

# National Theatre

## Visual Story



By Oscar Wilde  
Lyttelton Theatre



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

This production is supported by  
the Huo Family Foundation.

Production photography by Marc Brenner.

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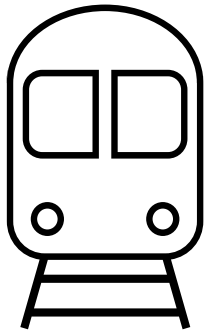
# About the National Theatre

## How to get here



**The National Theatre** is a large concrete building on the South Bank in London. It has three theatre spaces called the **Olivier**, **Lyttelton**, and **Dorfman**.

The address is:  
**Upper Ground, London, SE1 9PX.**



The nearest **train** and **underground** stations are:

- **Waterloo**
- **London Blackfriars**
- **Embankment**



The National Theatre has an **underground car park**. There is **free parking available for Blue Badge holders**.



More information about getting here is **on our website:**

[nationaltheatre.org.uk/  
your-visit/getting-here/](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/getting-here/)



The **main entrance** to the National Theatre looks like this.

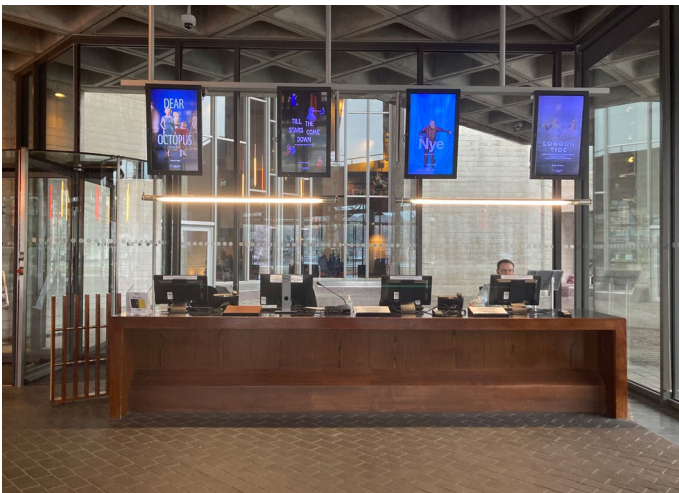
# About the National Theatre

## Who's who?

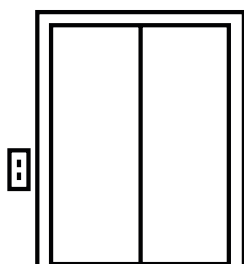


When you arrive through the main entrance, the **security team** will **check your bag**. You might need to queue for a short time.

The security team will not touch you.



If you need help with your ticket, you can speak to the **box office team**. Their desk looks like this.



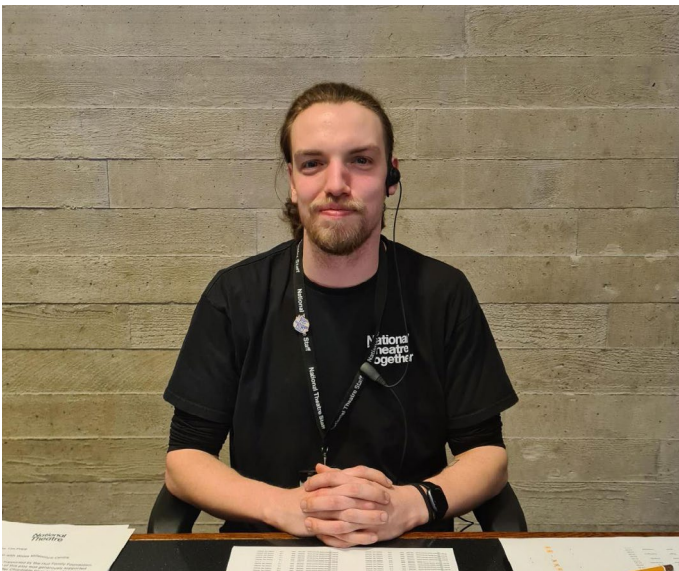
There is **step-free access** around the National Theatre and there are **accessible toilets** on every level.

# About the National Theatre Lyttelton Theatre



This production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* will be performed in the **Lyttelton Theatre**.

There are signs on the walls around the building to help guide you to the theatre.



