

National Theatre

NATIONAL THEATRE LAUNCHES LANDMARK NATIONWIDE PARTNERSHIP TO BOOST ACCESS TO THEATRE ACROSS EVERY REGION OF ENGLAND

- National Theatre Nationwide demonstrates significant commitment to touring, with investment from Arts Council England to fund major tours transferring directly from the National Theatre's stages with their original cast
- First tour under new partnership will be *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* starring Francesca Mills, Jill Halfpenny and Paul Chuckle
- Initiative described as “*a real statement of intent*” and “*shared mission to make outstanding theatre more accessible to audiences everywhere*” by partners



For images, click [here](#)

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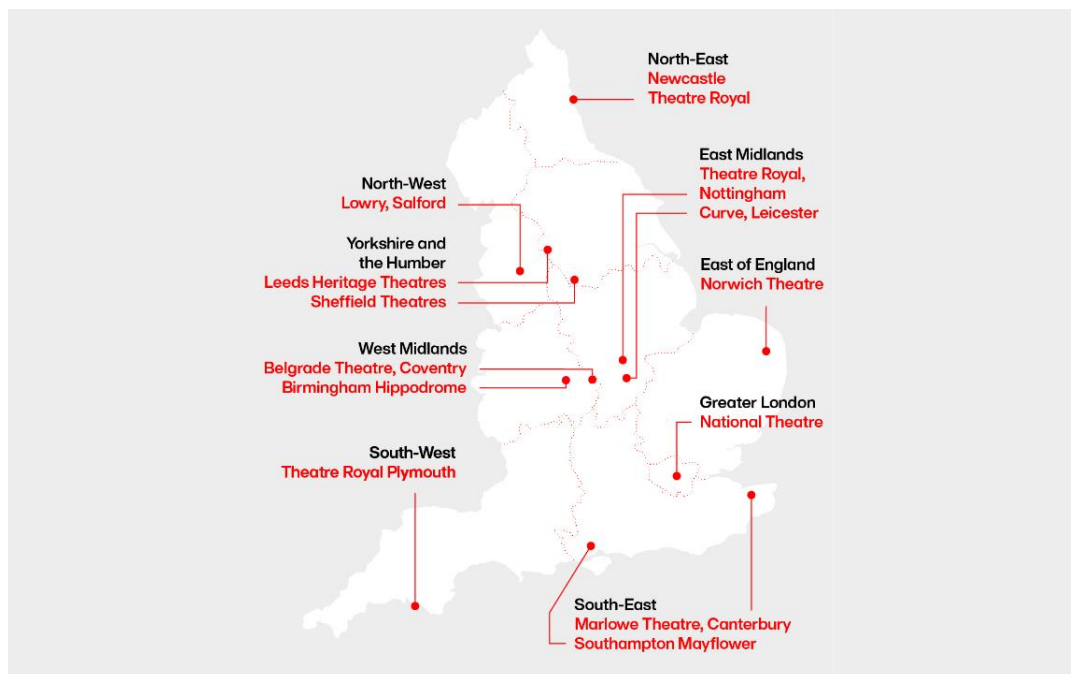
The National Theatre today announces **National Theatre Nationwide**: a new landmark partnership with 12 leading theatres in all nine regions of England dedicated to ensuring parity of access to art and culture, enriching people's lives – wherever they live.

The network is envisioned as a cornerstone for a more connected, resilient and accessible National Theatre that is present across the nation, with different facets of the scheme to be developed over time subject to funding, with a clear ambition to grow the impact of the model.

Today's announcement, as the first initiative for the network, centres on the partners' shared, deep commitment to boosting the touring ecology. This includes touring National Theatre productions direct from its London stages, with original cast, to venues in all English regions, supported by Arts Council England. In addition, there will be subsidised tickets and new schools touring productions around the country.

National Theatre Nationwide addresses one of the key challenges to achieving parity of access: the decline in the number of touring productions around the country. Recent research from Arts Council England shows that the number of plays touring England has fallen by 64% since 2019.

