Zoom socials and watch-alongs of filmed productions, as well as creative activity packs being delivered to individual households in a hope to combat digital exclusion.

As the threat of the pandemic eased, the company began working towards a smaller new production at Cast for August 2021 – an immersive community cabaret inspired by a forgotten Doncastrian myth called *The Magic of Wild Heather*. Written by Jasmin Mandi-Ghomi and designed by Hannah Sibai, the story was co-created by the community company and featured 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.’

The Magic of Wild Heather was Cast’s reopening production, performed three times to sold-out, socially distanced audiences. *Doncaster Free Press* said the production was ‘warm, wholesome and magical... I can’t wait to see what Public Acts brings to Doncaster next time.’

Members of the company performing in *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* at Cast in Doncaster

Robling Photography



Happily, after much delay, the Doncaster Public Acts company went on to perform *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* as planned in summer 2022. ‘After four years, 80 meetings and one pandemic we are delighted to be at last steering this epic company towards a production,’ announced Artistic Director of Cast, Deborah Rees. ‘I hope it will remind local audiences about the power and impact of live theatre, helping to heal us all after such a tumultuous last three years.’

The process leading up to the production included running 57 workshops with local community groups, engaging with 137 individuals in Doncaster and the surrounding areas. A final community company of 72 people came together with 30 cameo performers, five professional actors and five musicians, to create a huge company of 112 that represented a beautiful breadth of humanity and the city of Doncaster and its surrounding areas.

Among the performers were six women and 11 children who access Changing Lives’ Doncaster Community Hub, along with Sharon Wilson, Senior Childcare Worker and Volunteer Coordinator. All had featured roles in *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle*. Speaking about being involved in such an exciting project, Sharon Wilson said, ‘when we were invited to join Public Acts last October, I couldn’t even have imagined the impact it would have. Watching everyone grow in confidence,

be brave, find our voices and become part of a remarkable company has been just epic.’ Reflecting on how Public Acts had helped support her community, she added: ‘Engagement in the arts has been fundamental for the recovery from isolation work we have been delivering at Doncaster Women’s Centre and Community Hub. My plan was never for me to be on stage, I offered my time voluntarily to support women and children and somehow I got swept away in the whole experience and I am so glad I did.’

Looking ahead to 2023, Doncaster will be one of five community areas presenting a part of an epic retelling of *The Odyssey*. The first four episodes will be co-created with local artists and communities in Doncaster, Stoke-on-Trent, Trowbridge and Sunderland. As ever with Public Acts, each area collaboration is based on close partnerships with local social change organisations, through which we can offer creative activity in community settings that meets the needs of those people and places. The scale of this upcoming phase will push the boundaries of what nationwide participatory theatre can be, and create a mass gesture of civic unity in the wake of this historic period of challenge.

‘Watching everyone grow in confidence, be brave, find our voices and become part of a remarkable company has been just epic.’

Sharon Wilson, Senior Childcare Worker and Volunteer Coordinator



This year, our learning and engagement work with young people achieved over 500,000 engagements across online and in-person activity.

For young people

Mayflower
Youth Theatre
performing
The Ramayana
Reset

Stuart Martin

Our work with young people, schools and teachers is a vital part of the National Theatre’s work. We are committed to reaching as many young people across the country as possible, not just to inspire the talented theatre-makers and creative workforce of tomorrow, but also to open up the inspiration of theatre to everybody growing up in the UK.

We worked to move many of our learning programmes online during the pandemic, playing our part in supporting teachers and young people’s creativity through the challenge of lockdown. In 2021–22, we shifted to hybrid work, balancing digital engagement with live activity, with all the complexities that the ongoing pandemic would offer. Our teams did a fantastic job of adapting and reacting to all the challenges the year brought.

Our most established programmes – Connections, New Views, Let’s Play, schools’ touring, Young Technicians and Public Acts – reach over 100,000 people every year. Across all these programmes, we balance two aims: working to create opportunity that is

spread as widely across the UK as possible, like our Connections Festival, and targeting our work to places where it will have the biggest impact, such as through our Theatre Nation Partnerships programme.