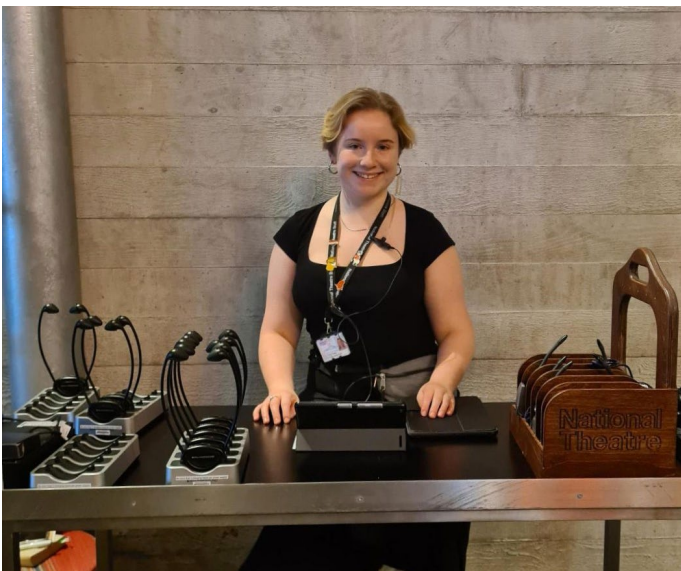
There are lots of staff available in the building if you have questions or if you would like directions to your seats. **National Theatre staff wear black t-shirts with white writing.**



The Lyttelton has two levels of audience seating: The **stalls** (lower level) or the **circle** (upper level).



Bathrooms in the areas near the Lyttelton Theatre will have **hand towels instead of hand dryers.**



The **access desk** is in the **Lyttelton ground floor foyer**. There are hearing enhancement headsets, ear defenders, fidget toys and large print cast lists available here.

# The Production

## *The Importance of Being Earnest*

*The Importance of Being Earnest* is a play by **Oscar Wilde**.

### **Dates**

*The Importance of Being Earnest* will be performed in the Lyttelton Theatre until **Saturday 25 January**.

### **Length**

*The Importance of Being Earnest* is **2 hours and 45 minutes** long.  
This includes one **20-minute** interval.

**The following pages contain spoilers.**



# The Production

## Content Guidance

*The Importance of Being Earnest* contains:



**Bright lights**



**Smoke and haze**



**Loud music**



**Strong language**



**Shouting  
and loud noises**



**Suggestive  
content  
and innuendo**

# What Happens in the Play?

## The set

The Importance of Being Earnest is set in 3 different locations:

1. A London **apartment**
2. The **garden** of a country house
3. A **library** in a country house



The play opens with a dark stage with a grand piano in the centre. Some scenes take place in front of a red stage curtain.

# What Happens in the Play?

## The characters



**Algeron Moncrieff**



**Jack Worthing**



**Gwendolen Fairfax**  
(Lady Bracknell's daughter)



**Lady Bracknell**  
(Algeron's aunt)



**Cecily Cardew**  
(Jack's ward)



**Miss Prism**  
(Cecily's governess)



**Lane**  
(Algeron's manservant)



**Reverend Canon Chasuble**

There is also a small ensemble who play different characters.

# What Happens in the Play?

## Synopsis

The play begins with Algernon playing a grand piano, and the cast dancing around him.



## London: Algernon's Mayfair apartment

Algernon and his manservant, Lane, prepare for the arrival of Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen Fairfax, Algernon's aunt and cousin.

Algernon's friend arrives. Algernon greets him with the name 'Ernest'.

Ernest's real name is Jack Worthing, and the last time he was at Algernon's apartment, he left behind a cigarette case, which revealed his true name and contained a message from someone called Cecily.

Jack explains to Algernon that he uses the name 'Ernest' in London, and 'Jack' when he is in the countryside. The note is from Cecily Cardew, his ward who lives at his estate in the country.



Jack has told everyone at his estate that he has a brother named 'Ernest' who lives in London. Jack intends to announce Ernest's fictional death soon.

Algernon tells Jack that he is a Bunburyist. This is someone who makes up a fake person who they can pretend to visit, usually to avoid other social situations.

Lady Bracknell (Algernon's aunt) and Gwendolen Fairfax (Algernon's cousin) arrive.

