

In this week's paper

# How to choose your drama school



Hear from theatremakers, tutors and graduates about the evolving nature of drama school training, how accreditation works and the best options for technical theatre training, p25-34

# THE STAGE

Fighting for the future of theatre since 1880

THESTAGE.CO.UK

OCTOBER 17 2024 £5

The Fear of 13



## Reviewed this week in The Stage

Our reviewers on new openings from across the UK, including *The Fear of 13* starring Adrien Brody at London's Donmar Warehouse, *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and *The New Real* at Stratford-upon-Avon's the Other Place **p15-21**

A Raisin in the Sun



The New Real



## Turbine Theatre to close blaming lack of support

EXCLUSIVE MATTHEW HEMLEY

The Turbine Theatre in south west London is to close after five years, with its artistic director Paul Taylor-Mills blaming the difficult economics of making a 92-seat venue work.

He said that without "serious investment and philanthropy", it was not possible to run such spaces in the current landscape.

The Battersea venue will close later this year, after its Christmas production, *The Liar, the Bitch and the Wardrobe*, which will run from November 21 to December 22.

During the Turbine's five years in business, it has launched shows such as *My Son's a Queer* (But What Can You Do?) starring Rob Madge, and Gwyneth Paltrow spoof *I Wish You Well*, both of which transferred to the West End.

Taylor-Mills said: "To say I'm proud of what we have achieved with the Turbine Theatre is an understatement. Just over six years ago, I walked into an empty railway arch at the Battersea Power Station. It was leaking, there was no dressing room, no bar – a few fold-out chairs.

"With an equal mixture of excitement and fear we created a magic corner in Battersea where we could help as many people get projects off the ground as we dared to take on. Without this noisy railway arch there would be no *My Son's a Queer*, no *I Wish You Well* and many more shows.

"As the landscape of making theatre shifts, without serious investment and philanthropy, a 92-seat space just can't work and it's time for me to focus my efforts elsewhere. The Turbine has been an absolute labour of love. It shouldn't have worked. But it did – and I'm so incredibly proud of the lives it's changed and the dreams it's made come true. Creating this incredible venue, with the people that believed in what it could be, has been a career highlight."

The venue opened in August 2019, with Taylor-Mills setting out three main ambitions – festivals to generate new work, focusing on work discovered through these events and focusing on classics and revivals "in a new, interesting way".

The theatre had a staff of three, including Taylor-Mills. He now plans to focus his attention on his role as artistic director at the Other Palace in London's Off-West End.

## Zero-hours ban would put theatre at risk, leaders say

KATIE CHAMBERS

Theatre figures have warned that Labour's "short-sighted" zero-hours contract crackdown could result in financial trouble and venue closures.

The Employment Rights Bill, unveiled in parliament last week, has been hailed

as the biggest improvement to workers' rights in a generation and includes an end to zero-hours contracts.

However, industry leaders including Leicester Curve chief executive Chris Stafford and BECTU head Philippa Childs, as well as zero-hours workers, have deemed the clampdown on zero-hours contracts to be symptomatic of the lack of understanding of creative industries within government.

Under the proposed legislation, more than one million UK workers on zero-hours contracts are set to be offered guaranteed working hours if they want them, in a move

Continues, p2



Musical theatre

Plan for UK centre of excellence unveiled **Page 2**

Lyn Gardner

Does theatre's artistic leadership model need to evolve? **Page 7**

Josette Bushell-Mingo

Central's principal on what to look for when choosing a drama school **Pages 10-11**

Skills crisis

Can drama schools help tackle theatre's workforce shortage? **Pages 12-14**

Want a new job?

Two pages of vacancies in the theatre sector **Pages 42-43**

ISSN 0038-9099





## NEWS

# West Midlands to become home to UK's first National Centre for Musical Theatre

EXCLUSIVE MATTHEW HEMLEY

Plans to launch the UK's first National Centre for Musical Theatre have been revealed.

The centre, which would aim to "grow skills and training to help fill the national industry skills gap", is being planned for the West Midlands and developed as a joint initiative between Arts Council England, the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre Trust, Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Combined Authority and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

A business case is being drawn up by planning and consultancy firm Lichfields, alongside a report into where the project could be located.

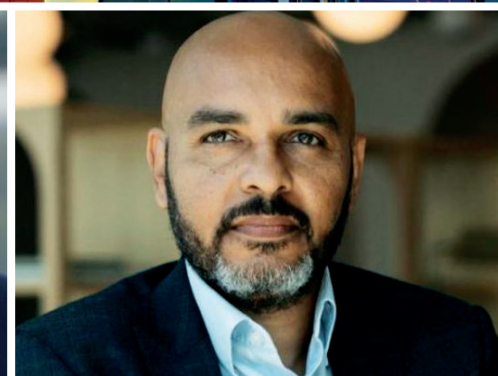
The partners said they were working together to "develop a first-class proposition" that would "stimulate economic growth, provide employment opportunities for young people from all backgrounds and help cement the UK's position as a leader in a thriving international music theatre market".

"The aim is to create world-leading musical theatre facilities, supporting a new generation of creatives and the desire for the West Midlands to become a region renowned for R&D in the creative industries," a joint statement said.

Plans for the centre follow Birmingham Hippodrome launching the UK's first in-house department dedicated to original musical theatre, aiming to make the venue the "UK's national theatre of new musicals".

Birmingham Hippodrome artistic director Jon Gilchrist said: "Our audience loves musical theatre, and of the 600,000 tickets we sell every year, more than half are for musicals. This partnership will work to harness the incredible creative talent of the West Midlands to make a genuine destination for the art form. We hope that one day soon our stages will be filled with the work of artistic talent developed here in Birmingham."

ACE chief executive Darren Henley said the UK had a "strong reputation for



**'This partnership will make a genuine destination for musicals'**  
Jon Gilchrist

creating and producing musicals that delight audiences across the country and around the globe".

"Birmingham's far-sighted plans for a new National Centre for Musical Theatre will help drive the growth of this important art form nationally and internationally, as well as nurturing the next generation of creative talent in the West Midlands," he added.

**'The centre will help drive the growth of this important art form'**  
Darren Henley

David Mba, vice-chancellor of Birmingham City University, said "bringing musical theatre education to Birmingham would mean nurturing even more creative talent in the West Midlands, helping the region meet the industry's skills gap and, in turn, harnessing the arts to power the region back towards prosperity".

**'Nurturing talent will help the region meet the industry's skills gap'**  
David Mba

"By bringing together the educational excellence of Royal Birmingham Conservatoire with the reputation of the Hippodrome, and the support of the Arts Council, City Council and West Midlands Combined Authority, we can make Midlands musical theatre into a force that will command attention nationally and internationally," he added.

## Acting & Theatre Arts Foundation Course

Affordable | High-Quality | Inclusive  
One year | Part-time

YOUNG  
ACTORS  
THEATRE



Apply now



70-72 Barnsbury Road,  
Islington N1 E0S

020 7278 2101  
www.yati.org.uk

## Zero-hours ban

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

intended to usher in the demise of zero-hours contracts, which the bill labelled "exploitative".

Although workers would be able to remain on zero-hours contracts if they prefer, Stafford warned that the move would still curtail zero-hours contract opportunities, with venues encouraged to facilitate guaranteed-hours agreements.

Speaking to The Stage, Stafford said the ban failed to recognise how zero-hours contracts function in the theatre industry, in which a high proportion of creatives work second jobs front of house, in the box office or at the bar in order to sustain a living.

"The suggestion that this way of working is exploitative undermines the benefits this flexible arrangement brings to thousands of people working in our sector," Stafford said.

"It is hard to see how this bill will not have a financial knock-on for theatres and producers at a time when we are continuing to grapple with managing increasing costs and sustaining our businesses."

Sofi Berenger, acting chief executive of London's King's Head Theatre, called for an exemption from a ban on zero-hours contracts for the arts, calling the contracts "vital to the ecology of the sector".

Meanwhile, Nicola Hurst, actor and front-of-house worker at Southwark Playhouse, said that while she agreed with Labour's principles, it was "short-sighted" to assume that banning zero-hours would benefit employees across all industries, saying that permanent contracts could never offer her the flexibility she needed to pursue her creative work.



# Vault team relaunches Waterloo venue in bid to ‘plug festival gap’

GEORGIA LUCKHURST

The former producers of the Vault Festival are to relaunch their Waterloo-based bar, cafe, and performance space the Glitch in a bid to make it the “most affordable venue” in London for fringe artists.

The Glitch is being relaunched as an enlarged 55-seat, in-the-round theatre, building on its current 30-seat offering, with the team behind it hoping to fill a gap left by the closure of the Vault Festival earlier this year after a new home for the event fell through.

The Glitch, run by Vault Creative Arts, has secured funding from the local council, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and central government to aid the transformation, with newly appointed artistic director and chief executive Oli Savage telling The Stage that the team would be staying true to the ambition of the Vault Festival by offering performance hire out at a 70/30 box-office split.

“We’re acutely aware of the loss represented by the festival, and we’re keen to plug that gap,” he said.

In addition, Vault Creative Arts has promised a new script development scheme, networking opportunities and the continuation of its residency programme to provide free rehearsal and performance space to young companies.

Savage explained that the Glitch would mirror the “enticing, vibrant, electric atmosphere” of the defunct Vault Festival all year round, presenting up to three shows each evening and maintaining the festival’s “pay less/pay more” scheme for audience members.

Upstairs, the building retains its bar, cafe and social area, with organisers also promising a “rethink” in programming strategy.

“The big thing with the Vault Festival was the quantity of opportunity – that’s why it had such a big impact on the industry. There was so much space in an affordable context for artists to throw spaghetti at the wall,” Savage explained.



“The priority for me was trying to find a way to deliver that same impact, all year round.”

In the new year, Savage hopes to publish a fresh callout for the Glitch’s residency programme, which currently supports more than 20 people. His script development ambitions, which follow a similar timeline, revolve around connecting early-career writers with actors, to workshop writing.

But programming for the spring season, currently in progress, is the first port of call, with applications closing on November 15. Savage said: “We’re open for expressions of interest and that’s the first way for people to get involved.”

“The headline is a combination of programming work with queer themes by queer creators, and we’re expecting that to make up maybe 50% of our work,” he continued. “But the Glitch is interested in a wide range of style, theme and concept. I want to make sure we have that representation but also that we’re presenting great work.”

## Mrs Doubtfire success gives owners of Shaftesbury bumper turnover

GEORGIA LUCKHURST

The owners of the Shaftesbury Theatre in London enjoyed a turnover of £26.2 million last year, a jump from 2022’s £17 million.

Theatre of Comedy Company Limited, founded by actor and director Ray Cooney, reported that its pre-tax profit rose from just over £1 million to £1.5 million over the same period – with the success of the Shaftesbury’s musicals repertoire partly credited for the leap.

In accounts filed to Companies House charting up to December 2023, the directors

of the Theatre of Comedy Company wrote that the venue was only left dark for five weeks of the year in the second financial quarter of 2023.