The partnership proudly brings together the expertise and reach of theatres across England to address this. **Belgrade Theatre** in Coventry, **Birmingham Hippodrome**, **Leeds Heritage Theatres**, **Curve**, **Leicester**, **Lowry** in Salford, **Marlowe Theatre** in Canterbury, **Newcastle Theatre Royal**, **Norwich Theatre**, **Sheffield Theatres**, **Southampton Mayflower**, **Theatre Royal Plymouth** and **Theatre Royal, Nottingham** join together to form a new network with the National Theatre.



The details include:

- **One major main stage production** will now tour annually, directly from the National Theatre to partner venues: giving audiences immediate access to the shows with the original cast, backed by investment from Arts Council England over the next two years.
- **Original and annual National Theatre-commissioned tours for schools**, offering children and young people vital first encounters with curriculum-relevant theatre.
- **Targeted and subsidised ticket funding** for tours to break down barriers to entry and build new audiences for theatre across the country.

The first main stage production to tour under National Theatre Nationwide with its original cast will be a new production of **Jim Cartwright's** modern classic ***The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*** directed by Deputy Artistic Director, **Robert Hastie**. *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* is a joyful, tender and bittersweet celebration of music, ambition and the courage it takes to be heard featuring iconic music from the likes of Judy Garland, Shirley Bassey, and more.

Following its run at the National Theatre from 2 December 2026 until 23 January 2027, the show will embark on a tour across England with the following partners in the Nationwide network: opening at **Newcastle Theatre Royal** (3-6 February 2027) and then touring to **Sheffield Theatres** (9–13 February 2027), **Belgrade Theatre, Coventry** (16-20 February 2027), **Lowry, Salford** (23-27 February 2027), **Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury** (2-6 March 2027), **Theatre Royal Plymouth** (16-20 March 2027). Additionally, *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* will also tour to **Wolverhampton Grand Theatre** (9-13 March 2027).

Joining **Francesca Mills** (*Silent Witness*, BBC), who will play the title role of Little Voice, will be Olivier Award-winning actress, **Jill Halfpenny** (*The Long Shadow*, ITV) and BAFTA Award-winning actor, **Paul Chuckle** (*The Madam Blanc Mysteries*, Channel 5), who will play the roles of **Mari Hoff** and **Mr Boo**, respectively. Further casting will be announced soon.

Director Robert Hastie is joined in the artistic team by set and costume designer **Janet Bird**, lighting designer **Paul Pyant**, sound designer **Mike Walker**, composer and music director **David Shrubsole**, voice coach **Shereen Ibrahim** with casting by **Alastair Coomer CDG**.

Tickets for *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* will go on sale from midday on Thursday 21 May 2026 with some venues going on sale at a later date. Please visit the NT's website for further details: nationaltheatre.org.uk.

A different NT main stage show will be touring to the other members of the Nationwide network in late spring 2028.

In addition, a new Nationwide schools touring programme will deliver original, curriculum-linked productions directly into a range of primary and secondary schools and local venues each year.

The first, in autumn 2026, sees writer **Nima Taleghani** join director **Hannah Hauer-King** to create an adapted version of a main stage production especially for schools, following ***Bacchae's*** debut at the National Theatre as part of Indhu Rubasingham's inaugural season. This modern retelling of Euripides' ancient Greek tragedy will be brought to life through rhythm, movement and music.

The tour will visit secondary schools and colleges across the country, working with the following partners in the Nationwide network throughout 2026: **Marlowe Theatre** in Canterbury (28 Sep -

2 October), **Norwich Theatre** (5-9 October), **Birmingham Hippodrome** (12-16 October), **Wolverhampton Grand Theatre** (19-21 October), **Belgrade Theatre, Coventry** (22-23 October), **Newcastle Theatre Royal** (2-6 November), **Theatre Royal, Nottingham** (9-13 November), **Lowry** in Salford (16-21 November) including public performances at the Quays Theatre on 20-21 November and **Sheffield Theatres** (23-27 November).