When Lady Bracknell and Algernon leave the room, Jack proposes to Gwendolen. Gwendolen believes that his name is Ernest and tells him that she could not love him if he had any other name.



Lady Bracknell does not approve of the proposal and tells Jack (Ernest) that he must prove his family history before he can marry Gwendolen.

Jack reveals that he does not know his real parents, as he was found in a handbag at Victoria train station. He still has the handbag.

### **Hertfordshire: a garden on Jack's manor house estate**

Cecily Cardew (Jack's ward) is studying with her governess, Miss Prism.

Cecily encourages Miss Prism to go for a walk with the local reverend, Chasuble.



Algernon arrives and introduces himself to Cecily as Jack's brother, Ernest.

When Miss Prism and Reverend Chasuble return from their walk, Jack arrives from London in black mourning clothes. He announces Ernest's death.

Jack asks Reverend Chasuble to christen him with the name Ernest, so that he can marry Gwendolen.

Cecily and Algernon (still pretending to be Ernest) return from the house.

Jack tries to make Algernon leave, but Algernon insists on staying and pretending to be Jack's (made-up) brother Ernest.

## **Interval**

Cecily tells Algernon that she is in love with him. They plan to marry.

Cecily tells Algernon that her childhood dream was to marry a man named Ernest.



Algernon leaves to ask the Reverend to christen him Ernest.

Gwendolen arrives, looking for Ernest (Jack).

Gwendolen tells Cecily that she is engaged to Ernest, causing much confusion. Cecily tells Gwendolen that she must be mistaken, as she is also engaged to Ernest. They compare their diary entries about their respective relationships with Ernest.



Jack and Algernon return from arranging their christenings.

Jack and Algernon's real names are revealed, and Jack explains that he has never had a brother named Ernest. Cecily and Gwendolen leave, agreeing to call each other sister.

## **A library room in Jack's manor house**

Cecily and Gwendolen plan to forgive the men.

Jack and Algernon explain their plans to be christened as Ernest.

The couples forgive each other and celebrate



Lady Bracknell arrives to take Gwendolen home to London.

Algernon tells Lady Bracknell that he is now engaged to Cecily. Lady Bracknell questions Cecily, and gives her consent.

Jack refuses to allow the engagement unless Lady Bracknell approves of his engagement to Gwendolen



After learning that the christenings are cancelled, Reverend Chasuble mentions that he must return to meet Miss Prism. Lady Bracknell asks who Miss Prism is.

Lady Bracknell asks Miss Prism about a baby that went missing 28 years ago, which Miss Prism was supposed to take for a walk.

Miss Prism admits that she once left a baby in a handbag at a cloakroom at Victoria train station.



Jack searches for the handbag he was found in, and Miss Prism confirms that this was the handbag she left the baby in

Lady Bracknell explains to Jack that he is the son of her sister, making him Algernon's older brother. Jack was named after his father, but Lady Bracknell cannot remember the name.

They search the library for military records to learn the first name of General Moncrieff.

The records reveal that Jack's birth name is Ernest John.