The business noted that 2023 was “the start of a new collaborative relationship” between the West End theatre and the producers of the 2023 musical Mrs Doubtfire, Jamie Wilson and Kevin McCollum.

That relationship, Theatre of Comedy Company directors wrote, resulted in “an agreement reached for the presentation of a range of musicals at the theatre for a set period beyond 2024”.

As previously reported by The Stage, the relationship means that Wilson will lead on programming the venue for the next decade.

Mrs Doubtfire, which is scheduled to run until April 2025, was approvingly recorded as a “popular” show in situ, while the company’s management “continues to build strong relationships within the industry” to ensure the Shaftesbury is occupied with other “high-quality productions”, the accounts said.

Approved by the board on October 7, the accounts paint a picture of a strong showing for the theatre’s owners.

Despite “competitive pressures from other theatre-owning groups in London”, the report stressed that the Theatre of Comedy Company is always on the lookout to “select the production we think is most suitable and likely of being successful”. After Mrs Doubtfire, the theatre will host musical Just for One Day.



Mrs Doubtfire the musical

In 1882, the great actor manager Sir Henry Irving founded the Actors’ Benevolent Fund with a promise to help actors, actresses and stage managers experiencing hardship due to accident, illness or old age.

Over a century later, the Fund remains true to that promise.

If you are in need of support please visit our website, or call us to find out about how the Fund might be able to help you. All enquiries are treated in the strictest confidence.  
020 7836 6378  
www.actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk

Registered charity number 206524



## NEWS

# ‘Hellish limbo’: Summerhall artists fear for money owed

FERGUS MORGAN

Dozens of producers, companies and artists that staged shows at Summerhall during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe have been left in limbo over money earned from ticket sales, after HMRC filed a winding-up petition against the venue over unpaid corporation tax.

Summerhall Management Ltd, the company that operates Summerhall, has taken legal action against the petition. It is currently unable to make payments worth hundreds of thousands of pounds to shows because of the HMRC action.

Playwright Laura Horton, whose play *Lynn Faces* ran at Summerhall during the fringe, told *The Stage* she was owed a share of box-office revenue of more than £15,000.

Commenting on the winding-up petition, Horton said: “I feel extremely anxious about what this means and the potential outcome.

“I don’t have expendable income, the fringe was a risk for me and I’d already lost some money, so this has the potential to impact my future work and financial stability.”

Another artist that performed at Summerhall in August but who wished to remain anonymous told *The Stage* they were owed more than £10,000 and had been left in “a pretty hellish limbo”.

They said: “It’s an enormous amount of money and there’s no way I can settle any outstanding fees myself in the short term.”

Summerhall is in the process of being sold by owners Oesselmann Estate Ltd, with responsibility for running its artistic programme being taken over by Summerhall Arts, a new charity separate from Summerhall Management.

The complex structure of the fringe, which involves multiple box offices, means income earned through ticket sales sits with several different parties.

Sam Gough, chief executive of Summerhall Arts, which is liaising with artists over the payments, said: “Money from tickets bought through our box office is in our bank account. Money from tickets sold through the Fringe Society is in its bank account.

“We are working as fast as we can with our lawyers and the Fringe Society to ring-fence and safeguard both of those things, and get all of this fixed, so that we can pay out the box-office money that is due to companies by the end of October.”

In a statement, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society said: “We have been in close contact with the management team at Summerhall to offer our support and better understand what implications this may have for artists.

“We recognise that this news will be concerning for fringe artists, and our artist services team is here to support any participant who may be affected.”

## James Brining named artistic director of Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum Theatre

FERGUS MORGAN

James Brining has been appointed artistic director and co-chief executive of Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum Theatre.

Brining, who is currently artistic director of Leeds Playhouse, will take over from David Greig in April 2025.

Brining said: “It has been a huge honour to have been a custodian of Leeds Playhouse, rooted in the city and the region I was brought up in and care about deeply.”

He continued: “I am very proud of all that has been achieved but I am ready for a new challenge, and I am thrilled to be returning to a place I love.”

Before his current role at Leeds Playhouse, Brining was artistic director and chief executive of Dundee Rep from 2003 until 2012 and, prior to that, artistic director of the Glasgow-based company TAG from 1997 until 2003.

During his time at Dundee Rep, he commissioned and directed the world premiere of *The Proclaimers* musical *Sunshine on Leith*.

Brining has also served as chair of the Federation of Scottish Theatre and as a founding trustee of the Playwrights’ Studio Scotland.

Brining said: “I have seen some incredible work at the Lyceum over the past 30 years and it is such a privilege

to have the opportunity to lead such an important Scottish and UK theatre in its next chapter.

“While I am aware of the current challenges the sector is facing, I am hugely optimistic about the opportunities to create fantastic and meaningful work in this beautiful and iconic space and beyond.”

Outgoing artistic director Greig said: “James has the skills, experience and boldness we need. I can’t wait to see what his plans are.”

He added: “I look forward to supporting him and the Lyceum as an audience member, an artist and a Lyceum fan for the years ahead.”

## Theatre leaders call for overhaul of all-white male boards

KATIE CHAMBERS

Theatre figures including Talawa Theatre boss Carolyn Forsyth and Tamasha artistic director Pooja Ghai have hit out at “hierarchical” theatre governance by predominantly white male boards.

Speaking at an event at London’s Royal Court, at which the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama launched its research into post-pandemic-lockdown theatre, Forsyth issued a provocation to attendees to “google the top organisations, their leadership and their funders”.

“We need to call a spade a spade,” the executive director and joint chief executive of Talawa Theatre said, adding: “Who’s important? Who decides what gets funding? They all look the same. Front of house is often very diverse, and then you go up to middle management and it’s not too bad. But then you get to senior leadership, executives and the board, and the colour, the disabilities – they disappear.”

She called for an upheaval of “top-down” governance by demographically homogenous boards, which she said often did not include artists, declaring theatre’s current leadership structures “not fit for purpose”.

Ghai echoed Forsyth’s critique when questioning the panel, which saw Forsyth in conversation about governance with Central academic Louise Owen and Playwrights’ Studio Scotland creative director Louise Stephens.

Ghai said: “So much of our governance and our funders is white-led and predominantly male. Power doesn’t look like me. We need to think about how our boards not only get more money in, but also about programming and representation.”

Ghai also hit out at a culture of censorship in the sector at large, alluding to boards’ culpability.

### ALSO ONLINE

Private investment in the arts could be “unlocked” after the creative industries were identified as one of eight “growth-driving sectors” in the government’s new industrial strategy. Labour’s strategy, entitled *Invest 2035: The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy*, aims to attract international money.

A report commissioned by Laidlaw Opera Trust into public perceptions of opera has found that although audiences deemed it an impressive and timeless art form, opera is “consistently” considered “expensive, exclusive and pompous”.

Arts Council England has acknowledged the insufficient consideration it gave to education and access initiatives – as well as “limited” audience data – in its analysis of UK opera earlier this year. But despite “extreme” funding pressures, it insisted there was still a sector-wide appetite for new approaches in the medium.

The public is a step closer to seeing the theatre where Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is believed to have debuted, thanks to the completion of an east London museum. Four centuries after the Elizabethan Curtain Playhouse staged its final plays, the theatre’s archeological remains are nearly ready to go on show.

A historic South Wales entertainment venue has staved off immediate closure. Blackwood Miners’ Institute has resumed bookings for January shows, as Caerphilly County Borough Council confirmed it would no longer be mothballing the building to make savings as soon as December this year.

### APPOINTMENTS

Director and producer James Dacre has been appointed chair of Theatre503 in London. He will take up the post at the end of November, succeeding Erica Whyman, who is stepping down after a decade.

Pembrokeshire’s Torch Theatre chief executive Benjamin Lloyd has stepped down after five years at the helm. He used his parting words to appeal to the government to protect the creative industries.



# Central School proposes voluntary redundancies amid sector challenges

GEORGIA LUCKHURST

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama is consulting staff on a proposed voluntary redundancy scheme, admitting the next few years look “increasingly challenging”.

The north London drama school said there was no “set target” for applications to the severance programme, but told *The Stage* it “must work to reduce its cost base” to ensure its “financial sustainability”.

Like universities and conservatoires across the country, Central, which employs 240 permanent staff members, is feeling the pinch – with a representative saying it anticipated a further rise in staffing and operational costs.

The school’s redundancy plans come against the backdrop of a dire state of higher-educational finances, attributed to factors including the freezing of tuition fees in 2017, a fall in foreign student numbers and the wider economic situation, which, in recent years, has experienced rampant inflation.



*The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama*

A spokesperson for Central said the school was not immune to this context, explaining: “The educational landscape is constantly evolving and, like

many institutions, Central is navigating a challenging sector environment.

“With staffing and operational costs projected to rise further, the next few years are going to be increasingly challenging for the sector.

“Central is in the fortunate position of being able to build on the foundations of its excellence in teaching and research, but the school must work to reduce its cost base to protect and ensure its financial sustainability for the short, medium and long term.”

They continued: “The decision to consult on a proposed voluntary severance scheme has not been taken lightly and is only one part of Central’s strategic response to the challenges ahead.”

The scheme, including its terms, is currently under consultation with staff and unions.

If agreed, it would be made available to all eligible staff from across the school. It would not be limited to any specific departments.

Asked whether compulsory redundancies could follow, the spokesperson clarified: “At the moment, the school is only exploring voluntary severance.

“This is being explored alongside other cost-saving measures and without a set target for applications to the scheme.”

In recent months, several higher-education institutions across the country have made cuts to their departments – with reductions often concentrated in the arts and creative subjects.

Universities including Surrey, Kent, Goldsmiths and Queen Mary University of London have reeled from restructuring, while leaders in the sector have warned that the funding crisis could even imperil the stability of the creative industries themselves.

Founded in 1906 by voice pioneer Elsie Fogerty, Central counts the likes of John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier among its alumni and is a member of both Conservatoires UK and the Federation of Drama Schools.

## Rose Bruford boss: Maintaining audition fees means only the privileged will be able to train

GEORGIA LUCKHURST

Rose Bruford College principal Randall Whittaker has criticised drama schools that continue to charge audition fees, saying they are working only to “preserve the status quo”.

Whittaker, principal and chief executive of the Greater London school, said: “My biggest fear is that if we don’t all work together and tackle these barriers, this training will become for people who can afford it.”

Speaking following the installation of Rose Bruford’s new president, Ray Fearon, Whittaker told *The Stage* that one of his first moves upon joining the school in September 2023 had been to remove audition fees for undergraduate courses.

But when asked his opinion of Equity’s campaign to abolish the practice of charging applicants, he said change was “too slow” to take place.

Where other schools, including the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, have defended audition fees, Whittaker said: “If only people who can afford this come [to drama schools], we will hear the same accents, we will see the same faces. That’s not entertainment.”

The principal, who was previously pro-vice-chancellor at Leeds Arts University and studied music at conservatoires in South Africa, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, also called on leaders

of institutions including his own to “sit together” and have “frank discussions” about their expectations of students.

