

# National Theatre

Tuesday 7 May 2024

**Sunderland Culture, Sunderland Empire and National Theatre to create new Public Acts production celebrating the people and music of Sunderland**



For images, click [here](#)

Sunderland Culture, Sunderland Empire and National Theatre today announce a new production as part of the National Theatre's *Public Acts* nationwide programme that creates extraordinary acts of theatre and community.

Director of Public Acts **Emily Lim**, Co-Director and Choreographer **Dan Canham** and Sunderland-born musician **Ross Millard** (*The Futureheads*) are teaming up to develop a new production ***Public Record***, a celebration of the people and music of Sunderland performed by community members and professional artists from across the city. Set in a live recording studio, we witness the community coming together to record an album and, in doing so, to make a record of who they are. Using a combination of dance and live music the piece will explore what it means to come together to write our own history, to capture our present and to look forward to a shared future. The piece is being developed in collaboration with community members and will feature an array of inspirational artists and musicians who represent the breadth of Sunderland's rich cultural identity.

The production will take place from **25 – 27 April 2025** at The Fire Station in Sunderland and will feature over 50 people from partner community groups.

Community groups across Sunderland will take part in weekly creative workshops with theatre-makers, theatre trips and creative social opportunities from June, building towards the production of *Public Record* next year.

The local partner community groups taking part will include:

- **Back on the Map** - working with and for local people to transform Hendon for the better. They work in the heart of the community to empower the people of Hendon by creating a better place, a stronger community and a local voice
- **Connect Company** - part of the beating heart of Sunderland Empire, a relaxed drama group for adults aged 18+ with additional needs. The group has toured shows and performed across the city of Sunderland
- **Sunderland Nigerian Family Group** - provides support for Nigerian families through shared experiences to encourage wellbeing for members and their children while navigating new cultures
- **The Alumni Group** - an intergenerational group formed of Sunderland community members who took part in the 2023 nationwide Public Acts production of *The Odyssey*

Director of Public Acts **Emily Lim** said, *"We are so excited to be creating our next show in Sunderland with such an inspiring group of community partners and artists. Sunderland is a city with an incredible musical history where music making and community activism go hand in hand. We can't wait to start work with our company, celebrating and honouring that spirit in the creation of our new show"*.

**Helen Green**, Head of Performance at Sunderland Culture said, *"We're thrilled to be working on another prestigious project with National Theatre, especially one that is going to celebrate Sunderland's fantastic musical landscape made even more exciting by the opportunity to incorporate some big dance routines. It's an amazing opportunity for community members and local artists and musicians to create a new production alongside the National Theatre and Sunderland Empire. A key part of our ongoing collaboration with National Theatre is that community members with no experience of performing, as well as amateur musicians and dancers, will get to work with professional practitioners from around the UK as well as our own region who are hugely experienced and nationally respected. Those involved in The Odyssey last year had a brilliant time and a feature of Public Record is that some of those involved in last year's production will be involved again this year."*

**Anthony Hope**, Senior Creative Learning Manager at Sunderland Empire said: *"National Theatre's Public Acts programme presents an incredible opportunity to celebrate Sunderland's creative and community spirit. Following our involvement in 2023's Public Acts performance of The Odyssey, we look forward to once again supporting diverse voices and communities from across all corners of our city to take centre stage, showcasing how a shared community theatre experience on an epic scale has the power to bring people together and make a lasting positive change that will resonate for the long term."*

**Steven**, a company member of *The Odyssey*, said, "*Being a lad who is born and bred in Sunderland it is an honour to be involved as we showcase what incredible, diverse talent and community spirit Sunderland has always had. Backed with the beautiful core values of Public Acts this will be a tremendous project.*"

This new production follows last year's epic multi-venue production of *The Odyssey*, reimagined with hundreds of community members in five episodes nationwide, including Sunderland. The fourth episode *The Island of the Sun* took place at The Fire Station in Sunderland in April 2023 and featured 24 local participants, with an epic finale production bringing performers from all five locations together on the National Theatre's Olivier stage in August 2023.

The National Theatre also today releases a new documentary, *The Odyssey: A National Story*, following the creation of the 2023 landmark Public Acts production *The Odyssey* which was reimagined with hundreds of community members in five episodes in Stoke-on-Trent, Doncaster, Trowbridge, Sunderland and at the NT. The documentary gives a unique insight into how this epic production was brought to life, highlighting the power of theatre to bring communities together. It has been created by award-winning director **Hanan Abdalla** and will be available to watch on the NT's [YouTube channel](#) from 7pm, Tuesday 7 May.

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to the Editor**

For images please click [here](#)

For press enquiries and more information, please contact Rhian Bennett on [rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk)

### **With thanks**

Public Acts is supported by Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The CareTech Charitable Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Mosawi Foundation, The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust and Susan Miller & Byron Grote.

### **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 71 of the 109 levelling up priority areas 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. Public Acts builds sustained partnerships with theatres and community organisations across the UK who share our vision of theatre as a force for change.

Public Acts produced *Pericles* (National Theatre) in 2018 and *As You Like It* (produced by Queen's Theatre Hornchurch in partnership with the NT) in 2019. In August 2022, the team presented *The Doncastrian Chalk Circle* in Doncaster in partnership with Cast. To celebrate the fifth anniversary of Public Acts in 2023, *The Odyssey* was reimaged as an epic, multi-venue production made in collaboration with hundreds of community members and professional artists from across the country.

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

### **About 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.

### **About Sunderland Empire**

Sunderland Empire, one of the North East's most loved theatres 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. It's award-winning Creative Learning team is highly regarded for educational and participatory projects within schools and the local community, ensuring people from a diverse backgrounds can experience and benefit from the arts. Sunderland Empire is operated by ATG Entertainment.