The second, in a co-production with the Unicorn Theatre, the UK's leading theatre for young people, is ***The Last Wild*** - a new version for primary school and family audiences adapted by **Jude Christian** from the award-winning eco-thriller by **Piers Torday**. It will be directed by the Unicorn Theatre's Artistic Director **Rachel Bagshaw**, opening at the [Unicorn Theatre](#) from 30 January - 7 March 2027. Packed with action, heart and humour, *The Last Wild* is an epic adventure about courage, friendship and fighting for a world worth saving. The production is creatively captioned and will go on a national tour with the following partners in the Nationwide network through 2027: **Theatre Royal Plymouth**, **Mayflower Studios** in Southampton, **City Varieties Music Hall** in Leeds, **Lowry** in Salford, **Curve, Leicester**, **Belgrade Theatre**, Coventry and **Newcastle Theatre Royal**. The primary touring performances are free for all schools thanks to Hearn funding.

Kate Varah, Executive Director & Co-Chief Executive of the National Theatre said:

"Today's announcement is rooted in the National Theatre's overarching commitment to ensure people across the nation can experience and benefit from our work and impact. Fresh analysis, supported by McKinsey, highlights that the National Theatre puts £241m back into the UK economy each year, £87m of which already flows into regional economies. This new Nationwide partnership will deepen and grow that contribution, not only ensuring the long-term resilience of theatre but crucially, supporting local communities and businesses, schools, teachers and their students, the growth of future audiences, and engendering pride in place."

"What better way to launch this partnership with 12 outstanding partners than with a strong commitment to touring between all of our venues, seeing modern classic The Rise and Fall of Little Voice shared with audiences across England, alongside our schools productions of Bacchae and The Last Wild. Together with our new Nationwide partners, we are grateful to Arts Council England for this significant and timely investment in the touring ecology, recognising the vital role it plays in widening access to live performance; as well as the many existing National Theatre supporters whose generosity makes the range and breadth of this work possible."

Hannah Lake, Director, Touring Transformation, Arts Council England said:

"Touring plays a crucial role in our cultural landscape, ensuring people can access the very best art and culture close to where they live. This innovative new partnership bringing work directly from the renowned National Theatre stages to major theatres across every English region, alongside an extensive programme engaging young people in theatre through schools productions does just that, which is why we are so pleased to be supporting it. Our research shows a decline in drama touring in recent years and we hope this significant investment, in addition to our own work of reimagining how best we can support touring, including the development of a new Touring Service, will work to combat that and grow audiences for the future".

Supporting quotes from National Theatre Nationwide partners:

Emma Flatley, Interim CEO, and Corey Campbell, Artistic Director at Belgrade Theatre said:

"It's genuinely exciting to be one of the regional theatres working with the National Theatre. This partnership is perfectly aligned with our mission to bring shows of the highest quality to the Belgrade to sit alongside our varied programme of touring shows and the new productions we create with our communities here in Coventry. We're delighted that our audiences will have the opportunity to see all this amazing work here at their local theatre."

Jon Gilchrist, Artistic Director & CEO of Birmingham Hippodrome, said:

"Establishing a regular schedule of world-class National Theatre productions will enable us to create a long-term plan for audience development, fully integrated with our learning and participatory programmes."

"We are deeply committed to the belief that people in our region deserve access to large-scale, world-class productions here in the West Midlands. This partnership with the National Theatre is a vital step on that ongoing mission and fully respects the regional and organisational differences that each venue on the tour will have, thereby engaging with audiences in a more meaningful way."

Vicky Cheetham, CEO at Leeds Heritage Theatres said:

"Leeds Heritage Theatres is excited to be part of National Theatre Nationwide, opening up opportunities for audiences across Leeds and West Yorkshire to experience work from our national stages closer to home. We are especially pleased to bring productions to both Leeds Grand Theatre and, through the schools tour, City Varieties Music Hall. This initiative helps us connect more people with great theatre – locally and nationally – ensuring that world-class work is accessible beyond London"

Chris Stafford, Chief Executive of Curve said:

"We are delighted to be collaborating once again with the National Theatre to bring this new nationwide programme to Leicester, building on the success of Theatre Nation Partnerships. Together with theatres across the country, we share a mission to make outstanding theatre more accessible to audiences everywhere."