Whittaker continued: “We do need a paradigm shift. The world has moved on and I really think this idea of intensive drama training or performing arts training where we quantify intensity with teaching hours is something I struggle with.

“What happens to those students who have to work? We are in a cost-of-living crisis.

“Many of my students have to work and they find it very difficult to balance the two. There are students with caring responsibilities and those with family needs. Thirty hours in the studio is a lot to ask.”

He suggested that, in the six specialist institutions he had worked in, he had seen a potential “link between the intensity of training with the demand for student support services, counselling and hardship”.

Whittaker admitted that he did not have the answers to what comprehensive performing arts training could look like, but said now was the time to reimagine the structure currently in place.

Rose Bruford celebrated the installation of Fearon on October 9. The actor, who has performed at theatres including the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National, succeeds novelist and fellow Rose Bruford graduate Bernardine Evaristo.

**Do you work on stage,  
backstage, front of house,  
on camera,  
behind camera?**

**Are you unable to work due  
to illness or injury?**

**Are you in financial  
difficulties?**

**If you have answered yes to all of these  
questions and have worked professionally  
in the entertainment industry for seven years,  
contact The Royal Theatrical Fund**

**The Royal  
Theatrical  
Fund**

**www.trtf.com  
020 7836 3322  
admin@trtf.com**

Reg Charity 222080





## COMMENT

ALISTAIR SMITH  
EDITOREditor's  
ViewEmployers need  
greater input  
into training

If you are a young person who wants a career in theatre, how do you choose the right training pathway for you? The options are seemingly endless: there are numerous drama schools offering an ever-increasing range of courses; there are non-specialist universities offering performance degrees; many performers and other theatre workers have got into the business studying non-performance degrees and making student theatre on the side; for technical and other offstage careers, there are apprenticeships; although rarer today than it once was, you might even be able to learn on the job.

As Giverny Masso explores (pages 30-31), once you've decided which of these routes might suit you, it can then be difficult to decide on whether the course you think you want to pursue is actually any good. Is it properly preparing you for the career you want to have?

This is where I think we would benefit from turning the telescope around and looking at our initial question from a different perspective: how do employers know whether the training on offer to students is right for them? I would suggest that at the moment, they don't.

Since the demise of Drama UK in 2016 and the closure of Creative and Cultural Skills in 2023, the link between employers and the training sector has almost vanished.

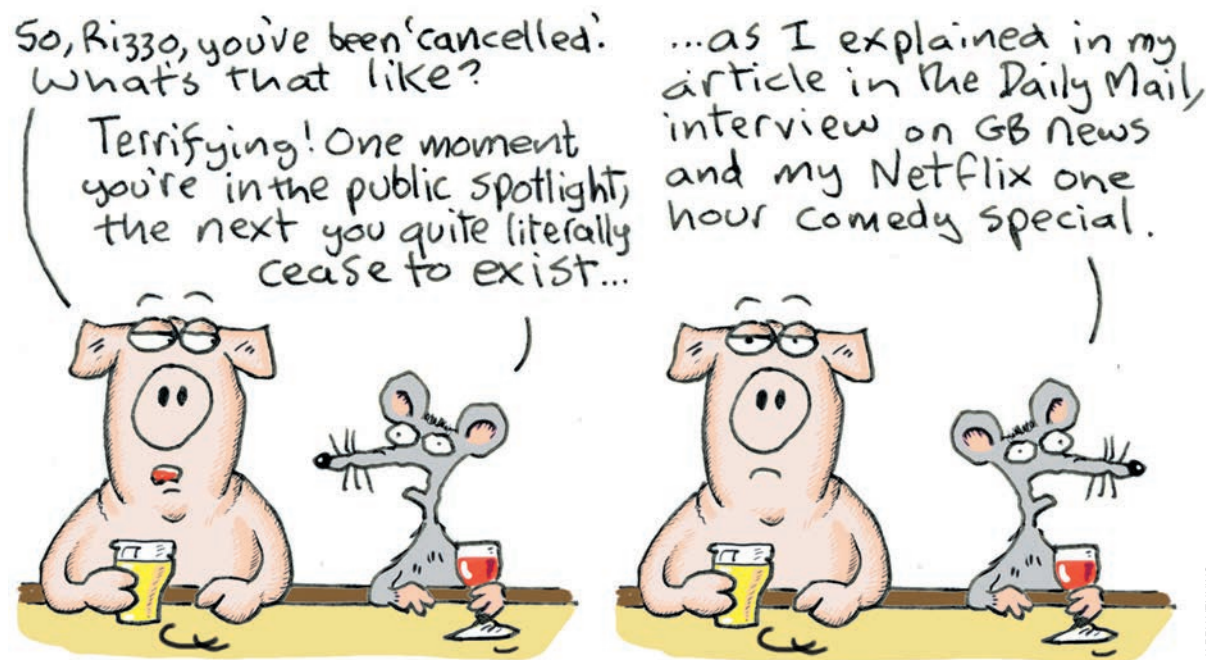
Yes, it's important that students choose the right pathway for them; but – assuming they are looking for a career in theatre – that is only a sensible approach if all the courses are fit for purpose for employers.

As our Long Read (pages 12-14) points out, there are significant skills gaps within theatre that need filling. One would hope the training sector might produce a new generation of talent to help fill them. But there is also a less optimistic outcome: training institutions produce the wrong types of graduates, the skills gaps remain and the graduates struggle to find employment. This is the worst of all worlds and it could happen even if the government is successful in reintroducing an appetite for arts education at primary and secondary level.

At the moment, there is no coherent, coordinated way for employers across theatre and the wider entertainment industries to tell drama schools (and other training providers) what they want and then ensure they deliver it. Even with apprenticeships, which are employer-driven, there is little sector-wide coordination. Employers design apprenticeship schemes (some of them excellent) to address their own needs, not those of the industry more generally.

There is an urgent need for a coordinated strategy – maybe even a dedicated organisation – to ensure that theatre makes the most of the new government's stated desire for the creative industries to be at the heart of its industrial strategy.

## HAMLET



HARRY VENNING

## YOUR VIEWS

Arts funding system needs  
root-and-branch review

The State of the Arts report on government spending on the arts ('UK arts sector running on empty', July 25, p1) makes grim reading and with the fiscal straitjacket the Labour government has inherited it will inexorably worsen unless a national plan is developed from the cradle to the grave. The entire arts funding system has to be closely examined with some tough decisions being made in prioritising what is required to enable a national plan for the arts replete with art-form policies.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's administration and research expenditure in 2010/11 was £49.8 million rising to £82 million in 2022/23, a rise of 64%, yet the Bank of England's inflation calculator shows the rise should have been 48%. Arts Council England did well in the same period and kept its increase in overheads to 19%.

There has been a 49% increase in the number of national portfolio organisations since 2015. The use of Lottery money to fund NPOs started in the 2012-15 ACE funding round with £54 million. In the 2015-18 funding round, £180 million of Lottery funding was used. In the latest funding round this has risen to £326 million. This reduces the funds available to individuals and organisations who do not have NPO status. These are some of the anomalies in the present state of affairs that only a root-and-branch review of the entire funding system could resolve. Tough decisions.

Another example, tax relief is going to high-end commercial companies. Perhaps these monies should be used elsewhere in the funding system where the need is greatest – education, small-scale venues, touring, etc.

The arts funding system lives in the bounded rationality of the past with the result that in the last funding round, 2023/24, 49% of the music allocation went to opera, 24% to classical music, 0.4% to folk music, 0.5% to brass bands and 2% to jazz.

Chris Hodgkins

Email address supplied

Is it time to abolish  
Arts Council England?

With reference to your story about the government's review of Arts Council England ('Lisa Nandy plans wider review of arts funding', September 19, p2), why not abolish ACE and save the administration costs? Let the Department for Culture, Media and Sport give out the grants. It is after all government money. ACE was always popular with ministers.

If there was a complaint about a local art gallery or theatre (nudity, bad language) they could always hide behind the arms-length principle. Surely we've moved on from those days.

Geoffrey Rowe

Via thestage.co.uk

Don't overplay the DCMS'  
role in Theatre Tax Relief

Your story 'Shake-up of arts decision-making needed by government – SOLT co-chief' (October 3, p5) overplays the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's role in Theatre Tax Relief. It was the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre's direct lobbying of the Treasury, and George Osborne's enthusiastic support, that led to TTR's implementation. In turn, it was thanks to Osborne, as well as Peter Bazalgette's support as chair of Arts Council England, that it was extended to Orchestra Tax Relief. The DCMS was a bystander.

Mark Pemberton

Via thestage.co.uk

## Congrats to Lisa Spirling

Congratulations to Lisa Spirling on her appointment as Stratford East artistic director (October 3, p4) and for the work she achieved at Theatre503. Quite a moving of the chairs in the last few months and notable that the ADs of the National, Young Vic and Stratford East are now all women. A big change from when I started reviewing in the mid-1980s.

Carole Woddis

Via thestage.co.uk

It's good to hear this positive news regarding Stratford East, where I retain fond memories of the great days of many an exhilarating play written and directed by the late Ken Hill himself!

Geoff Beresford

Via thestage.co.uk

Email your views to  
alistair@thestage.co.uk

Please mark your email as  
'for publication'. The Stage reserves  
the right to edit letters for publication.

X (Twitter): @TheStage  
Facebook: facebook.com/thestage





LYN GARDNER

As Rufus Norris announced his final season at the National Theatre, he talked in an interview about working 90-hour weeks and his intention to spend a year away from London “to try and recalibrate, get my creative energy back”. I wish him well, but it does feel as if there is something not right with British theatre when you need a year off to recover from the stresses of a leadership role, even a very significant one.

From his earliest fringe days with Wink Productions, Norris has been an intriguing theatremaker and even he would probably admit that he hasn't done his own best creative work while running the NT. The tension between being an artist and an administrator has always existed for artistic directors, but they are now often running diversified businesses with large turnovers.

# Is it time for theatre to rethink its hierarchical artistic director model?

It is 40 years since theatre started internalising the language of Thatcherism and it is now a hugely difficult climate in which the industry is operating. Being consistently at the top of your artistic game is a big ask. In 21st-century theatre, everyone's art gets less attention than it demands.

I suspect that when George Devine ran the Royal Court in the 1950s, he had much more time to concentrate on art and artists and had to spend far less time on accountancy than current artistic director David Byrne. Every era has its challenges, but as Erica Whyman – who last year stepped down as the Royal Shakespeare Company's acting artistic director – observed not long ago, it has never been tougher to be a theatre leader. “Some artistic directors are worn out from facing these [constant] new challenges,” she said. “I think we will see some people stepping away from that, as they might want just to be artists and create work of their own.”

Lynette Linton's impending departure from London's Bush Theatre may be an indication of that. She has had a hugely successful run, but despite great reviews and ringing tills, the theatre has faced the same significant external pressures around reduced funding and rising fixed costs that all venues are facing. Where, you might ask, is the appeal of running a larger, potentially

even more demanding venue for someone like Linton if it limits the amount of time she can spend actually making theatre?