Teachers are at the heart of this work, and nearly every programme we offer also has a teacher training or networking element. In February 2022, we held the National Theatre’s Drama Teacher conference. This year, the conference was a hybrid mixture of digital, pre-recorded masterclasses and a series of in-person workshops and talks. Offering a variety of ways to take part, we had over 1,000 engagements from teachers. The conference included workshops from Frantic Assembly, Theatre-Rites and Graeae Theatre Company, as well as masterclasses from Emma Rice, Lucian Msamati and Alecky Blythe.

The National Theatre Collection continues to grow as an invaluable resource for teachers. The streaming platform provides access to high-quality recordings of world-class productions, alongside supplementary learning materials. Over the past year, we have added 20 titles making 50 titles now available to schools everywhere. Eighty per cent of UK state secondary schools are currently signed up to National Theatre Collection.



engagements across online and in person activity

Working with primary schools

Our growing work with primary schools across the UK supports pupils developing oracy, literacy and creativity skills. Let’s Play focuses on the use of drama and creativity to engage children with a variety of learning styles and abilities, and is designed to support the curriculum rather than acting as an additional element to fit into a crowded school day. Let’s Play explores three different styles of learning: Let’s Learn, Let’s Perform and Let’s Watch. Each section has a choice of different programmes to allow teachers to choose what would work best at their school. This year, 7,537 young people and 242 teachers from 175 schools took part in Let’s Play including four new digital learning projects.

One approach to delivering this programme is through local creative partnerships who already have relationships with groups of primary schools. In the North West, we worked with ATG’s Liverpool Empire Theatre to create a festival of plays from the Let’s Perform collection that were performed by 16 schools. Meanwhile, Creative Connections Birmingham worked with 11 primary schools on the Let’s Make It Up performance strand, which supports teachers to work with their classes to create a short performance from scratch based on the interests of the pupils. These workshops were delivered



Kiren Kebaili-Dwyer as Hamlet in the schools tour of Hamlet for younger audiences

EllieKurttz

at each school before the 11 schools came together in April 2022, at the Old Rep in Birmingham, to perform their productions, themed around humanity, destiny and equality (the themes of the Commonwealth Games).

In summer 2021 we launched Story Seekers, a free six-week creative literacy project supporting pupils to develop their communication and language skills and promoting self-expression and wellbeing, which has been particularly important in the wake of the pandemic. Developed in partnership with the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education and the Unicorn Theatre, pupils are guided through a storytelling quest with workshops and performances directed by Justin Audibert. The programme was targeted particularly at high-priority schools in areas of social and cultural deprivation, where children are twice as likely to be identified as needing extra support with language and communication.

Since its launch, 6,000 children studying at Key Stage 2 from 117 schools have completed the project, with 145 teachers completing the accompanying professional training for the programme. In October 2021, we began a new partnership with the University of Sussex, which also meant that trainee teachers specialising in English delivered Story Seekers as part of their placements with local primary schools.

‘I’ve been doing [Story Seekers] with 12 vulnerable pupils and it is the highlight of my days at the moment. They are opening up, challenging themselves and really enthusiastic.’

A participating teacher

7,537

pupils took part in our primary schools programmes from 175 schools

175

schools including 91 high-priority schools and seven SEND schools

Touring into schools

Touring into schools is an essential part of our national work – going directly to young people with high-quality live theatre, often providing their first experience of seeing a professional production.

From consultation with teachers across the country, we know schools want to give their students a broad education including a rich cultural offer. This is becoming increasingly difficult as schools struggle with the impact of budget cuts and time pressures. Schools' tours, targeted at schools serving areas of structural disadvantage, overcome barriers of price, geography and expectation, and open up the use of theatre in teaching and learning.

Our 2022 schools' touring production was a radical reimagining of *Jekyll & Hyde* by Evan Placey. Directed by Kirsty Housley, the show explored online behaviour and how the repression of female voices is as prevalent today as it was in the 19th century. The play offered students a fresh, theatrically thrilling perspective on a widely studied text. *Jekyll & Hyde* was performed to over 7,000 pupils in 46 schools in our Theatre Nation Partner areas from January to March 2022 – a huge challenge, amid waves of Omicron and transport disruption caused by winter storms – and helping schools to forge a connection with their local theatre. Each performance was followed by a Q&A with the company of *Jekyll & Hyde*, which helped to deepen engagement with the production, and pupils' understanding of the different backstage roles in making the show. Students addressed as many questions to the technical teams as to the actors.