# What Happens in the Play?

## Sonic Story

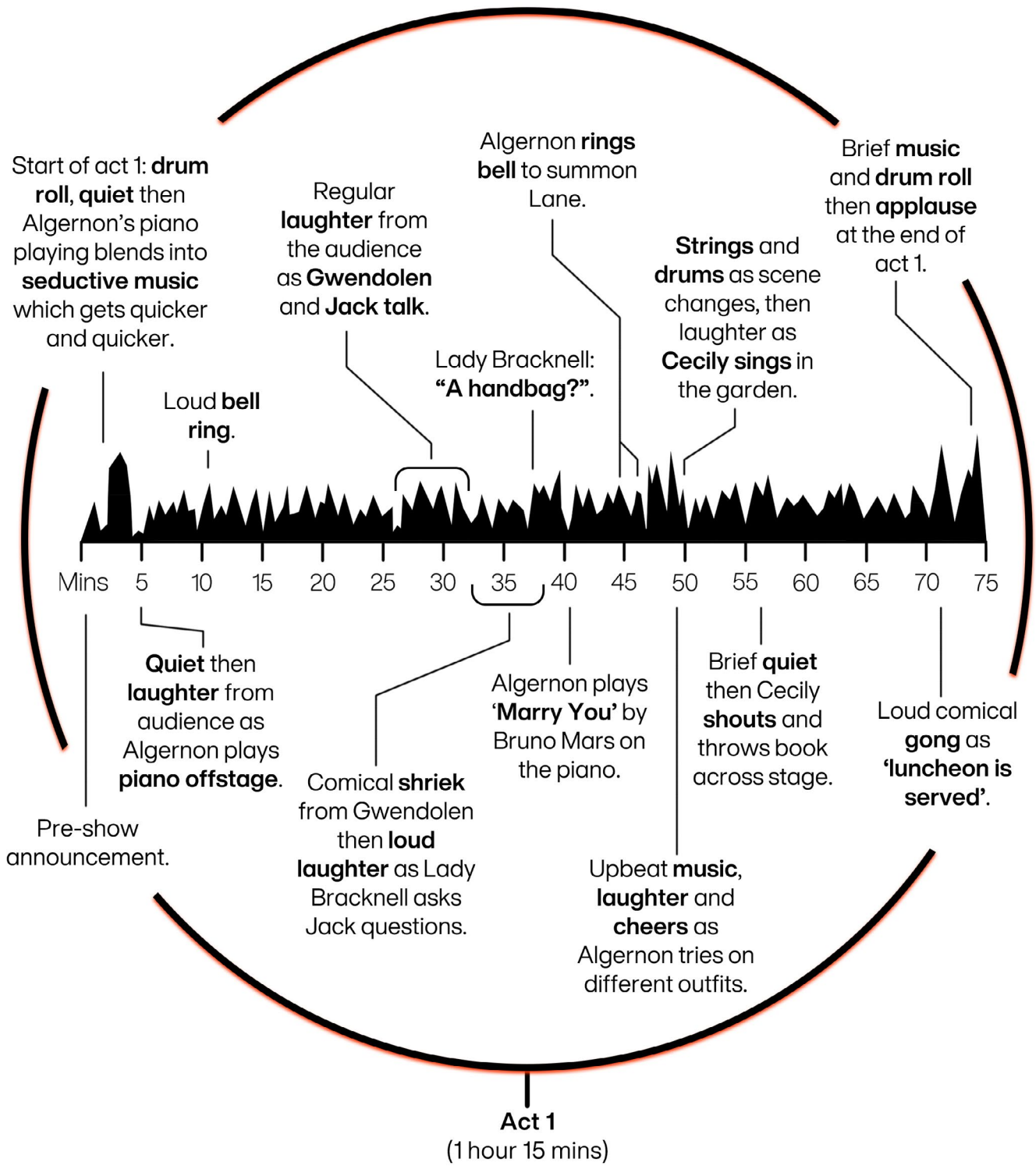
The graphic on the next two pages tells the **sonic story** of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It highlights any particularly **loud or quiet** moments, or any moments when there are **sudden changes** to the sound.

### Sound summary

- *The Importance of Earnest* is a play with some music.
- There are bells and gongs throughout the play
- There are moments of music at the start and end of the play
- Characters sometimes shout or speak over each other
- Pop music plays while the audience enter the theatre and during the interval