Artistic models are in a rum place, and in some theatres it is hard to know who is really running them. Listen, I am a huge Alan Cumming fan, and his appointment as artistic director of Pitlochry Festival Theatre will deliver plenty of sparkle, potential sponsorship and, I hope, some talented friends directing and performing, but is he really going to be running the theatre on a nitty-gritty, day-to-day basis? I doubt it.

Norris acknowledged that it is easy to get addicted to the pressure of running the NT, but surely at such a large organisation – and at most big venues – the leadership model needs to evolve so the pressure is shared across departments and teams and doesn't just fall on the increasingly weary shoulders of a few people at the top?

The buck, of course, has to stop somewhere (something Manchester's Royal Exchange doesn't seem to have grasped after the *Midsummer Night's Dream* debacle) but too often, artistic directors end up scapegoated. Is there a better, more supportive role for boards in helping to spread the burden of management?

There seems to be a peculiar imbalance in the way leadership and governance are playing out in British theatre of late, where

leaders either emerge from their jobs on their knees and exhausted, or find themselves squeezed out by highly strung boards before having had a chance to create the change that their appointments heralded.

Last week's Clore Leadership report, entitled *Imagine it Different: Interventions for Change*, offers a worrying snapshot of just how hard it is to lead in the arts. Based on 356 face-to-face interviews and 426 online responses, it found 87% of those surveyed felt under increasing external pressures – even “under siege and overwhelmed”.

Theatre leaders are trapped in survival mode, according to Clore Leadership chair Moira Sinclair, who asked if the sector, with its hierarchical structures, really does have the capacity to “imagine it different”.

It is a crucial question that, as Sinclair highlights, requires thinking around governance and why we “rely on more traditional, hierarchical leadership styles... with ‘leader-led’ solutions, rather than calling on teams for support and recognis[ing] the assets they might hold”.

If, as she suggests, “in the wider world, leaders seem to be more willing to embrace internal collaborations to solve issues”, theatre should also be looking beyond its own models to seek new ways of working.

Visit: [thestage.co.uk/author-lyn-gardner](https://thestage.co.uk/author-lyn-gardner)



DAVID BENEDICT

He was many things, but a playwright was none of them. You don't have to trust me on the subject of novelist Henry James and the theatre. Colm Tóibín's fact-based, multi-award-winning novel *The Master* begins with the damagingly public failure of James' 1895 play *Guy Domville* at London's St James' Theatre – where, only a month later, Wilde's greatest play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, would open to rave reviews.

Indeed, the word that best describes the opening night's curtain call, with James beside producer and lead actor George Alexander, is “ignominious”. As James wrote to his brother: “All the forces of civilisation in the house waged a battle of the most gallant, prolonged and sustained applause with the

# Beware trying to adapt a masterpiece

hoots and jeers and catcalls of the roughs, whose roars (like those of a cage of beasts at some infernal ‘zoo’) were only exacerbated (as it were) by the conflict.”

But these days, James' reputation is not confined to the page. His novels have achieved fresh life in adaptation. Michael Redgrave adapted *The Aspern Papers* for the stage and Ismail Merchant and James Ivory made films of three of his novels *The Europeans*, *The Bostonians* and *The Golden Bowl*. But his most often revitalised work is his masterpiece of ambiguity, the extraordinarily chilling novella *The Turn of the Screw*, which last week resurfaced in a new production by English National Opera.

Benjamin Britten's opera, with a libretto by Myfanwy Piper, is an exceedingly rare phenomenon. For all the expressiveness of the music, what Britten and Piper wrote is not simply a version, it's fully dramatic. Numerous unimaginative adaptations of novels deliver nothing but the narrative retold – a plot, as it were, on legs – but this is a work of art in its own right.

It isn't just Piper's words that capture James' compellingly queasy, quasi-ghost story, which itself is startlingly short of dialogue. Echoing the fact that the novella originally appeared in weekly parts, the two-act opera is tightly structured into 16 scenes of mounting tension, each preceded by an orchestral variation on an eerie theme shared between 13 musicians.

In other words, it's faithful but utterly reimagined, an approach at the heart of all truly great adaptations.

It is not the only time that this has happened with James' story. It inspired Alejandro Amenábar to write, compose the score and direct the fascinating Nicole Kidman film *The Others*, a horror film of rare subtlety. Even better, in 1961 Jack Clayton and cinematographer Freddie Francis made the black-and-white *The Innocents*, a flat-out gothic masterpiece. If you've not seen it, close the curtains, turn out the lights and stream it immediately.

**Faithful but utterly reimagined – this is the approach at the heart of all great adaptations**

Not that all this discourages anyone with an eye for adapting known properties. But even giant TV stars Mary Tyler Moore and Richard Chamberlain couldn't save the Broadway musical of Truman Capote's masterful *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – so bad that producer David Merrick closed it in preview. *Lestat* – Elton John and Bernie Taupin's musical of Anne Rice's bestsellers *The Vampire Chronicles* – closed after 39 performances on Broadway. In 2006,

the ill-advised musical of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* managed only 13.

The key to adaptation is that what defines a masterpiece is content being realised within, crucially, its perfect form. That's why the chances of turning something perfect into another masterpiece are so slim. When taking a pre-existing property for the stage, it's far wiser to find something that, in its original form, doesn't quite work.

Timberlake Wertenbaker and director Max Stafford-Clark took Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker*, about convicts staging a play in Australia in 1789, and put it on stage in *Our Country's Good*. Winningly, they gave it what the novel lacked and the reader craved in a story about the power of drama: living and breathing performance.

Musical producers too often think the route to success is simply taking a title and adding songs. The prosecution calls the poleaxingly dreadful musical of Rebecca. Although, to be fair, maybe they thought they were on to a winner since Hitchcock had turned Daphne du Maurier's mystery masterpiece into a masterpiece of its own.

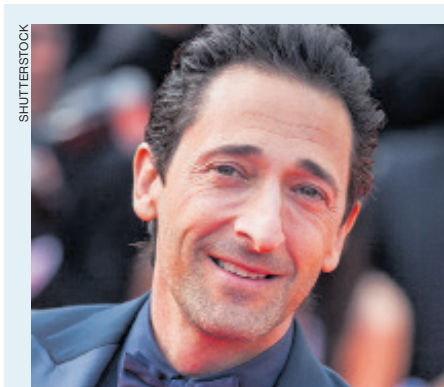
One of my other favourite translations is *Legally Blonde*. On screen it was splendid, silly fun. On stage, with an outstanding Sheridan Smith, it was even more sassy and snappy. But elsewhere, *The Turn of the Screw* to one side, I'm issuing an edict: when it comes to adaptation, leave masterpieces alone.

Visit: [thestage.co.uk/author-david-benedict](https://thestage.co.uk/author-david-benedict)



THE WEEK IN THEATRE

QUOTE UNQUOTE



**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

**“Theatre, you’re living in the attic and you’re working in the basement, and you don’t leave and nobody brings you lunch. You go out and you’ll get a sandwich at Tesco, and you munch it down and try to absorb all this material and try to represent so much. And you’re with 10 other people doing the same and it is quite wonderful.”**

**Actor Adrien Brody, star of The Fear of 13, on how theatre differs from film (review, p15) (Guardian)**

“We’re very fortunate to have the University [of St Andrews] support. But we also need to recognise that we’re part of a bigger ecosystem. We rely on touring productions, which are facing their own funding challenges.”

**Julie Ellen, director of the Byre Theatre in St Andrews (Courier)**

“The world was closed. We couldn’t see anyone, go anywhere. Theatre then, of course, would be especially dangerous. Live entertainment – alive entertainment – was dead; what we saw on our screens was old. Nothing was now anymore, nothing was fresh. The act of putting on a play for a group of assembled people, to communicate a story in live time, was outlawed.”

**Playwright Edward Carey on writing his new novel, about a woman trapped in a theatre, during the pandemic (Big Issue)**

“I’m very curious to see how people react to it, because it’s close enough to the original movie so that people can feel comfortable. And far enough so people don’t feel betrayed. I’m dancing on a thin line.”

**Director Mathieu Kassovitz on turning classic French film La Haine into a musical (New York Times)**

“That’s what’s so difficult to explain to young people who want to be actors: they are probably very good, but that’s not the point. It’s not a meritocracy. It’s totally subjective. And you need an enormous amount of luck to land a role that will help you progress.”

**Actor Mark Strong (Times)**

“I didn’t feel constrained by gender or anything, and it felt very personal. I’ve been closer to ‘me’ playing Shakespeare than any part whose outer trappings are more similar to my real ones. If it’s sort of ‘enter a tall dark woman with a waspish sense of humour and tweed suit’, then, you know, it’s confining.”

**Actor Harriet Walter on playing men in Shakespeare (Financial Times)**

“It’s funny – it’s almost like anything I did prior to Emily people forget... I did theatre as a kid, so it was in me already. I knew I wanted to do it. The West End was the thing in my head; my dad [musician Phil Collins] had done it. I grew up going to shows in the West End. I just loved it so much.”

**Emily in Paris star Lily Collins on performing in the West End (Telegraph)**

**Top stories online**

- 1. Exclusive: UK’s first National Centre for Musical Theatre revealed
- 2. The Fear of 13 review
- 3. Exclusive: Turbine Theatre to close blaming ‘lack of investment and philanthropy’
- 4. Central School floats voluntary redundancies amid sector challenges
- 5. Royal Exchange front-of-house staff lose weeks of pay following cancellation

FROM OUR ARCHIVE



**25 YEARS AGO (OCTOBER 21, 1999)**

This week 25 years ago, we reviewed the UK premiere of *The Lion King* at London’s Lyceum.

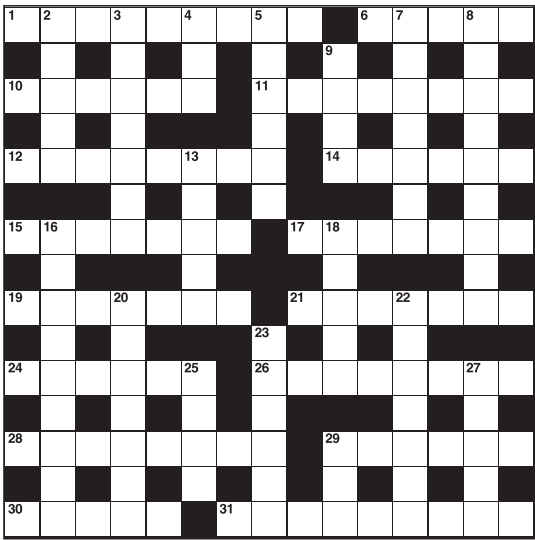
“Though I am not predisposed in favour of those managements which think that because their customers can afford to pay £30 or £40 for a seat they will also take happily to spending £2 on a can of Coke and forking out large sums on merchandise, I have to admit that this stage version of the Disney animated film is a spectacular delight,” said our critic Peter Hepple. “For this, we have chiefly to thank the director Julie Taymor. There are no animatronics here. The animals are played by actors and dancers... Most of the speaking characters... are played by actors...”