This year, for the first time, we also took a touring production to Primary schools in Wolverhampton, Liverpool, Sunderland and Essex. The production for primary schools was an energetic 65-minute performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, specially adapted for children aged 8–11 by Jude Christian and directed by Tinuke Craig. The touring production was performed a total of 26 times, reaching 1,000 children from 37 schools in our Theatre Nation Partnership areas. The production then came to the South Bank for a three-week run at the Dorfman theatre during the Easter holidays for local schools and families to attend.

83

schools in areas of structural disadvantage received the productions

9,000

pupils saw *Hamlet* or *Jekyll & Hyde*



A teacher's perspective

Following the performance of *Jekyll & Hyde* a teacher got in touch to share her insight into the impact of the show:

'The children absolutely loved it, they couldn't say enough about how engaged they were, shocked by the twist, how clever it was and how seeing the performance had inspired them to think more about a career in theatre – in particular backstage.

Our school currently stands at 65 per cent pupil premium with many families just narrowly missing the criteria, so many of the children had never had a real theatre experience before, so they just didn't know what to expect. One boy begged me to sneak him in whilst the set up was still taking place because he had no idea what a theatre might look like in real life and he wanted to see it empty before it was filled with an audience.

I don't mean to sound dramatic but the performance, for some of those children yesterday, was life-changing because it has introduced them to a whole world they never thought they would access. I'm already being nagged about can we go to a real theatre, [and] can they [the National theatre touring company] come again.'

Laura Wilkes at Ormiston New Academy in Wolverhampton.



‘We couldn’t stop talking about it all the way home, it made us realise how much we love drama.’

A student from Oxclose Community Academy in Sunderland who saw *Jekyll & Hyde*

‘It was one of the best things I have taken school children to see in 11 years as a teacher.’

A primary school teacher who saw *Hamlet*



‘The performance, for some of those children yesterday, was life-changing because it has introduced them to a whole world they never thought they would access.’

A teacher in Wolverhampton whose school saw *Jekyll & Hyde*

(left) Members of the company in the Schools’ tour of *Jekyll & Hyde*

The Other Richard

(middle) Members of the company in *Hamlet* for younger audiences

EllieKurtz

(right) Members of the company in the Schools’ tour of *Jekyll & Hyde*

The Other Richard

Connections



Bristol School
of Acting
performing in
*Like There's No
Tomorrow* by
the Belgrade
Young
Company

Helen Murray

South Asia to learn about a thousand-year-old epic tale, and inviting them to protect the future of our planet.

One of the successes of our digital Connections programme in 2021 was Zoom workshops with the Connections playwrights, which we incorporated into our hybrid model for 2022. More than 1,500 young people from across the UK were able to attend a workshop with the writer of their play and share their reactions to and thoughts about the scripts and rehearsal process.

From March to May 2022, the young people performed their productions in their school and community settings and at one of 30 Connections festivals hosted by leading theatres across the UK who partner the National Theatre on Connections. One of the plays, *Superglue*, was written for an intergenerational cast of young people and older people. The team from Sunderland Empire told us about a group who performed the play at their Connections festival – young people with special educational needs and disabilities, paired with older local actors. ‘*Superglue* has really taken our group on a special journey,’ they told us. ‘The younger and elder cast have forged beautiful friendships which will transcend the rehearsal room.’

Connections continues to go from strength to strength in opening up the world of theatre for hundreds of young people every year. ‘We purposefully targeted a young cohort, many of whom had never been involved in extracurricular activities before,’ wrote a teacher from Canterbury. ‘The whole process did so much for them and perhaps more than you could ever realise. Our numbers at Drama GCSE have increased from 12 students to 39, with 22 members of our company choosing the subject. We know that this is because of their participation in the programme.’

