

National Theatre

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NATIONAL THEATRE'S STAR-STudded *NEXT CHAPTER* GALA RAISES £2 MILLION TO SUPPORT ITS MISSION TO MAKE WORLD-CLASS THEATRE AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

- Stars of stage and screen including Cate Blanchett, Aidan Turner, Olly Alexander, Lesley Manville, James Corden, Celia Imrie and more attended the one-night-only creative celebration
- The event kicked off with a bespoke performance on the evening's theme of *the family show* led by Meera Syal, Kadiff Kirwan, Bella Maclean, Imelda Staunton and Katherine Kingsley.
- Guests were invited to dine on the Lyttelton stage which was transformed into a lush jungle-scape – where they watched an immersive preview of puppetry from upcoming show *The Jungle Book*



On 5 March 2026, the National Theatre hosted its **Next Chapter Gala** in the Lyttelton Theatre, the first major fundraising event under the artistic leadership of Director **Indhu Rubasingham**, raising **£2 million** to support the National Theatre's mission to offer the widest access to high-quality theatre in the world.

The National Theatre has hosted biennial galas for over 20 years, and the 2026 edition celebrated the transformative power of *the family show* at the National Theatre, exploring how

a first encounter with the magic of theatre can inspire the next generation of artists and audiences.

The one-night-only theatrical experience brought together patrons and artists for a creative celebration. The evening featured introductions from actor, **Jim Carter** (*Downton Abbey*), original performances, bespoke staging and spectacular design, all created by the National Theatre's in-house team of craftspeople in collaboration with leading creative partners.

Notable guests in attendance included:

Olly Alexander, Francesca Amewudah-Rivers, Adjoa Andoh, Sheila Atim, Cate Blanchett, Bessie Carter, Jim Carter, Oliver Chris, James Corden, Rosalie Craig, Russell T Davies, Clint Dyer, James Graham, Celia Imrie, Katherine Kingsley, Kadiff Kirwan, Bella Maclean, Stephen Mangan, Lesley Manville, Lisa McGrillis, Suzie Miller, Ben Power, Adrian Scarborough, Will Sharpe, Rosie Sheehy, Imelda Staunton, Beth Steel, Meera Syal, Russell Tovey, and Aidan Turner.

A twist on the traditional red carpet, guests arrived at the Next Chapter Gala through a verdant green tunnel decorated with living plants, created in collaboration with **Plant Designs**. During the welcome reception, guests enjoyed a glass of **Nyetimber** English Sparkling Wine, the National Theatre's Exclusive Sparkling Wine Partner, and were invited to participate in a fragrance profiling experience hosted by **Penhaligon's**, a sponsor of the National Theatre's Gala.

Following a welcome speech from **Indhu Rubasingham**, guests experienced a specially commissioned performance '**The Child in G17**' to mark the theme of the evening, *the family show*, directed by Rubasingham (*Bacchae, The Father and the Assassin*). Championing British talent and creativity, the cast included **Meera Syal, Kadiff Kirwan, Bella Maclean, Imelda Staunton and Katherine Kingsley**, who brought to life a celebration of theatrical discovery, capturing the wonder of experiencing a stage transformed for the very first time.

This bespoke performance wove together moments inspired by past National Theatre productions including *The Wind in the Willows* (1990-91, 1991-92), *His Dark Materials* (2003-04, 2004-05), *War Horse* (originally 2007-08, various productions since), *The Witches* (2023-24) and *Ballet Shoes* (2024-25, 2025-26).

Following the performance, the Lyttelton Stage was transformed into a lush jungle-scape, featuring living plants in a nod to the National Theatre's upcoming production of *The Jungle Book*, also directed by Indhu Rubasingham. Guests dined on the stage itself beneath a canopy of real plants also installed in collaboration with Plant Designs, with catering provided by **Spook London**.

In keeping with the decor, following dinner a second performance offered guests an immersive preview of puppetry from ***The Jungle Book***, opening in the Olivier theatre this Autumn.

The evening culminated in a live auction led by **Harry Dalmeny**, Earl of Rosebery, the honorary chairman of Sotheby's UK, offering guests the opportunity to bid on a series of unique lots. These included behind-the-scenes experiences on upcoming NT productions with Sandra Oh, Lesley Manville, Aidan Turner and Marianne Elliott; a chance to slip behind the curtain of the new *The Traitors* stage adaptation; and a VIP box for Ariana Grande's hotly anticipated London concert.