“Josette Bushell-Mingo, playing Rafiki..., speaking an African language... is made up as a multicoloured baboon for her role as narrator and mover-on of a plot so slight it could be written on the back of an envelope.

“Richard Hudson, himself born in Zimbabwe, has designed wondrous settings redolent of African plains with hints of mountains and jungle, all bathed in Donald Holder’s superb lighting. The overall movement by Garth Fagan is hugely convincing, the impressive, occasional dance sequences naturalistic and exciting... Here is something that has genuine Broadway attack, but is influenced by other cultures.

“Not so, alas, the story, adapted by Roger Allers and Irene Mecchi from the screenplay in which Mecchi also had a part, or the songs by Elton John and Tim Rice... But there is musical joy in the unaccompanied African singing arranged by Lebo M, which has an authenticity that the rest of the score lacks...”

**For more from The Stage Archive, visit thestage.co.uk/archive-virtual**



CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- 1 1960 film starring Kirk Douglas and Jean Simmons (9)
  - 6 A Coffin in \_\_\_, Horton Foote play (5)
  - 10 Cuisine similar to Cajun featured in Robert E Sherwood’s Small War on Murray Hill (6)
  - 11 Playwright Peter Božić’s country (8)
  - 12 The Fever \_\_\_, Alexis Zegerman play (8)
  - 14 Granville-Barker play (6)
  - 15 \_\_\_ Lincoln, John Drinkwater play (7)
  - 17 Early sci-fi writer on whose work the stage play War of the Worlds is based (1,1,5)
  - 19 Georgia’s capital (7)
  - 21 Sleepless in Seattle star (3,4)

- 24 \_\_\_ Grammer, Frasier star (6)
  - 26 Former resident of Belgrade, Skopje or Zagreb, eg (8)
  - 28 Magical symbol of Earth (8)
  - 29 Blithe \_\_\_, comic play by Noël Coward (6)
  - 30 Friend of Porthos and Aramis (5)
  - 31 Veined cheese from Dorset (4,5)
- DOWN**
- 2 \_\_\_ Grainger, Australian composer and pianist (5)
  - 3 Cwm \_\_\_, Welsh hymn tune (7)
  - 4 At Her \_\_\_, Eve Merriam play (3)
  - 5 \_\_\_ American, David Ireland play (6)
  - 7 Valley south of Fort William (4,3)
  - 8 \_\_\_, Queen of the Desert, jukebox musical (9)
  - 9 Christopher Shinn play (4)
  - 13 \_\_\_ Baby, John Patrick play (5)

- 16 Christian fundamentalist area of the US (5,4)
- 18 Stephen \_\_\_, playwright (5)
- 20 Kingdom within South Africa (7)
- 22 The Barber of Seville composer (7)
- 23 Grease high school (6)
- 25 Youth hostel organisation (inits) (4)
- 27 1979 sci-fi thriller starring Sigourney Weaver (5)
- 29 Revolt. \_\_\_ Said. Revolt Again, Alice Birch play (3)

**Find last week’s answers on p47**

Complete this interactive crossword on The Stage app. Download the app for free – print and digital subscribers get full access.



H A R C U S  
P A R K E R

## Commercial Card Claim

# Your business could be owed ££££

## Find out more – Join the claim

[commercialcardclaim.co.uk](https://commercialcardclaim.co.uk)

Mastercard and Visa are unlawfully overcharging businesses for accepting card payments on commercial cards. You can join the claim if your business has received payments from customers using commercial cards anytime between 6 June 2016 and 6 June 2022.

The claim is being led by Marcus Parker, a specialist litigation firm with deep experience of running collective actions. The claim is fully funded and insured, meaning no cost and no risk to you should you choose to join.

GET INTO  
THEATRE

Get Into Theatre is the **essential** theatre careers website to help **all young people** discover the **opportunities available** and the ways to pursue a successful career in theatre

[getintothetheatre.org](https://getintothetheatre.org)

Generously supported by

Andrew  
Lloyd  
Webber  
Foundation



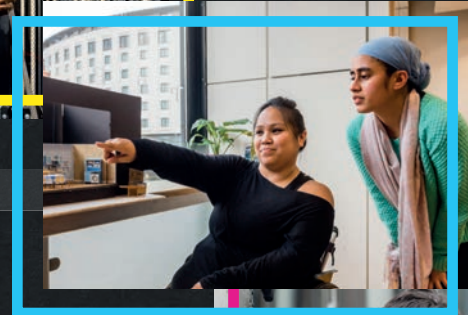
SOCIETY OF  
LONDON  
THEATRE  
EST 1908

UK  
THEATRE  
EST 1894

THE STAGE



Supported using public funding by  
ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND





## OPINION Where to train



CAM HARLE

# What should I look for when choosing a drama school?

When selecting a place to study, consider more than just your course. Chances for interdisciplinary collaboration, work placements and networking will be key for your future, says **Josette Bushell-Mingo** of the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

**L**ike all principals and vice chancellors, I'm bracing myself for an exciting and challenging academic year. Alongside the welcome return of our continuing students is a new cohort at the start of their journey with us.

Choosing where to train – the theme of this issue of The Stage – is a pivotal decision for any aspiring practitioner. This is a personal letter to you – and with two sons of my own going through the same process in the arts in Sweden, I am biased.

Every student is choosing not just a building, but a whole community of students, teachers, staff and graduates. They are choosing a life path. They are choosing an environment where, hopefully, they can find balance and the confidence to be tested; where they can feel brave enough to take risks and to make mistakes, to learn from those mistakes and to grow. To build networks and to develop skills that they will bring with them throughout their career – whatever that career looks like and wherever it may take them – whether as a performer, a director, a designer, a producer or a film-maker; or perhaps in education, biochemistry, agriculture or healthcare.

But what should you look for if you're just starting to explore your options? Above all, you must find an institution that resonates with you – with your aspirations and values.

**'Every institution has its unique selling point. Find the one that feels most aligned with who you are and where you want to go'**

Attend open days. If you're coming to the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, we offer support to eligible applicants through a travel bursary to assist with these costs. We believe the best way to get to know who we are and what we stand for is to come and meet us – spend time in the building, walk through the campus, explore the surrounding area and speak with staff and students. Every institution has its own unique selling point and you must find the one that feels the most aligned with who you are now – and with where you want to go.

Visit as many training institutions as you can. Attend productions and showcases. Speak with current students, staff and graduates. Ask questions, even the tough ones – especially the tough ones.

### See the bigger picture

Find out about all the different courses on offer, not just the one you intend to pursue. Your peers across the disciplines will be your colleagues as you train and will make up your professional networks in the future. Take advantage of the learning opportunities available through cross-course collaboration. Interdisciplinary work will expand your understanding of your craft and will make you more adaptable and versatile as a practitioner.

Enquire about postgraduate offerings as well, and especially about any research that is taking place. This work is innovative and drives progress. Engaging with it during your training will sharpen your critical thinking and help to keep you ahead of the curve.

Ask about existing links to industry. Does the training environment mirror what you'll encounter in a professional setting? Will you have access to industry professionals, whether through guest lectures and workshops or



PATRICK BALDWIN

Students at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

through placement opportunities? Strong industry links will enhance your employment prospects after graduation and provide you with mentorship and guidance beyond your course.

Learn about the support that's available, from counselling, neurodiversity and disability services to personal tutors and a robust students' union. Going to

## COLUMN

# When exactly do you become an 'advanced' lighting designer?

**ROB HALLIDAY** LIGHTING DESIGNER



This column started as a conversation with lighting designer Emma Chapman, who is the latest in what has been quite a distinguished line of people asked to write a book on 'advanced lighting design'. But what exactly does that mean? Who exactly is it pitched at? Without knowing the answers to those questions, it was hard to answer a third: what exactly should it contain?

In our chat, we approached it in reverse: if we couldn't identify what advanced lighting

design was, could we figure out what it wasn't? Beginners, playing with light for the first time? Not them. There are already plenty of books explaining first principles and providing step-by-step instructions.

Get beyond that and your needs change. You don't want direction, but you do want hints, suggestions, ideas to crib, plans to copy. There are lots of books like this, too, although it's interesting how it's harder to decode a designer's intent from a modern plan full of moving lights compared with an older one where each conventional light had a clear direction, colour and purpose.

Eventually, with enough practice, you let go of other people's thoughts, opinions

and suggestions. You trust your eye, trust your judgement and stride out on your own unencumbered by the opinion of others, unafraid of making bold choices (but with enough experience to row back if they turn out not to work). That (plus some experience in the politics of show lighting) is surely an advanced lighting designer. In fact, is that not the very definition of any artist in any field: following your own vision.

Of course, if you're trying to write a book on the subject, it's a problem to discover that your target audience no longer needs to read about what they're doing!

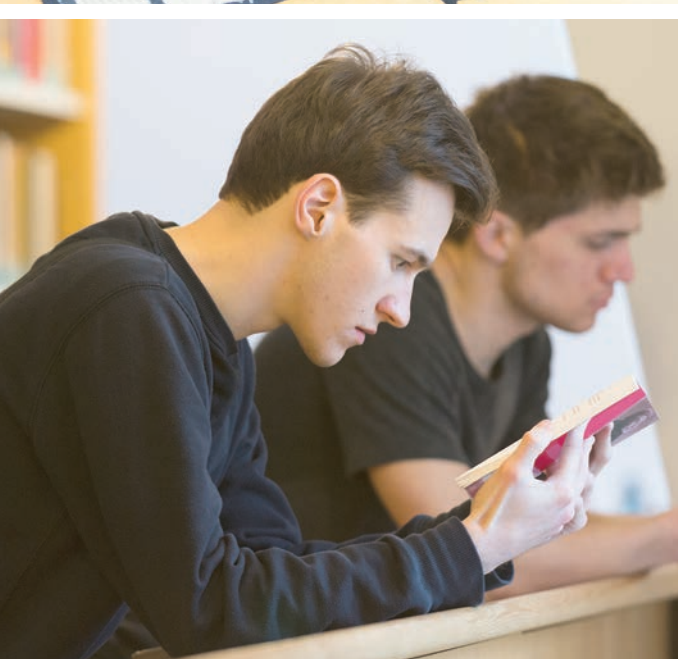
But might there be a little sliver just before that point? You don't want ideas, but you do sometimes want just a little reassurance. That it is okay to do *this* when convention suggests *that*. That it is fine to trust your instinct over others' opinions.

So that's where the book ultimately headed. We realised the key was the

interviews with lighting designers at different phases of their careers that Emma had already conducted. Reading those, there was an interest when designers agreed on things – but the real fascination was when they disagreed, because that provided exactly that reassurance.