Connections is the National Theatre's nationwide youth theatre festival for young people aged 13–19. Each year the National Theatre commissions up to ten new plays for young people to perform, bringing together some of the most exciting playwrights with the theatre-makers of tomorrow. Exploring these plays gives young people the chance to express themselves, discuss the challenges they face and connect with one another and the world.

The programme has a history of championing the talent of young people from across the UK. This year's Connections festival marked a return to our partner theatres' stages across

the country, from Shetland to Cornwall and Northern Ireland. 5,320 young people were involved, including 799 in backstage and other production roles, from 228 school and youth theatre companies. We also welcomed 304 group leaders and teachers to the National Theatre for the Directors' Weekend. They attended ten in-person workshops jam-packed with ideas and inspiration for our Connections companies to explore in their plays.

National Theatre Connections 2022 drew together six new plays for this cycle as well as two from Connections 2020 and two from previous years. These plays saw our Connections companies journeying to 1930s East London and the fight against fascism, to

5,320

young people took part in Connections

30

partner theatres across the UK hosted festivals of Connections plays

31%

schools and youth theatres were new to participating in Connections

New Views



(left) Lara Steward and Erin Siobhan Hutching in *Barrier(s)*, New Views winning play 2022 by Eloise Pennycott

(right) Erin Siobhan Hutching and Lara Steward in rehearsals for *Barrier(s)* by Eloise Pennycott

Both: Helen Murray

New Views is our year-long playwriting programme for students aged 14–19. The programme invites young people to tell the stories that matter to them and develop their creative writing skills. New Views includes professional mentoring for all students by playwrights, training for teachers, and entry into a competition to see the winning play performed at the National Theatre.

2022 marks the tenth anniversary of New Views. Over the past ten years New Views has worked with 12,672 students to explore their creativity and write about what matters to them. 750 schools, colleges and groups have taken part, and we have been able to produce 79 rehearsed readings and ten professional full productions of winning and shortlisted plays at the National Theatre.

Of this years 427 finished plays submitted by students at 99 schools and colleges nationwide, the winning play was *Barrier(s)*, written by 17-year-old Eloise Pennycott from Southend High School for Girls. The play is about two women who fall in love and begin their life together despite social, political and personal barriers. Denzel Westley-Sanderson, theatre director and New Views judge said, ‘I was hooked from the very first page of *Barrier(s)*, such a clear, well-thought-out and important piece of writing, the characters were so well developed with many layers to them, a great piece of writing and storytelling. The plays this year were all so strong, such expressive and imaginative writing, it makes me so excited to be working in this industry knowing how much great talent is coming through!’



One of the characters is deaf and uses British Sign Language like Eloise Pennycott herself, and accordingly the play was written and performed in a mix of British Sign Language and English. Eloise Pennycott wrote a play that showcased deaf culture and queer culture on stage, and we worked to honour that in realising the production. The play was performed in July 2022 by professional actors Lara Steward and Erin Siobhan Hutching, who are both from the deaf community.

Alongside *Barrier(s)*, the Dorfman theatre and the Duffield Studio hosted eight rehearsed readings for the plays that had been shortlisted. As ever, young people reached for a huge range of ambitious contemporary themes in this year’s plays including cultural identity, racism, climate activism, internet safety and gender identity. The shortlisted writers were Alycia Okonta, Isaac Reuben, Kayden Best, Loresa Leka, Maya Haugen-Hestnes, Poppy Williamson, Rae Webb and Sanaa Pasha.