The Next Chapter Gala is a vital part of the National Theatre's [Stories Start Here](#) campaign - the most ambitious fundraising effort in its history. Funds raised will support world class productions on the National Theatre stages, nurture the next generation of theatre makers through initiatives including the [National Theatre Skills Centre](#), expand the NT's global reach through live and digital performance, and deepen creative engagement with young people, ensuring that the spark of creativity lit in childhood can last a lifetime.

Indhu Rubasingham, Director and Co-Chief Executive, National Theatre, said: *"When I took on the role of Director, what struck me the most was just how many people told me how much this place mattered to them. Specifically, their first experience of theatre, seeing a family show here, and how it opened their young eyes to the singular magic theatre provides on a scale only possible at the National Theatre.*

It's the history of the National Theatre and this shared story that inspired us to shape the evening around the 'NT Family Show'. Creating awe-inspiring work takes a huge amount of people, skills and resources and thanks to the generosity of our patrons and partners, we can continue to make those moments possible for young people all over the country, and because of our digital work, the world."

Kate Varah, Executive Director and Co-Chief Executive, National Theatre, said: *"We are deeply grateful to our extraordinary community of partners, patrons and artists who made this year's Gala possible.*

Last night was a powerful celebration of what the National Theatre does best: championing bold, imaginative storytelling that captures the wonder of a first visit to the theatre. That first experience can be truly transformative. Creating those moments of discovery, particularly for young people, is central to our purpose and something Indhu and I are passionate about. We are excited that the support raised through the Gala will help ensure many more first encounters with the magic of theatre in the years to come."

The National Theatre has a long history of creating landmark family productions that ignite imagination across generations, from the internationally acclaimed *War Horse* to the recent stage adaptation of the children's book *Ballet Shoes*, and forthcoming *The Jungle Book* opening this autumn.

Creative teams

The Child in G17 was written by **Ben Power** (*The Lehman Trilogy*, *London Tide*), with original composition and lyrics by **David Shrubsole** (*Life is for Living: Conversations with Coward*), choreography by **Stephen Mear** (*Mary Poppins*, *Gypsy*), puppetry direction from **Finn Caldwell** (*The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *The Life of Pi*), associate direction from **Elin Schofield** (*Till the Stars Come Down*), set co-designed by **Emma Morris** and **Joy Chen**, lighting design by **Oliver Fenwick** (*Bacchae*, *Alterations*), sound design by **Alex Caplen** (*The Father and the Assassin*, *The Witches*) and video design by **Zakk Hein** (*The Maids*, *The Book of* *Dust: La Belle Sauvage*).

The Jungle Book preview included puppetry direction by **Finn Caldwell**, and puppetry design by **Finn Caldwell & Nick Barnes from Lume Theatre**.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The National Theatre Next Chapter Gala took place at the Lyttelton Theatre on London's Southbank, 5 March 2026, 6:30-10:30pm.

Images can be downloaded [here](#).

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With thanks to the National Theatre Gala committee: Kate Groes (Co-Chair), Elizabeth Pryce (Co-Chair), Michelle Cedar, Priya Heal, Elizabeth Jack, Ian Mill, Yana Peel, Elizabeth Sieff, Lorraine Spencer, and Jane Yarrow.

About the National Theatre

The National Theatre makes theatre that entertains and inspires using its creativity, expertise and unique reach. We tell big stories in bold ways, offering the widest access to high quality theatre to millions of audience members across the UK and around the world – on our own stages, on tour, in schools, on cinema screens and streaming at home.

We bring the world to the National Theatre and take the National Theatre to the world through reimagined classic stories meeting fresh, contemporary voices. As part of our mission to celebrate and platform bold voices in British theatre, the National Theatre proudly hosts a

dynamic group of Resident Companies, offering a platform for collaboration, growth, and innovation.

Through touring our work to local theatres, schools and through our nationwide education and community programmes, we are active in every local authority in the UK. We invest in talent and innovation on stage and off, taking seriously our role as the nation's theatre. We work with hundreds of schools and communities across the UK to fire imagination and inspire creativity. The National Theatre Skills Centre supports thousands of young people every year to develop skills and pathways for careers in theatre.

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