As a result, the name of the book changed – to *Theatre Lighting Design: Conversations on the Art, Craft and Life*. Fourteen interviews with 14 lighting designers, plus a 15th group interview with the lighting team behind *Billy Elliot*. It's perfect if you're on that cusp of fully trusting yourself. But it turns out it's also pretty interesting whatever stage of a lighting career you're at (or even if you're just a casual observer of lighting as part of shows) – perhaps even 'advanced', because of course, while the very best in any field always trust their own opinion, they never stop learning from others around them.





university is an exciting and intense time of growth. Ensure you're aware of what's there to underpin this transition from the start, as you never know what you may need or when you may need it.

Ask about the approach to equity, diversity and inclusion – to belonging. What is the institution doing – is it just talk, or is it backed up with action?

And with so much emphasis placed on what different institutions can offer you, it's just as important to think about what you can bring to them. Expectations? Experiences? Every institution is different and offers something unique, and it is the same with you. You bring your talent and passion and a desire to deepen your craft. But you must also bring openness, a willingness

to learn, a desire to work with your colleagues, dedication and commitment. And you must bring respect and curiosity into the spaces you move through. This will be a two-way relationship.

Finally, in discussing training institutions, it is impossible not to also discuss the precarity under which so many are currently operating. With arts education having been underfunded, under-provisioned and undervalued for so long, many small specialists are struggling to survive. A training sector with a variety of providers is necessary if we are to meet the needs and demands of prospective students and to ensure we are attracting a diverse range of students from a diverse range of backgrounds. A rich training landscape will help to ensure that the industry we serve is more representative of society. For too long, this has been at risk.

**‘Speak with current students, staff and graduates. Ask them questions, even the tough ones – especially the tough ones’**

Yet there is cause for tentative hope. A commitment to increased arts provision at GCSE level and the removal of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act are significant first steps. We need more action like this, and more sustainable funding streams made available urgently, if we are to continue to train the creative leaders of the future.

#### Be an advocate for the arts

These are the challenges our sector is facing, and it is important that you come into your training with an understanding of the issues we must address together. Because once you join us, you will need to become an advocate for the arts, and for stronger support systems to ensure a vibrant and diverse creative community for generations to come.

You are at an exciting juncture, and I wish you the best of luck as you begin to explore training options and find the path that feels right for you. If it feels right, I hope to welcome you to Central very soon. And I wish you success if you decide to go elsewhere. Whatever your decision – welcome to one of the most important moments in your life. In the arts and across the sector, you are joining an incredible, global community of millions.

Seize it.

**Josette Bushell-Mingo is principal at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama**

## COLUMN

### I'm not just sharing a stage with fellow LAMDA alumni – we also share values

STEPHANIE STREET ACTOR



I've been reflecting a lot recently on drama school. I trained at LAMDA at the turn of the millennium and 24 years on am sharing a stage at the National Theatre

in *Coriolanus* with three fellow alumni, David Oyelowo, Kemi-Bo Jacobs and Anton Cross.

There's a lot we four have in common that traces back to LAMDA. We all value and appreciate the discipline of the vocational teaching we received, from the movement and voice work – without which you can't

meet the challenges of Shakespearean emotions and thoughts on the Olivier stage over a sustained run – to a shared love for stage combat, which we're joyously exercising in the Act I battle scenes.

We also all lean heavily on collaboration and a company dynamic (none less than David, who effortlessly balances being our lead and one of our team). Lastly, given that we're all actors of the global majority, each of us was one of a tiny minority (in my case, a minority of one) in our LAMDA cohorts.

I remember when I was applying, hearing that all drama schools accepted more men than women because there was more work out there for the guys; in my year we were

11 women to 17 men and that seemed to be the rough ratio everywhere. I guess the same logic applied for actors of colour.

I can't speak for my colleagues, but when I reflect on my own sense of who I am (particularly in relationship to what I do), I only really became aware of my 'otherness' when, at 21, I arrived in London to train as an actor. I can only suppose it was because they were preparing to deliver me into an industry that would be hyper-concerned with how I look and whether my name matches my skin colour, but never really having considered any of this before, remarks about these things became common at drama school.

Never once were the remarks malicious or pejorative – they were just analyses of things (hair colour; skin colour; was I Indian, British, Singaporean, none or all of the above?) that were facts of my existence. Yes, it was exhausting, but I now know that

it was no worse than what I'd go on to meet time and time again in the real world.

Just before graduation, LAMDA's then principal, Peter James – I think to prepare me for the industry's myopia – implored me to be patient, keep my ambition broad and not take the simpler path of only playing South Asian roles in South Asian work.

I have done and celebrated doing South Asian work, but I also took his point. Like most actors, I don't just want to play my own precise heritage. Imagine someone saying to Cate Blanchett: "Sorry, you can only play Australian women. No Arkadina for you!"

What drama school also did was prepare me for the work, and in that era, LAMDA did so pretty impeccably. Putting aside who said what about how I looked or sounded, I was taught things that to this day are, for me, deep professional learning, the elements of a craft. And I want to be able to go anywhere and play anything with that craft.



## LONG READ Skills gap

# How can drama schools help solve theatre's skills crisis?

Drama schools are adapting their approach to training to help bridge a skills gap that is showing worrying signs of becoming endemic, but there is only so much they can do. Figures from both the training sector and the industry talk to **Theo Bosanquet** about the root causes of the problem and what needs to happen to tackle the shortage

**N**early five years since the onset of the Covid-19 lockdowns, which closed UK theatres and devastated the industry's workforce, the recovery still appears to be moving in slow motion, if at all. Over the past few years, the creative industries have experienced a gathering storm of long-term funding cuts, worker shortages and spiralling costs, leading to a crisis that will be all too familiar to regular readers of these pages.

Among many ill effects, this situation has created an employment landscape much changed from the previous decade, with a chronic skills gap, particularly in technical roles. Many who left the industry in the wake of the pandemic are yet to return, and unless things change markedly, they likely never will.

Philippa Childs, head of creative industries union BECTU, puts it starkly: "The sector was one of the worst affected by the lockdowns and many, including BECTU, called for a post-pandemic 'reset' to address poor terms and conditions, modernise the industry and create fairer working conditions. Members tell us that little has improved, with theatre workers hit hard by rising costs of living and unable to sustain a family or social life alongside unsocial hours and a damaging 'the show must go on' mentality."

For there to be a recovery, Childs says, "it's critical that we now see a sustained, coordinated and collaborative approach from the government to prioritise not only skills development, but also retention of talent".

Against this backdrop, drama schools have had to adapt their approach to training. Whereas previous graduates could expect to continue to gain vocational training once they left a conservatoire environment, in the current climate they need to be ready to hit the ground running. In some ways, the picture is a bright one for those just entering the industry, with graduates from technical courses typically finding no shortage of opportunities. But this boom in demand has led to other challenges.

## Cause for concern

Daz James is programme leader for stage management and technical theatre training at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. "Some graduates are getting so-called 'higher' jobs far sooner in their career than historically expected," he says. "This is great for career progression and potentially better pay, but I often have to remind employers that the level of expectation put on young and relatively inexperienced shoulders may come with its own risks."

These concerns are echoed by those working in the industry. Almost 70% of respondents to a BECTU survey on skills shortages in 2022 said they believed that "people are promoted before they are ready for it and their lack of skills/experience creates problems for others".

There is also the fact that the industry is evolving quickly in terms of technology, in areas such as automation and video, so those working backstage regularly need to upskill. Kate Lane, reader in scenography and head of department (producing) at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, highlights

how today's graduates need not just technical skills, but a readiness to adapt in a fast-changing environment.

"People of my generation and younger are going to have long and varied careers," she says. "Our students need to develop the ability to adapt to new technologies and their possibilities to prepare them not just for the economic and employment possibilities of now, but of the future. This is what arts degrees do, especially ones that incorporate practical technical skills."

But for all drama schools' efforts to adapt, data shows that fewer students are enrolling in creative courses overall, which has also stretched the talent pipeline. A report by the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre that was published this year showed that performing arts further education courses in England have seen an alarming 68% drop in participation in the past decade. This, says the report, risks "intensifying already chronic skills shortages".

## Impact on the creative workforce

Considering the significance of its consequences, it's worth investigating the root causes of the skills gap. And on this subject, most people I spoke to highlighted an issue that goes much further back than the pandemic or the cost-of-living crisis: the reduction of emphasis on arts subjects in the national curriculum. The recent State of the Arts report by Campaign for the Arts showed that, since 2010, entries in arts subjects at GCSE and A level have dropped by 47% and 29% respectively, mirroring the drop at higher-education level.

Lane says this has led to the talent pool, "becoming limited to those few who still have access [to the arts] from an early age". This in turn has implications not just for the overall size of the creative workforce, but for the breadth of it as well. "I'm concerned about how this feeds into issues surrounding diversity in the sector," she adds. "If only a select few know about the possibilities of a career in technical theatre, that's extremely limiting."

Added to this is the fact that careers in the arts, both on stage and off, are perceived as lacking security, which in a time of inflation and high living costs naturally makes them more appealing to those with a financial cushion.

Hansjörg Schmidt, deputy director of production arts at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, says the college's graduates have "an extremely high" employment rate of 92%, according to a Higher Education Statistics Agency graduate outcomes survey. However, he still finds it challenging to persuade families and educators that the creative industries present a feasible career option for young people.

"Many parents, carers, teachers and career advisers consider creative careers as risky or unsustainable pathways, despite plenty of evidence that the sector is a major contributor to the UK economy," he says. "The performing arts, and particularly backstage roles, also suffer from low visibility, with few young people aware of the possibilities and range of technical theatre jobs and careers available."

In response, Guildhall has undertaken outreach projects including its Backstage Roadshow, which is visiting state secondary schools and colleges across the UK to offer workshops in areas including costume design, prop making and stage management. Schmidt says it's part of

Royal Shakespeare Company apprentices,  
in departments including props, costume and automation

**'We need a broader range of routes into developing skills and developing a career, particularly in technical areas'**

Jacqui O'Hanlon,  
Royal Shakespeare Company







RSC APPRENTICESHIPS PHOTOS: SARA BEAUMONT



**‘Some graduates are getting so-called ‘higher’ jobs far sooner in their career than historically expected, but the level of expectation put on young and relatively inexperienced shoulders may come with its own risks’**

Daz James, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

a commitment to “removing barriers to ensure that as many potential students as possible have the opportunity to receive an inspiring creative education and pursue a rewarding creative career”. He also acknowledges that “industry sectors with rapidly evolving technology, such as automation, have a particularly acute skills gap because of a lack of access to suitable equipment to train on, often due to its high cost”. However, Guildhall is “fortunate to have one of the very few conservatoire theatres with an automated flying system, giving our students a significant advantage in the training they receive, and their career prospects as graduates”.

But drama schools can only do so much. An industry-wide approach is required to deal with a gap that is showing worrying signs of becoming endemic.