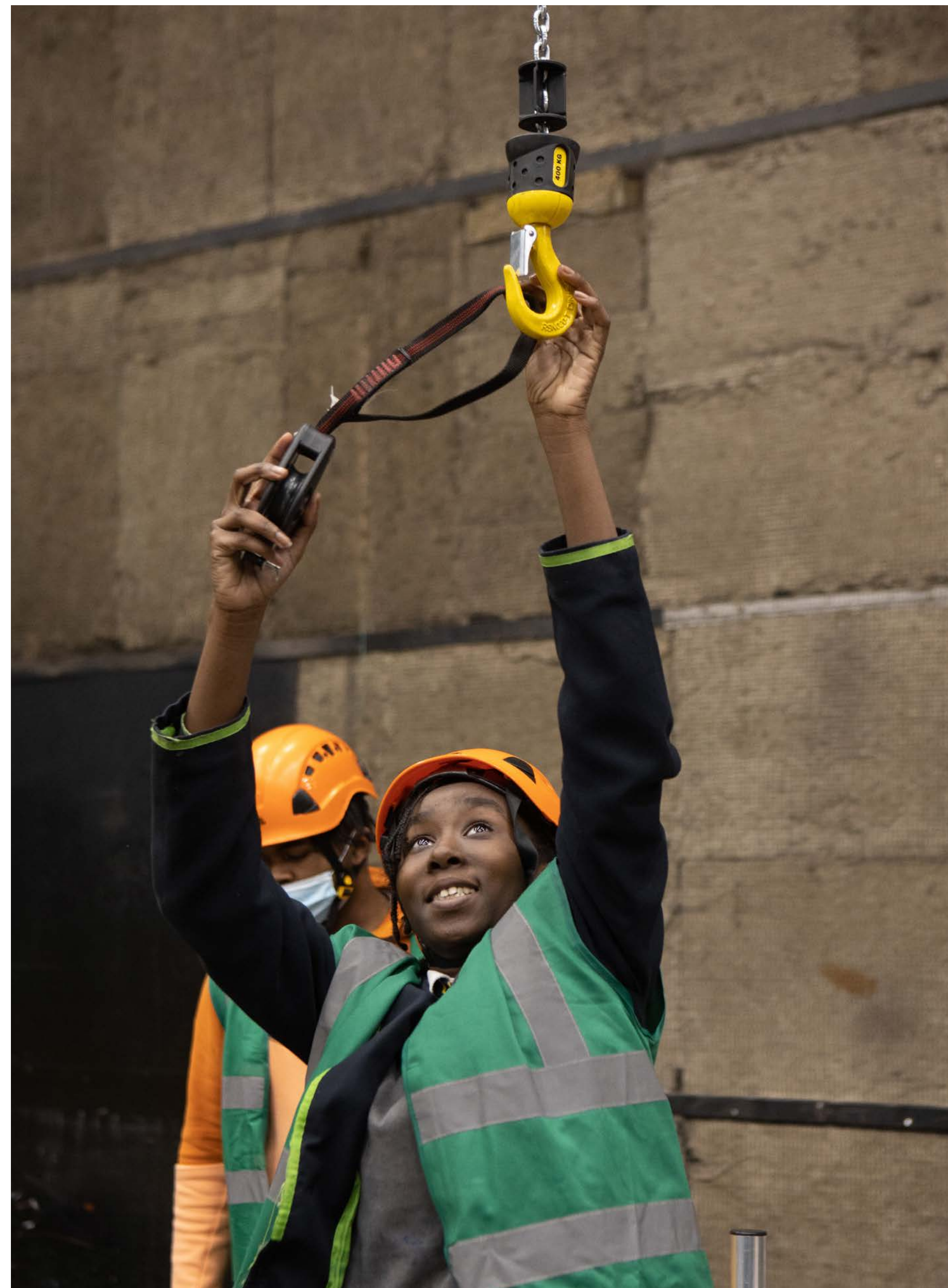
‘I wanted to create something for myself as an audience member. I am deaf, so I’m not going to hold the hearing audience’s hand and spoon-feed them... the bilingual nature of the play was important to me. The National have pushed me to be braver with what I’m presenting.’

Eloise Pennycott, winner of New Views winning play, *Barrier(s)*

Erin Siobhan Hutching and Lara Steward in *Barrier(s)*, New Views winning play 2022 by Eloise Pennycott

Helen Murray





A member
of the Young
Technician's
2022 cohort

Belinda Lawley

Young people's programme

Each year, the National Theatre works with young people aged 14–21 to explore every aspect of theatre-making through courses, workshops and creative projects. Over the past year, 180 young people participated in our core programmes: Young Technicians, Young Producers and Writing for Theatre, as well as theatre-making projects Space to Create and Fly the Flag.