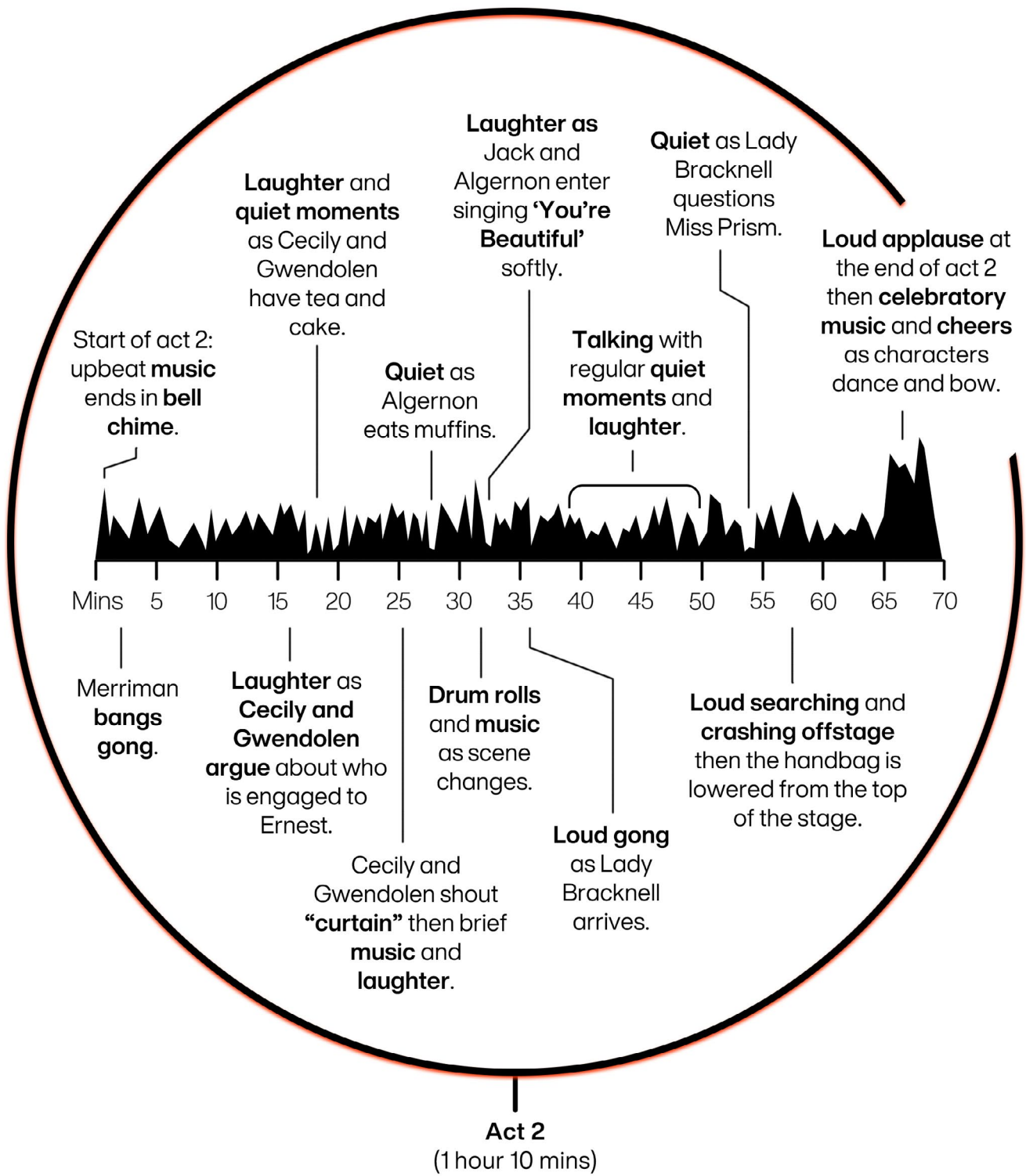


# The Importance of Being Earnest Sonic Story



# The Importance of Being Earnest

## Sonic Story





# Access Performances

## Show information

There is a **dementia-friendly performance** of *The Importance of Being Earnest* on Tuesday **14 January at 7.30pm.**

These performances will take place in a **relaxed environment.** This means:

- Some of the lighting and **sound effects** have been adjusted to be **less sudden** or **intense.**
- The **auditorium lights** will remain on during the show at a **low level.**
- You are welcome to **leave** and **re-enter** the auditorium if you need to.
- You are welcome to **move around** or **make noise.**
- We have **ear defenders** and **fidget toys** available to use. Just ask a member of staff who will direct you to the **access desk.**
- There will be **yellow signs** to help you find your way around the building.

# Access Performances

## Upcoming performances

### ***Alterations***

Monday 24 March at 7.30pm

This seminal comedy by Michael Abbensetts, with additional material by Trish Cooke, illuminates the experience of the Windrush generation in 1970s London.

### ***Dear England***

Tuesday 15 April at 7.30pm

James Graham's Olivier-Award winning smash-hit returns to the National Theatre, directed by Rupert Goold.

### ***Here We Are***

Tuesday 10 June at 7.30pm

Tony Award-winner Joe Mantello directs Stephen Sondheim's final musical with a book by David Ives.

All the information about our future relaxed performances, and **how to book**, can be found on our website:

[nationaltheatre.org.uk/whats-on/?accessibility=relaxed-performance](https://nationaltheatre.org.uk/whats-on/?accessibility=relaxed-performance)