

National Theatre

50 STORIES FOR 50 YEARS

NATIONAL THEATRE LAUNCHES NEW APPRENTICESHIP AND
SHARES STORIES FROM THE PAST FIVE DECADES WITH
AUDIENCES WORLDWIDE TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF ITS
ICONIC BUILDING



- ***Stories Start Here: 50 Stories for 50 Years*** to celebrate five decades of the National Theatre's South Bank building featuring personal stories shared by **Hugh Jackman**, **Lesley Manville**, **Lucian Msamati**, **David Oyelowo**, **Imelda Staunton** and **Jim Carter**, alongside memories from **Laurence Olivier**, **Peter Hall** and the NT's architect **Denys Lasdun**.
- These stories will be shared in a free installation outside the NT building and via the NT's digital guide on Bloomberg Connects, reaching people around the world.
- New apprenticeship named in honour of Denys Lasdun to support the next generation of theatre-makers, craftspeople and technicians.

Thursday 30 July 2026

In October 2026, the National Theatre will mark the anniversary of its iconic building with ***Stories Start Here: 50 Stories for 50 Years***, a free installation celebrating five decades of creativity, innovation and world-class productions seen by millions of people across the UK and around the globe.

Alongside the installation, the NT is also marking the anniversary with a **new apprenticeship**, investing in the next generation of theatre-makers, craftspeople and technicians and reaffirming its role in developing the talent and skills that underpin one of the UK's fastest-growing sectors.

Named in honour of the NT's architect, the *Sir Denys Lasdun Mechanical & Electrical Apprenticeship* will offer hands-on training in the vital engineering skills needed to care for and maintain a working cultural building. Designed to provide a springboard for the next generation of theatre-makers as they push their careers forward, it forms part of the NT's wider commitment through the National Theatre Skills Centre, in partnership with Bank of America, to opening pathways into careers in the creative industries. The National Theatre Skills Centre currently supports nearly 6,000 people around the country annually and ensures that specialist technical skills are developed, retained and passed on to future generations.

Installed outside the National Theatre on the Queen's Walk, *Stories Start Here: 50 Stories for 50 Years* is a wooden structure inspired by the iconic amphitheatre seating of the Olivier Theatre. Facing the National Theatre, it invites visitors to sit, listen and enjoy personal stories about the building, transforming the theatre itself into the show. People around the world will be able to experience these stories via the NT's free digital guide on Bloomberg Connects, making them accessible to audiences wherever they are.

Featuring memories, anecdotes and reflections from a wide range of actors, writers, directors, designers, past and current staff, audiences, individuals involved in the construction, and creatives connected to the NT, the installation will offer fresh insight into the building's history while shining a light on the hidden corners, quirks, long-standing traditions, and personal rituals that make the National Theatre one of the greatest civic buildings of modern Britain. It is a building that has launched generations of talent, nurturing them as they find their feet and voice at the start of careers across theatre and beyond. A **Story Station** inside the NT will also dispense the short stories printed on eco-friendly paper at random so visitors can take away their own memento of the anniversary.

The installation is designed and fabricated by **La Cuarta Piel** and co-curated by **Sarah Hemming**, theatre critic for the Financial Times and author of *The National Theatre Guide*, and the NT's Special Projects Producer **Katurah Morrish**.

The anniversary is kindly supported by global built environment consultancy **Arup** and the Queen's Walk installation is supported by **Sir Robert McAlpine**, two companies that helped build the National Theatre 50 years ago – a powerful marker of their continued commitment to this iconic building.

Located on the South Bank, the National Theatre was built between 1969 and 1976. For its first 13 years, the company was based at The Old Vic before moving into its first purpose-built home on the banks of the Thames. Designed by architect Denys Lasdun, the Grade II listed 250,000-square-foot building divided opinion at the time of its construction but is now

widely regarded as a masterpiece of brutalist architecture. Its textured concrete, sweeping riverside terraces and three auditoriums - the Olivier, Lyttelton and Dorfman (previously Cottesloe) theatres - have become one of Britain's most recognisable cultural landmarks.

But the National Theatre is far more than a theatre. Conceived as a place where every stage of theatre-making happens under one roof, it brings together performance, design, engineering, construction, craft, technology and education in a single creative ecosystem. Alongside its three theatres are rehearsal rooms, production facilities, and workshops where scenery is built, costumes are made, props are crafted and world-class productions are created. Inside the concrete walls are restaurants, bars and public spaces where people come to socialise, work and enjoy a moment of pause by the river. Jennie Lee, the UK's first Minister for the Arts, called the creation of the National Theatre *'an act of faith in the future'* - a place where culture belongs to everyone.

The National Theatre today offers the widest access to high-quality theatre in the world, serving audiences, artists and communities locally, nationally and globally. Through touring productions, NT Live cinema screenings, its streaming platform NT at Home, and digital education platform the NT Collection, work created here reaches people in every local authority in the UK and 184 countries around the world.

As the UK's largest non-profit theatre, the National Theatre's landmark building requires significant ongoing investment to modernise and replace ageing infrastructure. Protecting this extraordinary public asset is vital to ensuring it can continue delivering world-class theatre across the nation and around the world for generations to come.

Indhu Rubasingham, Director and Co-Chief Executive of the National Theatre, said: *"For 50 years, the National Theatre's South Bank building has been a place where artists, audiences and communities have come together to share stories that help us understand ourselves and one another. It was created with the conviction that great theatre should belong to everyone, and that artistic excellence and public access go hand in hand. At a time when so much of modern life encourages us to retreat into our own worlds, theatre remains one of the few places where we gather collectively, embrace complexity and experience something together."*

Kate Varah, Executive Director and Co-Chief Executive of the National Theatre, said: *"This anniversary offers a moment of renewal, hope and celebration of the NT's remarkable legacy, and a physical reminder of the cultural foundations that we as a nation have been given to build on. Yet like many major cultural buildings across the UK, the NT now faces significant capital and modernisation needs. Looking after this extraordinary building isn't simply about preserving an architectural landmark. It's about protecting the creative home of a national institution whose work generates £241 million in Gross Value Added for the UK economy every year, with one third of that impact created outside London. And a lot of joy."*

Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, said: *"For 50 years, the National Theatre's iconic South Bank building has been a beacon of world-class creativity, brought to life by the performers, designers and technicians who inspire and entertain millions. Its impact reaches far beyond London with groundbreaking productions, community programmes and nationwide partnerships."*

"The new Sir Denys Lasdun Apprenticeship is a really exciting way to mark this milestone, and will support our driving mission to make exceptional careers in the arts accessible to everyone."

Sir Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, said: *"The 50th anniversary of the National Theatre's South Bank home is a celebration not just of an iconic institution but of everything that makes London's cultural sector so special. For five decades the National Theatre has showcased British theatre at its very best, nurtured talent, and made a huge contribution to our city's rich cultural heritage and global reputation. It's fitting that this milestone is being marked by investing in the next generation through new apprenticeships. This new programme will help aspiring theatre makers, craftspeople and technicians develop the skills they need to keep London's world-leading creative industries thriving for decades to come as we continue to build a better London for everyone."*

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Notes to Editors

For further information, please contact Benno Rembeck: brembeck@nationaltheatre.org.uk

Images of the National Theatre building can be downloaded [here](#).

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