

# National Theatre

A man with a shaved head, wearing a white t-shirt, yellow trousers, and pink sneakers, is looking up at a rack of colorful clothing in a store. The rack is filled with various garments, including a blue sequined dress, a red patterned top, and a white patterned top. The background shows more clothing racks and a red wall.

Exclusively  
for members

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In conversation  
with Meera Syal

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Katy Rudd  
on *Ballet Shoes*

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*War Horse*  
returns

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Issue

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# News in brief

## Lifting the Lid

In August, we welcomed young people to the South Bank for our latest Lifting the Lid workshops. The programme offers 18 to 25-year olds an in-depth look at our productions, through a series of interactive workshops with our theatre-makers.

Focusing on the theme of collaboration, workshops took place across all three stages, with participants exploring the actors' relationship to sound design in *Mnemonic*, discovering how ensemble movement was choreographed for *The Grapes of Wrath*, and hearing from *The Hot Wing King* director, Roy Alexander Weise, about the production's design. They also received a free ticket to experience one of these shows for themselves.

**Lifting the Lid** is part of our commitment to nurturing the skilled makes of tomorrow, as we empower young people with knowledge of roles in the creative industries.

Find out more at:  
[nationaltheatre.org.uk/  
learn-explore/young-people](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/young-people)



Participants explore movement work from *The Grapes of Wrath*.  
Photograph by Andreia Leitao

Young People's Programmes are supported by Bank of America, The Maurice Hatter Foundation and the Richard Radcliffe Trust. With thanks to the MAP Fund. Creative Careers enabled by TikTok.

The Mohn Westlake Foundation supports nationwide Learning programmes for young people. Nationwide learning is supported by Buffini Chao Foundation, Clore Duffield Foundation, Crevan O'Grady & Jane McClenahan, MFPA Trust Fund for the Training of Disabled Children in the Arts, The Kartik Foundation, Behrens Foundation, Marlow Trust, Cleopatra Trust, and The Andor Charitable Trust.



Costumes at the National Theatre Green Store.  
Photograph by Reeds Watts Architects

## A More Sustainable Future

For the first time in our history, the National Theatre's costumes, props and scenery are now stored in a single site in Bermondsey, just a short distance from our South Bank home.

This game-changing storage solution, the Green Store, will encourage reuse and recycling not only at the National Theatre but across the sector, and will put sustainability at the heart of our theatre-making.

Find out more about the Green Store in your latest What's On Guide.

The Green Store is generously supported by the 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust



NT Tours. Photograph by Stephanie Claire

## Members' Week 28 October to 3 November 2024

Join us as we celebrate your amazing support during Members' Week. Highlights include our Members' Celebration exploring *Coriolanus*, complimentary sparkling wine at Lasdun, and a free custardo with meals at Forza Wine.

Keep an eye out for more offers still to be announced in your member emails.

# Meera Syal



## Last month, Tanika Gupta's new play *A Tupperware of Ashes* opened in the Dorfman Theatre.

**Meera Syal plays the role of Queenie, an ambitious chef and formidable matriarch. When Queenie's children notice gaps in her memory, they are forced to make an impossible choice.**

**We caught up with Meera Syal ahead of rehearsals.**

**NT: What appealed to you about *A Tupperware of Ashes*?**

**MS:** I think Tanika Gupta has written a beautiful play about a challenging subject – it is not what you expect at all. There is a huge seam of spirituality and occasional joy layered through the sadness, and it is, strangely, wonderfully life-affirming.

I feel very connected to the story Tanika is telling; we both went through very similar struggles of caring for ailing parents and dealing with their slow goodbyes from the world at the same time. For South Asian families, there are added cultural layers of duty, expectation and guilt which complicate an already complex situation. All of that was ripe for exploration.

**NT: Can you tell us about your character, Queenie?**

**MS:** Queenie is a dream role – complex, challenging. She's a mighty woman and it's going to be quite a journey excavating her. She is one of those Amazonian matriarchs that I grew up with – admirable, forged in steel and quite scary. I hope I can do her justice.

**NT: Why do you feel this is an important story to tell?**

**MS:** Because this is a universal story and one most of us will have been through or may face in the future. Dementia affects one in three families in the UK and the more we can banish the shame about sharing our experiences, the better we can deal with it.

It is a wonderful opportunity to be able to explore huge human questions with our audiences, and hopefully make us all feel less alone when we face them. I know how completely lost we felt when we got the first diagnosis, thrown into a foreign land with no map and no help.

But being my parents' carers for over 12 years taught me so much about them, the disease, myself – and how much kindness and support was available when you knew where to look.

**NT: You and Tanika Gupta have worked together several times before. Can you tell us a bit more about that working partnership?**

**MS:** It's a nice double whammy to be working with someone I admire as an artist and who is also a dear friend. I have never actually been in one of her stage plays before, so this feels like a natural culmination of a long creative friendship. Our fantastic director Pooja Ghai is also a great friend to both of us, so we have an immediate shorthand which is always useful in a rehearsal room.

**NT: What do you hope audiences will take away from this production?**

**MS:** That even in the midst of loss, there is life, and learning – and love. And after loss, there is still love.

*A Tupperware of Ashes* is now playing in the Dorfman Theatre until 16 November.