We work to ensure that the young people recruited to these courses are from backgrounds which are under-represented in the industry at the moment, or have been disproportionately affected by the events of the last few years. These focused opportunities are a fantastic chance for us to welcome a new generation of talent to the industry, and support skills development.

The Young Technicians programme is a 14-week course exploring lighting, sound, video and stage skills with the National Theatre's leading technical teams. This year's course was hybrid digital and in person, which allowed us to work with a larger group of 49 young people aged 14–18, including 32 young people from outside London.

The programme is making a continued impact on young people, with six of our Young Technicians alumni employed to work as part the crew of our National Theatre weekend at the River Stage Festival on 12–14

August. Our Young Technicians alumni network now includes 30 young people who have previously taken part in the training. This year, we delivered two network meetings with theatre employment organisations Get Into Theatre and Backstage Niche. Young Technicians alumni also took part in a four-day production course with the theatre company Wise Children, who co-produced *Wuthering Heights* with the National Theatre in February. Fifteen young people took part in masterclasses with the Wise Children's sound, lighting, costume and stage management teams.

This year's Young Producers course was extended with a takeover producing-in-action element – the first project of its kind at National Theatre. Working with Tobi Kyeremateng and Alistair Wilkinson, eight brilliant young producers had the opportunity to return to the National Theatre and work with us to programme and produce a series of events (online and in person) to accompany the run of *Our Generation*, a new verbatim play by Alecky Blythe which followed the lives of 12 young people from across the UK.

This project ran online for three months of ideas, collaboration and detailed planning, which then culminated with an in-person weekend where the Young Producers delivered a weekend of live events, digital workshops and social media content around the provocation, 'what does it mean to be young today?'

Other courses for young people this year included the Young Writers programme, the Space to Create devising course, the Fly the Flag project, and the Paper Birds School of Hope.

'When it comes down to it, this course is at the heart of why I am now working in theatre.'

Young Technicians participant



This was a year where we moved on from the Covid crisis, and started to think seriously and carefully about recovery, change, and securing the National Theatre for the future.

For the future

The year 2020–21 had been the most challenging in the history of the National Theatre. Following our closure in March 2020, we entered a new financial year with 75 per cent of our expected income cut off overnight, leaving us with a two-year £80 million deficit. Although we were able to undertake other kinds of exciting work, such as the free National Theatre at Home streaming series which reached 15 million worldwide, we were largely unable to fulfil our charitable mission. This had an immediate impact for our teams and a ripple effect into our supply chains – freelance theatre-makers engaged or about to be engaged had work cancelled, purchases of materials and ingredients paused, and our national and international touring work suspended.

We worked closely with colleagues in the sector to make the case for business support for theatres and theatre-makers to government, ultimately leading to the creation of the Culture Recovery Fund. Our outgoing Joint Chief Executive, Lisa Burger, played a particularly key role in developing the fund – her work was subsequently recognised with a CBE for Services to the Arts and a Special Olivier Award. The fund formed a critical component in the survival of the National Theatre, and hundreds of other companies across the UK. We received a £19.7 million repayable loan from the Culture Recovery Fund, which in addition to £20 million of radical cost-cutting measures, including loss of staff, left a £40 million deficit. To complete the recovery plan, in April 2020 we launched National Theatre Together, an ambitious two-year £40 million fundraising campaign, and sought the support of those closest to us.

We were overwhelmed by the generosity of our donors and members in the UK and around the world, whose incredible philanthropy helped us achieve this ambitious target, including \$10 million contributed by our American supporters.

(previous)
Alex Jarrett
(Annabella) and
members of the
company in *Our
Generation*

Johan Persson

(right) Deputy
Artistic Director
Clint Dyer
performing at
the National
Theatre's Up
Next Gala

Olivia Spencer



2021–22 was the first year on our pathway to recovery; a year in which focused on reopening safely on the South Bank, relaunching our in-person work with young people and communities across the UK, and returned to screens and cinemas around the world. One of our major recovery factors was the return of audiences. We were pleased to welcome 257,900 people back to our South Bank theatres in 2021–22, a ringing endorsement of our work. This was significantly below our normal capacity of around 700,000, but this was modelled into our reopening pattern and operation at reduced capacity to ensure the safety of audiences and those on stage and off. We also saw hugely healthy audiences for our West End, touring and US work – all areas where we were among the first theatre companies to reopen new productions or remounts. At the time of writing, at the end of 2022, audiences are currently down by around ten per cent compared to pre-pandemic.