"At Curve, we are deeply committed to ensuring everyone can experience high-quality work, and we are grateful to Arts Council England for their support in helping make this programme possible."

Julia Fawcett CBE, Chief Executive, Lowry said:

"We are delighted to continue our long-standing relationship with the National Theatre through this ambitious new Nationwide partnership. At a time when large-scale touring faces significant challenges, this investment in audiences and young people in our regions is both welcome and important."

"At Lowry, we know there is a real appetite for bold, high-quality drama and for creative opportunities that inspire communities and open pathways into the arts. This partnership creates

exciting opportunities not only to bring exceptional productions to Greater Manchester, but also to deepen engagement with schools, young people and audiences across our region.

“We look forward to working with the National Theatre and partners across England to help ensure great theatre can be experienced by more people, wherever they live.”

Deborah Shaw, Chief Executive, Marlowe Theatre said:

“We're thrilled to be part of the National Theatre's major regional partnership. Kent audiences are hungry for great theatre and this new initiative gives them the exciting opportunity to see productions coming straight from the National Theatre's stage to ours, on a regular basis. It is a brilliant reflection of the National Theatre's commitment to being a company for the whole country. And for the next generation to have specially created work from the National performing in their schools and colleges will be a tremendous investment in the future as we champion bringing creativity back into the classroom.”

Marianne Locatori, Chief Executive at Newcastle Theatre Royal said:

“We're delighted that Newcastle Theatre Royal is an inaugural partner of the new National Theatre Nationwide, strengthening our role as a cultural hub for the North East, ensuring more people experience outstanding theatre close to where they live.

“Launching the national tour of The Rise and Fall of Little Voice direct from the National Theatre is a real statement of intent of our ambition for audiences in Newcastle and beyond, and we're equally excited to take Bacchae and The Last Wild into local schools and community spaces to provide a shared theatre experience for students and families. Together, this partnership with the National Theatre connects world-class theatre productions with local learning, participation and opportunity, ensuring the benefits are felt right across our region.”

Wendy Ellis, Creative Programmes Director at Norwich Theatre said:

“We know that for some students, their first encounter with a live performance is at school, and it can be a defining moment that shapes their lifelong relationship with the arts. That is why our partnership with the National Theatre is so important to bring high-quality productions like Bacchae directly into schools in our region.”

Tom Bird, Chief Executive and Elizabeth Newman, Artistic Director at Sheffield Theatres said:

“We are thrilled to be a partner in the National Theatre's Nationwide project. At Sheffield Theatres, we are passionate about our longstanding relationship with the National Theatre and the opportunities this collaboration creates for artists, participants, audiences and communities across the country. Being part of NT Nationwide celebrates the strength of national organisations working in partnership together and we cannot wait to create and share even more world-class theatre together here in Sheffield.”

Michael Ockwell, Chief Executive, Southampton Mayflower said:

"We are delighted to be partnering with the National Theatre on this new nationwide scheme which will ensure high quality theatre is accessible to the people of Southampton. As part of this scheme, we will first present The Last Wild at Mayflower Studios which will be ideal for family audiences and primary school-aged children. We look forward to working with the National Theatre and are excited by the opportunities that this partnership will offer."

James Mackenzie-Blackman, Chief Executive and Artistic Director at Theatre Royal Plymouth said:

"The National Theatre Nationwide partnership is truly just that, because we have built it together. Over the course of the last 12 months the team at the NT have invited their regional partners alongside them, to firstly listen to the challenges and opportunities of better collaboration in touring, and then to support the co-design of what now becomes NT Nationwide."

"All of us at TRP look forward to welcoming The Rise and Fall of Little Voice and The Last Wild to the South West peninsula and collaborating with the National Theatre to deepen our engagement with new and established audiences and with schools and families. The ambitions of this programme are not insignificant but I'm confident that together we can achieve a major step-change in how touring in England is developed and celebrated."