Apprenticeships are a vital tool of both social mobility and career progression. The Royal Shakespeare Company offers 28 in-house placements to young people in backstage roles, enabling them to train and earn a salary while studying towards a professional qualification (either a Level 2, equivalent to a GCSE, or Level 3, equivalent to an A level). Apprentices spend most of their time in-house, and about 20% with one of the RSC’s partner organisations, which include 12 regional theatres. Areas of specialism include operations, automation, front of house, carpentry and scenic engineering.

“We need a broader range of routes into developing skills and developing a career, particularly in technical areas,” says RSC director of learning Jacqui O’Hanlon. She quotes a statistic from the Creative Industries report that 73% of people in the creative industries have a degree or higher-level qualification, compared with 44% in the general workforce.

“The long-standing issue, which existed pre-pandemic, is that not enough people from backgrounds that are under-represented in the sector are going into it,” she says. “That all goes back to an education that has not valued creative arts subjects.”

She highlights that apprenticeships, while being an effective tool in rebalancing this, are limited to companies

that have the resources to offer them. More partnerships are needed, she says, between “large and small organisations”, to enable them to happen.

O’Hanlon also points out that there are other issues limiting the growth of apprenticeships, such as a shortage of end-point assessors. “We have a need for a wardrobe apprentice at the moment, but because of the lack of an assessor, we can’t recruit. That is a key question for all kinds of training providers.”

Efforts are also hampered by a paucity of data on the precise nature of the skills gap and the efficacy of different training routes. O’Hanlon says too much of what is known is gathered through anecdotal rather than statistical evidence. “For a sector that makes such a big contribution to our country’s economy, we need more serious data on this issue.”

#### Green shoots of hope

Despite such limitations, there are green shoots of hope in the area of vocational training. O’Hanlon cites the impact of a theatre technician ‘bootcamp’ that was initiated by then West Midlands mayor Andy Street as part of a scheme to equip local residents with “work-ready skills”. She also mentions a recent pilot by the Department for Education to offer flexi-job apprenticeships in sectors including the creative industries that it says “often use short-term contracts or other non-standard employment models”.

O’Hanlon, who has been with the RSC for more than 20 years and has an MBE for services to the arts, reminds me of the often-used phrase that “talent is equally distributed, but opportunity is not”.

Drama schools are also embracing the potential of vocational training. At RWCMD, James highlights the college’s new course in technical production, which includes in-house training alongside “work placement opportunities that will provide a wide and varied experience required of an entertainment industry technician”.

It’s one of a number of new two-year foundation courses aimed at people who may be put off by the ►

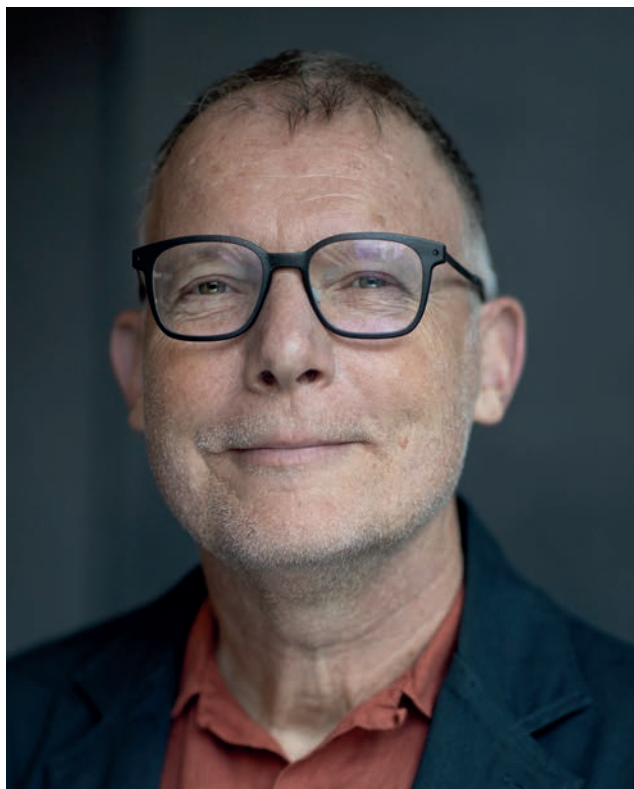


## LONG READ



**‘Our students need to develop the ability to adapt to new technologies to prepare them for the economic and employment possibilities of now and the future’**

Kate Lane, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama



**‘Many consider creative careers as risky or unsustainable pathways, despite plenty of evidence the sector is a major contributor to the UK economy’**

Hansjörg Schmidt, Guildhall School of Music and Drama



**‘It’s critical we see a sustained, coordinated and collaborative approach from the government to prioritise skills development and retention of talent’**

Philippa Childs, BECTU

idea of a full degree. “There are other industries out there where people do have the specific skills and can transfer to the stage and screen sectors with a little more training,” James explains. “That’s where we see our foundation courses helping to bridge that gap. Most degree courses, including ours, run over three years, which can be daunting, especially if young people are concerned about starting off their careers with a significant amount of debt.”

RWCMD’s local partner organisations include Welsh National Opera, Sherman Theatre and Bad Wolf, which produces Doctor Who. Experiences such as these “mean our students get a true sense of the industry, making them better prepared for their careers after graduation”, says James, adding: “There is so much work around Cardiff, graduates are spoilt for choice,” as evidenced by the school’s “100% employment record”.

But while this may be good news for today’s students, it’s of little help to those already struggling to stay afloat in an industry notorious for both its precarity and fast-changing nature. As Guildhall’s Schmidt acknowledges: “The skills gap cannot be bridged by higher-education training alone. The importance of education and lifelong learning throughout careers must be remembered, with opportunities to upskill the existing workforce made widely available to sustain and manage the rapid technological changes that drive the creative sector forward.”

#### Cautious optimism

It doesn’t engender confidence that 52.9% of the BECTU survey respondents said they didn’t believe their employer was good at upskilling people (only 22.7% believed their employers were good at this). And more than 93% of respondents recognised a “vicious cycle” of short staffing leading to more stressful working conditions and therefore more vacancies. It will take a long time to break this pattern.

However, in the longer term, there are reasons to be cautiously optimistic. For one thing, the new government plans to re-centre the arts in education, trumpeted by culture secretary Lisa Nandy at last month’s Labour conference in a speech quoting George Bernard Shaw (“Imagination is the beginning of creation”).

Central’s Lane says this shift in emphasis is welcome. “Changing the rhetoric around the arts and creative industries is a step in the right direction. There needs to be a balance, a shift away from STEM and towards STEAM. I also think the term ‘high-quality’ degrees, and the designation of quality being based on graduate earnings, is unhelpful. It doesn’t recognise the wider importance of taking a few years of your life to develop your creative thinking and a love of learning, thinking and doing.”

This change will, however, take time to filter through in terms of graduates entering the creative industries. And wider reforms are needed, too. Funding for the arts in the UK has fallen significantly behind that of many other countries in Europe. The State of the Arts report revealed that from 2010 to 2022, the UK reduced its arts funding by 6%, compared with increases of 22% in Germany, 25% in France and 70% in Finland.



Government plans to place more emphasis on the arts in education have been underlined by culture secretary Lisa Nandy

These cuts have inevitably made for a more insecure working environment. But for things to really change, the industry must also take responsibility. As Schmidt says: “It’s important that government takes steps to improve the conditions for freelancers, making creative careers more sustainable and attractive for young people. The industry has an important role to play here too, and must focus on improving working conditions, ensuring secure and safe places of work, investing in staff development and retention, and improving links with education and training providers.”

It’s not just technical roles that this applies to, but every offstage department from administration to front of house, marketing to finance. It even extends to suppliers. As Lane points out: “There needs to be an understanding that the arts and cultural industries are of huge importance to the wider UK economy. It’s a vast ecosystem that also includes companies that are reliant on the sector for their survival, but aren’t themselves classed as being in the arts or cultural sectors. For example, logistics and transport companies that are involved in touring, or the engineering and technical firms that create our stages. It’s all interconnected.”

The tub-thumping for funding will surely continue from all corners of the industry. But in the meantime, colleges, conservatoires and companies running apprenticeships (these include the National Theatre, Royal Ballet and Opera and ATG Entertainment) are doing what they can to provide a diverse range of training opportunities to meet a dire industry need. Many I spoke to for this article praised students’ resilience in dealing with the pressures exerted by the contraction of the theatre workforce. Nevertheless, fears remain that many will suffer as a result of being expected to assume responsibilities that belie their experience.

“You don’t stop learning when you leave college, the journey you take remains a huge part of a person’s development,” says RWCMD’s James. “I’m concerned that the increased pressure on these young people may lead to adverse results, which employers will need to take some responsibility for. We want people to stay in this industry, so let’s look after them.” ■



## REVIEWS

[thestage.co.uk/reviews](https://thestage.co.uk/reviews)


MANUEL HARLAN

Aidan Kelly and  
Adrien Brody

# The Fear of 13

## THEATRE

**October 4–November 30,  
PN October 10  
Running time: 1hr 45mins**

**Author**  
Lindsey Ferrentino  
**Composer/musical director**  
DJ Walde  
**Director**  
Justin Martin  
**Associate director**  
Ed Burnside  
**Fight directors**  
Kev McCurdy, Sam Lyon-Behan  
**Intimacy director**  
Lucy Hind  
**Set designers**  
Miriam Buether, Luke Smith  
**Costume designer**  
Brigitte Reiffenstuel  
**Lighting designer**  
Jon Clark  
**Sound designer**  
Ian Dickinson  
**Video/projection designer**  
Ash J Woodward  
**Wigs, hair and make-up designer**  
Campbell Young Associates  
**Vocal/dialect coach**  
Barbara Houseman,  
Aundrea Fudge  
**Casting director**  
Anna Cooper  
**Cast includes**  
Aidan Kelly, Cyril Nri, Ferdy  
Roberts, Michael Fox,  
Tommy Sim'aan, Adrien  
Brody, Nana Mensah, Posi  
Morakinyo, Matt McClure  
**Production manager**  
Marty Moore  
**Company stage manager**  
Lizzie Donaghy  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Vicky Eames  
**Assistant stage manager**  
Honor Ramsdale  
**Producer**  
Donmar Warehouse

**DONMAR WAREHOUSE, LONDON  
REVIEW BY SAM MARLOWE**

You may not have heard of Nick Yarris, but the arc of his real-life story is familiar: a monumental injustice, exacerbated by institutional incompetence and staggeringly callous officialdom that tramples lives as if they were worthless.

This new play by American writer Lindsey Ferrentino, based on David Sington's documentary, traces a narrative of drugs and petty criminality that nightmarishly escalates into false accusation and incarceration. Yarris spent more than two decades on death row after being wrongly found guilty of the rape and murder of Linda Mae Craig.

The inaugural production of Timothy Sheader's tenure as artistic director at the Donmar, it stars Oscar winner Adrien Brody as Yarris, and it's helmed by Justin Martin, who directed Jodie Comer in Suzie Miller's *Prima Facie*. Like Miller's play, Ferrentino's is formulaic, and Martin's staging is once again remarkable chiefly for its astonishing central performance. But it has an undeniable emotional force.