In an ideal world, the recovery of the National Theatre would be taking place in stable financial conditions. Unfortunately, the end of 2021–22 saw a new period of instability begin, with high rates of inflation and a major increase in our energy costs. With 60 per cent of our expenditure being on people, the cost-of-living crisis means we are also mindful of paying our staff and freelance theatre-makers fairly. In addition, in November 2022, we saw the investment we receive from Arts Council England reduce by £0.85 million with effect from 2023–2024 as a result of funding redistribution from London. Taken together, this financial landscape remains very challenging.

Despite this gloomy picture, the evidence of the last two years is that the National Theatre and its staff are resilient, innovative and able to make big, positive changes to the way we work. We are therefore confident that we can weather the period to come, based on the strong, values-led recovery we have been able to make throughout 2021–22.



Doing our part to address climate crisis is one of the key themes that has threaded through our recovery work, and it is set to underpin our creative and operational activity for many years to come. The argument for this is, sadly, evident – with extreme weather events already having an impact on our operation in the form of heatwaves, flooding, and stress on the transport infrastructure.

In October 2019, the National Theatre declared climate emergency, meaning that we recognised climate change needs to be tackled urgently and we began taking new measures as an organisation to address it. In 2022, we announced we would aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. As part of this work,

84%

of materials used by the scenic construction, props, and costume teams went on to a planned future use after the production

we began testing and implementing the new Theatre Green Book in June 2021 – a new framework for reducing carbon impact across production, buildings and operational activity.

2021–22 was the first year where we worked to apply the standards of the Theatre Green Book to our production practice, and to reimagine our processes for working at every stage of the production journey. While no new individual productions met the Green Book baseline standard overall this year, the teams made significant shifts in their practice. Staff carefully tested new materials, explored new routes for procurement, and came up with innovative ways to repurpose and reuse materials between productions. As a result, 84 per cent of materials used by the scenic construction, props, and costume teams went on to a planned future use after the production.

For our building, we recycled 54 per cent of non-production waste, 30 per cent of production waste and reduced total waste tonnage by 68 per cent. We also exceeded our 2021–22 target to reduce energy and water carbon emissions by 20 per cent, achieving a 42 per cent reduction. This fantastic result was the legacy of over ten years of development of the Grade II listed National Theatre building, facilitated by the NT Future fundraising campaign. Projects this year included new LED lighting in the Olivier and Lyttelton theatres and front-of-house areas, improvements to our building management system, and upgrading pump and fan controls for our heating and ventilation systems. We joined the Lambeth Climate Action Group, and began a collaboration between our expert Facilities team and South Bank University’s School of Engineering to support placements and research around optimisation of our complex building systems, like our combined heat and power plant.

A panel discussion during our 2021 Making Theatre Green conference

Stephanie Claire

What is the Theatre Green Book?

The Theatre Green Book is a new measure for how theatres and producers are reducing the impact of theatre productions, buildings and operations on the planet. The standards were created during lockdown by Theatres Trust, Buro Happold and ABTT, led by theatre architect Paddy Dillon.

The Theatre Green Book is part framework and part provocation – no large-scale theatre work generally meets any of these standards. This means that changing our practice will be an enormous team effort, which needs every single person working on a show to rethink what they do.

In May 2021, the National Theatre started applying the baseline standard of the Theatre Green Book to our productions. Reusing and recycling materials for our sets, costumes and props are at the heart of this commitment: 50 per cent of all materials need to have a previous life, and 65 per cent need to be repurposed or recycled at the end. We are also ending use of materials, chemicals and aerosols that cause environmental harms.