Rebecca Morris, Heritage & Learning Partnerships Manager at the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall Nottingham said:

"At the Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall, we're delighted to be part of the National Theatre's Nationwide partnership programme and proud to be bringing this work to schools across Nottingham and the wider region. Our recent collaboration on Dear England benefited multiple schools and demonstrated the impact of connecting young people with nationally significant theatre, archives and NT practitioners, enriching curriculum learning and ensuring that young people from across the region encountered nationally significant theatre as part of their education."

"Building on this work, welcoming the Bacchae schools tour to Nottingham feels like an exciting next step in enabling even more students to engage with ambitious, high-quality theatre where they learn and live, and reflecting our excitement at being part of a place-rooted National Theatre partnership."

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For images, click [here](#).

For further information re **Nationwide** please contact Rhian Bennett at rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk

For further information re **The Rise and Fall of Little Voice** please contact Clare McCormack at CMcCormack@nationaltheatre.org.uk

With Thanks:

The National Theatre production of *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* is supported by James and Victoria Corcoran.

The Mohn Westlake Foundation supports nationwide Learning programmes for young people.

The Primary Schools programme is made possible by the Hearn Foundation.

Nationwide Learning is also supported by Buffini Chao Foundation, Richard and Kara Gnodde, Clore Duffield Foundation, The Ingram Trust, Tina Alexandrou, Crevan O'Grady & Jane McClenahan, The Constance Travis Charitable Trust, Delta Air Lines, The Alchemy Foundation, Mike Staunton, The Anthony and Elizabeth Mellows Charitable Settlement, The Attwood Education Foundation, Tioc Foundation, MFPA Trust Fund for the Training of Disabled Children in the Arts, The Archie Sherman Charitable Trust, The Kartik Foundation, Rosetrees Trust, The Dow Clewer Foundation and The Michael Marks Charitable Trust.

Listings Information for *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*:

Dates: Performances from 2 December 2026 – 20 March 2027 (full schedule below)

Press Performances: The national Press performance will take place on **10 December 2026** with each venue hosting a regional press performance

Assisted Performances: Check individual venue websites for information and booking details.

Tour schedule for *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*:

Venue	Tour dates
National Theatre nationaltheatre.org.uk General on sale from 21 May 2026	2 December 2026 - 23 January 2027
Newcastle Theatre Royal theatreroyal.co.uk General on Sale from 19 May	3-6 February 2027
Sheffield Theatres sheffieldtheatres.co.uk General on Sale from 13 June	9-13 February 2027
Belgrade Theatre, Coventry belgrade.co.uk General on Sale from 26 May	16-20 February 2027
Lowry, Salford thelowry.com General on Sale from 13 May	23-27 February 2027
Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury marlowetheatre.com General on Sale from 20 July	2- 6 March 2027
Wolverhampton Grand Theatre grandtheatre.co.uk General on Sale from 13 May	9-13 March 2027
Theatre Royal Plymouth theatreroyal.com General on Sale from 7 July	16-20 March 2027

About the National Theatre

The National Theatre offers the widest access to high-quality theatre in the world. This year, we will produce 18 plays, following over a thousand shows that have shaped British theatre since 1963.

Our productions transfer from our home in London to the West End, Broadway and beyond, winning awards on both sides of the Atlantic. We champion bold storytelling that inspires, challenges and entertains, bringing the world to the National Theatre, and taking the best of British theatre to the world. Through our online streaming service NT at Home; our education platform, the NT Collection in schools; and in cinemas with NT Live, we reach audiences digitally in almost every country worldwide - 184 out of 195 and counting.

We operate as a registered charity with a deep social purpose and a nationwide footprint. We partner with regional theatres to tour our shows, are active in more than 90% of state secondary schools, and our Skills Centre trains 5,000 people each year.

Our dedicated NT Studio champions new writing, and we are central London's 'biggest factory' with workshops that craft every aspect of our productions. We host the world's most extensive theatre archive, and our Green Store houses more than 150,000 reusable props and costumes as part of our sustainability commitments.

For more information, please visit nationaltheatre.org.uk

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