Find out more at [nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/a-tupperware-of-ashes](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/a-tupperware-of-ashes)

Director Roy Alexander Weise speaks to participants on the set of *The Hot Wing King* during our August Lifting the Lid workshops. Photograph by Andreia Leitao



# Stepping into Ballet Shoes

This festive season, the Olivier Theatre will be home to a spectacular reimagining of *Ballet Shoes*.

Noel Streatfeild's cherished novel has been a favourite on generations of bookshelves since 1936.

Now, it is reinvented for the stage in a new adaptation by Kendall Feaver, bringing this beloved story to a new audience of young people, directed by Katy Rudd (*The Ocean at the End of the Lane*).

'I read *Ballet Shoes* many times when I was a child,' explains Rudd. 'It is a wonderful fairy tale about found families, dinosaur bones and ballet. It will make you laugh and cry.'

Pauline, Petrova and Posy Fossil are the story's protagonists, brought to London as babies and left in the care of two guardians.

'Undoubtedly what drew me, and many other people, to the book was the Fossil sisters,' says Rudd, 'I have two lovely brothers, but I always wanted sisters. I felt like Pauline, Petrova and Posy were mine.'

Over the course of Streatfeild's novel, and now this new adaptation, we follow the sisters' journeys – from supporting their family by performing as ballet dancers, to pursuing their passions and working hard to achieve their dreams. As they do, the Fossil sisters shape their futures and discover the power of forging their own paths, finding joy and greater empathy for those around them along the way.

For Rudd, the story is as much about celebrating the girls' talents and passions as examining their imperfections and exploring the valuable lessons they learn. 'They aren't all brilliant dancers' Rudd says, 'They do mess up. They are allowed to fail and to grow, which is such an important thing for young people to see'.

Despite being almost one hundred years old, the themes explored in *Ballet Shoes* have led many to consider it far ahead of its time. 'It's a hugely feminist book', says Rudd, 'encouraging

girls in the 1930s to be ambitious, to enjoy making art, to strive and to make something of their lives – for themselves. It was a groundbreaking idea then that is still so relevant today'.

This new production promises to be a show for all ages, revived with contemporary energy, bracing humour, music, dance and a bold new design.

'I hope this production will bring *Ballet Shoes* to a new generation of young people. I hope they will identify with the Fossil sisters and be inspired. Inspired to dance, inspired to act, or just to follow whatever passions they have. To find friendship, sisterhood and family wherever they can. And when they find it, to hold it close'.

*Ballet Shoes* runs in the Olivier Theatre from 23 November.

Find out more and book tickets at [nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/ballet-shoes](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/ballet-shoes)

Photography (Grace Saif and Daisy Sequerra) by Rachel Louise Brown.

**'We three Fossils, vow to distinguish our name, so that we can make our own futures'**

Act 1, *Ballet Shoes*

As creativity inspires the Fossil sisters in *Ballet Shoes*, so this story will spark the imagination of young people enjoying this magical new production at the National Theatre. That's why we are giving over 1,000 young people free or reduced-price tickets to watch *Ballet Shoes* this winter.

If you can, please consider making a donation to share this story with more young people.

Scan the QR code or visit [nationaltheatre.org.uk/ballet-shoes-appeal](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk/ballet-shoes-appeal)

With your support, our stories will fire imagination and creativity that last a lifetime.



This production is supported by Rosetrees Trust and The Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater. This is an Edgerton New Plays Commission. New Play Commissions are also supported by the Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation.

# War Horse



Tom Sturgess and Rianna Ash in rehearsals. Photograph by Pamela Raith

# Returns

The cast of *War Horse* on tour in rehearsals. Photograph by Pamela Raith



In September, the National Theatre's smash-hit production, *War Horse*, returned to UK stages for the first time in five years, kicking off a major UK and Ireland tour.

The tour is supported by our Partner for Financial Wellbeing, Charles Stanley, who, with a network of clients and offices across the UK, share our ambition to ensure that unforgettable stories can be enjoyed by even more people nationwide.

Based on the book by Michael Morpurgo, *War Horse* tells the story of a boy and his beloved horse, Joey, who are separated at the outbreak of the First World War. The production first captured people's hearts back in 2007 and has since been seen by over 8.3 million people around the world. It's now back on home soil, sparking the imagination of audiences who are discovering this production for the first time.

At the production's heart are the life-sized horse puppets, designed and created by South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company.

Each puppet is operated by three puppeteers: one controlling the head, another managing the heart and front legs, and the third manipulating the hindquarters, creating fluid and life-like movements and suspending the audience's disbelief.

The puppeteer in charge of the heart bends up and down to create the illusion of breathing. Similarly, the puppeteer responsible for the head will manipulate the ears, moving them back and making the horse appear frightened or angry.

Through this, these incredible creations become fully realised characters, evoking empathy and emotion in audiences.

The enduring success of *War Horse* is a testament to the power of puppetry to captivate, move and inspire new and returning audiences.

The world has changed a lot since Joey first galloped onto stage in 2007, but he continues to dazzle and leave his impact - wherever he goes!

Find out more about the 2024-25 *War Horse* tour at: [warhorseonstage.com](http://warhorseonstage.com)

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Front and Back cover: Costumes at the National Theatre Green Store, Photography by Reeds Watts Architects