We have also chosen to start using more complex measures, calculating the carbon footprint of every new item or material, including deliveries, so that we can work towards our target of carbon neutrality for the National Theatre’s work by 2030. We aren’t experts yet, but we will be. Everything we learn along the way will help us change the way we make theatre, for good.

Retaining skilled theatre-makers and preparing the makers of the future is a growing priority for us. The last couple of years have been hugely challenging for theatre-makers, particularly those working freelance – the result has been the skills drain of experienced makers from the sector in response to the loss of work during the Covid-related periods of closure, and the scale of salaries that can be offered in the booming UK film and television sectors.

Our sector is particularly hungry for craft and technical talent, and we believe that tomorrow’s theatre-makers will only come from a diverse range of backgrounds if we are able to create opportunities for young people build creative skills now. As a result, the scale of our nationwide Learning programme continues to be an essential part of our mission. Whether it’s through our new co-creation programme, Speak Up, or having the full experience of creating a play through Connections, that work has a real and lasting impact on the accessibility of our industry. Our in-depth Young Technicians programme has created a pathway for a cohort of young people who might not have considered a technical career to go onto further training and employment; even more directly, six of our Young Technicians alumni were paid to work as part the crew of our summer River Stage Festival.

Back stage at the National Theatre

Helen Murray



Creating entry-level opportunities across the National Theatre has also been a priority. In January 2022, we took on four Kickstart placements, two of whom have stayed with us in new roles and two have gone on to other training and work. Our paid apprenticeship programme provides valuable opportunities for young people to learn and gain practical experience for a creative career, while working towards a recognised qualification. Over 40 young people have trained with us across a range of teams, including Wigs, Hair and Make-up, Scenic Construction, Metalwork and Lighting. In 2021–22, we were able to support all the 2019–2020 apprentices to complete their Covid-interrupted programmes. We were also excited to relaunch our entry level

‘I have learnt more in the past few months than I ever could have elsewhere and have developed skills I never imagined would be so useful.’


Jemima Hutton, Props apprentice

apprenticeship recruitment in February 2022 and contributed a portion of our apprenticeship levy to fund a Technical Theatre apprenticeship at the New Victoria Theatre, Stoke.

Props apprentice Jemima Hutton joined us as part of this new cohort, specialising in furnishing and upholstery. ‘I have learnt more in the past few months than I ever could have elsewhere and have developed skills I never imagined would be so useful,’ she reflected. ‘My time here so far has given me invaluable tools and experience and will be the greatest investment I could ever make for my future in the creative field.’

Investment in work like our learning programmes and our apprenticeship positions are at the heart of why subsidised theatre is so important. This is work that sustains the future of our industry, wherever it is in the UK – but in turn, our success supports the vibrancy of town centres and pays £5 for every £1 invested back into the economy, playing a part in the recovery of the country as a whole.

As a registered charity, we rely on donations to make world-class theatre for everyone – last year, 22% of our income came from fundraising. We are very lucky to be supported by an enthusiastic community of members, donors, companies, trusts and foundations who have helped us recover through the last two years. Their support now commissions new work from leading writers and gives opportunity to new voices. It builds awe-inspiring sets and trains the next generation of specialist craftspeople. It welcomes the world’s most exciting actors, directors and designers to our stages, and it powers our mission to share theatre with as many people as possible. A huge thank you from all of us at the National Theatre to everyone who has stood with us in the story so far, helping us to shape a bright, creative future.

A woman in a sparkling, sequined dress is performing on stage, her arms outstretched in a wide gesture. She has a joyful expression, with her mouth open as if singing or laughing. The background is dimly lit, showing the silhouettes of audience members seated at tables. Warm, golden light from stage lamps illuminates the scene, creating a festive and celebratory atmosphere. A circular sign with the number '2' is visible on the right side of the frame.

We would like to thank all our supporters for their generous contributions to the National Theatre and its work with theatre-makers and communities, for young people and audiences.

Our supporters

Campaign Luminaries



(previous)
The National
Theatre's Up
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Olivia Spencer

(left) The Tree,
designed by
Rose Revitt

Cameron Slater Photography

We would like to thank our campaign Luminaries for their transformational support.

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(next page) Leonie Elliott (Hortense) in Small Island

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Thank you