

# National Theatre

## Rehearsals begin for new Public Acts production *Public Record* celebrating the sound of Sunderland



Tuesday 4 January 2025

- ***Public Record* to transform The Fire Station from 25 – 27 April 2025 as Sunderland writes its own history**
- **A community of over 100 people come together to record an album, with music, dancing, DJs, a knockout house band and a massive disco ball**
  - **Original music from The Futureheads' Ross Millard alongside an incredible line up of local professional musicians**

Rehearsals have begun for ***Public Record***, a new Public Acts production developed in collaboration with the National Theatre, Sunderland Culture and Sunderland Empire.

From 25 – 27 April 2025, *Public Record* will transform The Fire Station in Sunderland into a live recording studio to create a new album; a portrait of the city told through its people. The production is a celebration of the sound of Sunderland, depicting its unique musical heritage, life in the city and looking towards its exciting future. The production features a cast of over 100 people from local community groups, professional dancers and musical legends from across the city who represent the breadth of Sunderland's rich cultural identity.

Sunderland-born musician **Ross Millard** (*The Futureheads*) writes original music for the production alongside Director of Public Acts **Emily Lim**, co-director and choreographer **Dan Canham** and writer **Stewart Pringle**.

An incredible line up of local professional musicians also featuring in the production include Folk singer **Dave Murray**, **David & Peter Brewis** (*Field Music*), **Barry Hyde** (*The Futureheads*), **Sarah Hayes**, Naijaway Entertainment's Afrobeats DJs **DJ Bykonz & DJ Banko**, **Sophie Lisa Beresford** & Makina DJ **DJ Infinite**.

*Public Record* is being developed as part of the National Theatre's Public Acts programme, a nationwide initiative creating extraordinary acts of theatre and community. The community groups involved in the production include **Back on the Map**, **Connect Company**, **Sunderland Nigerian Families Group** and **The Odyssey Alumni Group**.

Public Acts started in 2017 and at its heart lies the simple idea of connection, between people, community organisations, and theatres. At a time of diminished sense of belonging, increasing inequality of opportunity, declining trust in institutions, and weakened social ties, programmes like Public Acts can create conditions for individuals to overcome isolation and build community and cohesion among participants from a wide range of backgrounds.

A research report published in 2020 found that almost all participants in Public Acts reported significantly increased confidence and a sense of achievement as a result of taking part in the programme, with many taking up new creative interests. For many participants this change translated positively into their wider lives, from improved physical and mental health to resuming training or finding employment.

**Emily Lim**, Director of Public Acts said, "We are having such an inspiring time creating *Public Record*. We hope our show will do justice to the amazing passion for music and community that exists in Sunderland. It's a show that explores what it is to live, love, lose and grow together, and we can't wait to share it with everyone."

**Helen Green**, Sunderland Culture's Head of Performance, said: "Sunderland, nor anywhere else, has ever seen anything like it. *Public Record* is something unique and extraordinary. It is original, exciting and very emotional and we know people will leave The Fire Station having enjoyed an amazing experience – but also feeling very proud of our Music City."

**Marie Nixon**, Sunderland Empire Theatre Director, said: "We are absolutely delighted to be part of this phenomenal project, which brings together communities and celebrates creativity with such heart. It's a testament to the power of collaboration and our commitment to delivering high-quality experiences that truly resonate with people."

*Public Record* takes place at The Fire Station in Sunderland from 25 – 27 April 2025. Tickets are on sale now at [www.thefirestation.org.uk](http://www.thefirestation.org.uk)

**ENDS**

For further information, press requests and review tickets, please contact Rhian Bennett on [rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk)

**Notes to Editors**

**With thanks**

Public Acts is supported by Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The CareTech Charitable Foundation, The Mosawi Foundation, Susan Miller & Byron Grote and The Hadrian Trust.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About the National Theatre**

The National Theatre makes theatre that entertains and inspires using its creativity, expertise and unique reach. The National Theatre shares unforgettable stories with millions of audience members across the UK and around the world – on its own stages, on tour, in schools, on cinema screens and streaming at home.

World-leading artists make their best work at the National Theatre with the widest possible audience and impact. The National Theatre invests in talent and innovation on stage and off, taking seriously its role as the nation's theatre. Of the new productions developed each year with a wide range of theatre companies, a third of that research and development resource is dedicated to shows staged at theatres outside London.

Through touring our work to local theatres and schools and nationwide education and community programmes, we are active in every local authority in the UK. A registered charity with deeply embedded social purpose, the National Theatre works with hundreds of schools and communities across the UK to fire imagination and inspire creativity, and to develop skills and pathways for careers in theatre. For more information, please visit [nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk) @NationalTheatre @NT\_PressOffice

### **About Public Acts**

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

Public Acts builds sustained partnerships with theatres and community organisations across the UK who share our vision of theatre as a force for change. The programme was first established in 2017 with our founding partner theatre Queens Theatre Hornchurch and has since partnered with Restoke in Stoke-on-Trent, Cast in Doncaster, Trowbridge Town Hall, Trybe House Theatre in London, Sunderland Culture and Sunderland Empire in Sunderland. Through these partnerships, and in collaboration with theatre artists and professional performers, community members come together to make ambitious large-scale performances. Community members take part in regular workshops, theatre trips and creative social opportunities.

To celebrate the fifth anniversary of Public Acts in 2023, *The Odyssey* was reimagined as an epic, multi-venue production made in collaboration with hundreds of community members and professional artists from across the country. The production was told in five episodes in five locations by community companies and artists across the country.

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

## **Sunderland Culture**

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

@SundCulture

## **Sunderland Empire**

Sunderland Empire (operated by ATG Entertainment), is the North East's premiere theatrical venue captivating audiences from across the region and beyond since opening in 1907. The opulent Edwardian theatre has plays host to everything from the biggest West End theatrical productions, to the nation's favourite comedy and music artistes, to opera, ballet and more. Its Creative Learning team is highly regarded for participation projects within the local community.

Instagram - @sunderland\_empire

Facebook / TikTok / YouTube - @sunderlandempire

Twitter - @sundempire

## **The Fire Station**

The Fire Station is an exciting, new performance venue in Sunderland that incorporates an auditorium, bars, a restaurant and studios. It has been developed by Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust. The new, state-of-the-art auditorium, designed by award-winning architects Flanagan Lawrence, programmes music, theatre, comedy and dance. It can host up to 550 people seated or up to 800 people standing. The Fire Station is at the heart of a transformational £18m cultural redevelopment in the city centre that will include the Parade Ground, a 600-capacity outdoor performance space with an external stage and bar opening in Summer 2022.

The £7m first phase of The Fire Station, the redevelopment of an Edwardian building into a bar and restaurant, studios and heritage exhibition, was built thanks to financial support from National Lottery Heritage Fund, Sunderland City Council and the MAC Trust. The Fire Station Auditorium was developed as phase 2 thanks to a £6.25m award from Arts Council England's Capital: Large Grants programme, funded by the National Lottery, and a

£1.38m grant from the government's Cultural Capital Kickstart fund. Further generous support came from Sunderland City Council, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust, the Foyle Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, and Backstage Trust.

[www.thefirestation.org.uk](http://www.thefirestation.org.uk) @FireStationSun