On a geometrical, white-tiled set by Miriam Buether, a section of which is divided from us by glass, the action is initially placed within a pretty hoary framing device. Jackie Schaffer (Nana Mensah), a prison visitor who falls in love with Yarris and takes up his cause, leads us through flashbacks of her conversations with him, a structure that is later abandoned as Yarris, who became a committed autodidact while incarcerated, takes control of his own story. Dramatically, there's a flatness and a literalness to the writing, perhaps born of its transition from the screen. But as Ferrentino delivers pretty much exactly what you'd expect – sadistic prison guards, violence, sexual exploitation – Brody's Nick gently unfurls. Gradually, we learn how his penchant for spinning a yarn has been both a survival tactic and the unwitting trigger for a cascade of catastrophe.

Rangy and warm voiced, a wry smile rarely far from his lips, his brow furrowed like a sad Pierrot's, Brody transforms from the prisoner caught between resignation and tantalising hope, struggling to cling to sanity, to the reckless, smart-talking young man and, eventually, the frightened little boy who suffered a trauma that has insidiously shaped his existence. He's both an innocent and a streetwise survivor. We're with him through every excruciating second as he faces down a relentless, Sisyphean torment of bungled investigations and false promises.

Mensah implies a lively mind and a generous heart as Jackie, although the underdeveloped characterisation doesn't give her much to work with; and Aidan Kelly, playing various law enforcers, shows glints of humanity behind the thuggery. There are some beautiful redemptive moments, too, when the prison choir breaks into soulful song, a community of condemned men facing their mortality and finding connection. There's also a powerful, if brief, recognition of the stolen life of Linda Mae Craig and her family's devastation. But it's the raw reality of Yarris' experiences, and the deft sensitivity of Brody's portrayal, that gives this play its potency.

**Adrien Brody is astonishing in this miscarriage of justice docudrama ★★★★★**

# The Other Place

## THEATRE

**September 27–November 9,  
PN October 8  
Running time: 1hr 20mins**

**Author**  
Sophocles  
**Adapter/director**  
Alexander Zeldin  
**Composer**  
Yannis Philippakis  
**Dramaturgs**  
Faye Merralls,  
Sasha Milavic Davies  
**Associate director**  
Sammy J Glover  
**Movement director**  
Marcin Rudy  
**Fight director**  
Sam Lyon-Behan  
**Intimacy director**  
Elle McAlpine  
**Set/costume designer**  
Rosanna Vize  
**Lighting designer**  
James Farncombe  
**Sound designer**  
Josh Anio Grigg  
**Vocal/dialect coaches**  
Charmian Hoare,  
Cathleen McCarron  
**Casting directors**  
Alastair Coomer, Chloe Blake  
**Cast includes**  
Emma D'Arcy, Jerry Killick,  
Nina Sosanya, Tobias  
Menzies, Alison Oliver,  
Lee Braithwaite  
**Production manager**  
Hannah Blamire  
**Company stage manager**  
Pippa Meyer  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Julia Slienger  
**Assistant stage managers**  
Hannah Gillet, Tash Savidge  
**Producer**  
National Theatre,  
A Zeldin Company

**LYTTELTON THEATRE, NATIONAL THEATRE, LONDON  
REVIEW BY DAVE FARGNOLI**

Stripping away the veneer of mythic significance from Sophocles' *Antigone*, celebrated director and playwright Alexander Zeldin renders the tale of intergenerational struggle into a dark, dangerous family melodrama. Here, themes of trauma, grief, suicide and incest swirl in a slow-boiling soup of unspeakable subtext and avoidant behaviours, as estranged daughter Annie returns to her remodelled family home to find Uncle Chris now head of the household and preparing to scatter her father's ashes.

Zeldin builds pressure from the opening moments, as characters anxiously await confrontations or visibly agonise over awful thoughts that they cannot voice. Taut, stretching pauses abound when words dry up, and there are sudden moments of heart-in-mouth tension, often defused with satisfyingly savage punchlines.

House of the Dragon star Emma D'Arcy gives a powerful central performance as Annie, a trembling, traumatised presence who speaks little, but wrings her hands constantly. Though Annie takes decisive control of the spiralling situation several times, D'Arcy makes clear that these are acts of desperation. Alison Oliver channels an opposite energy as sister Issy, the kind of person who says "lol" out loud, or shrieks with nervous laughter when a conversation becomes too uncomfortable. She clothes deep sadness in brittle cheeriness.

The source of much of that discomfort is Tobias Menzies' softly spoken tyrant Chris, working hard to be seen as a voice of respectable reason, but inwardly just as messed up and helpless as the rest of his cursed family. Ruined by his own shame, he only seems truly happy when he loses all power. Nina Sosanya is strong as his wife Erica, putting on a brave face and a show of civility but inwardly fuming, while Lee Braithwaite has a relatable, slouchy energy as in-over-their-head teenager Leni, feeling an instant compassion for Annie's plight. And Jerry Killick is strikingly sleazy as scuzzy Tiresias-figure Terry, the family adviser with a knack for dipping out right before things kick off.

Working with an eerie score by Yannis Philippakis of indie band Foals, sound designer Josh Anio Grigg builds on the production's unsettling energy. Low warbling noises grow into ominous drones, and twittering birdsong is drowned out by cacophonous bursts of discordant sound, or, just for one disorienting moment, thumping dance music.

Rosanna Vize's slick set depicts a swanky open-plan kitchen backed by wall-length sliding doors – "to let in the light", according to Erica. But most often, the doors serve only as black mirrors reflecting the dysfunctional family back upon themselves. A light box hangs overhead, pouring a cold white glare down on to the scene, ensuring that every detail is laid bare for the audience's scrutiny, and every dark family secret is brought mercilessly into the light.

**Bleak and bold reworking of the Antigone myth punchily performed by a formidable cast ★★★★★**

Emma D'Arcy, Alison Oliver,  
Nina Sosanya and Tobias Menzies

SARAH LEE



## REVIEWS



Felicity Kendal, Julie Legrand  
and Matthew Kelly

## Filumena

## THEATRE

**October 4-19, then touring  
until November  
PN October 9  
Running time: 2hrs 15mins**

**Author**  
Eduardo De Filippo  
**Translators**  
Keith Waterhouse, Willis Hall  
**Director**  
Sean Mathias  
**Associate director**  
Stevan Mijailovic  
**Movement director**  
Lisa Connell  
**Set/costume designer**  
Morgan Large  
**Lighting designer**  
Nick Richings  
**Sound designer**  
Dan Samson  
**Casting director**  
Jill Green  
**Cast includes**  
Felicity Kendal, Matthew  
Kelly, Jodie Steele, Ben  
Nealon, Fabrizio Santino,  
Gavin Fowler, George Banks,  
Hilary Tones, Jamie Hogarth,  
Julie Legrand, Lee Peck,  
Sarah Twomey  
**Company stage manager**  
Lauren Barclay  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Sandra Szaron  
**Assistant stage managers**  
Lee Peck,  
Eliza Le Touzel Teale  
**Producers**  
Bill Kenwright Ltd,  
Theatre Royal Windsor

## THEATRE ROYAL WINDSOR REVIEW BY HOLLY O'MAHONY

Eduardo De Filippo's 1946 Neapolitan comedy about a woman who tricks her lover of 35 years into marrying her contains plenty of lewd comments to raise the eyebrows of discerning modern audiences. But following an explosive first act, it matures into a tender, timeless story of loving another in spite of their flaws, and being open to a change of heart. In Sean Mathias' production, Felicity Kendal and Matthew Kelly shine, but scenes without them seem under-directed, as if each character has been encouraged to be boldly entertaining, overlooking their potential for more refined, subtle humour.

It opens with a domestic battle royale: Kelly's Domenico, a wealthy philanderer whose high-ceilinged mansion can barely contain his ego, is hurling insults at his new wife, Kendal's Filumena, who has tricked him into marriage by pretending she was at death's door. He plucked her from a life of prostitution decades previously, making her his lover, but never offering an official union. With Domenico threatening to stray with his young mistress Diana (a grating Jodie Steele), Filumena drops a bombshell: she has three adult sons, one of whom Domenico fathered.

Kendal is cracking as the toughened, impish, fiercely maternal Filumena. With an endearingly flirty smirk on her lips, she commandeers this house with or without the wife badge – and has the loyalty of its maid Rosalia (Julie Legrand, very good). Meanwhile, Kelly's wry smiles reassure us that Domenico is much gentler than his words.

There's plenty that has not aged well. Once the sons have breezed in – bestowing this otherwise English production with Italian gesticulations – their bawdy comments about women, and Riccardo's sexualising of the young maid Lucia, sit uncomfortably in the mouths of characters we're broadly supposed to like. The production also handles the sexual humour clumsily, scrounging for a few extra laughs through breast and bottom thrusts that are irritatingly base.

Still, Morgan Large's dining-room set brings the Italian house to life in all its rich splendour: chandeliers hang from a frescoed ceiling and frosted windows offer a glimpse of a courtyard draped in greenery. Religion is etched into the walls of this God-fearing household, whose actions are overlooked by Christian figurines, and who bless themselves with holy water before leaving its confines.

Several reveals don't land as powerfully as they should: Domenico is jarringly calm on learning about Filumena's three sons, and the shift in tone from the flammable first act to the placid second is hard to navigate. The ending is abrupt too – but still, it leaves a cordial enough aftertaste.

Felicity Kendal is the bright spark in this revival of  
Eduardo De Filippo's Neapolitan comedy ★★★★★

## A Raisin in the Sun

## THEATRE

**October 8-November 2,  
then touring until  
November 16,  
PN October 11  
Running time: 3hrs**

**Author**  
Lorraine Hansberry  
**Director**  
Tinuke Craig  
**Composer/sound designer**  
Max Pappenheim  
**Movement director**  
Sarita Piotrowski  
**Fight/intimacy director**  
Haruka Kuroda  
**Set designer**  
Cécile Trémolières  
**Costume designer**  
Maybelle Laye  
**Lighting designer**  
Joshua Pharo  
**Wigs, hair and make-up  
designer**  
Dominique Hamilton  
**Vocal/dialect coach**  
Aundrea Fudge  
**Casting director**  
Lotte Hines  
**Cast includes**  
Cash Holland, Doreene  
Blackstock, Jonah Russell,  
Kenneth Omole, Solomon  
Israel, Joséphine-Fransilja  
Brookman, Gilbert Kyem Jnr,  
Oliver Dunkley, Jeriah Kibusi  
**Production manager**  
Kat Ellis  
**Company stage manager**  
Grace Pattinson  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Emma Currie  
**Assistant stage manager**  
Catherine Mizrahi  
**Producers**  
Headlong, Leeds Playhouse,  
Lyric Hammersmith Theatre,  
Nottingham Playhouse

LYRIC HAMMERSMITH, LONDON  
REVIEW BY DAVE FARNOLI

In 1959, the debut production of Lorraine Hansberry's searing, sharply observed family drama broke new ground as the first play written by a Black woman and helmed by a Black director to open on Broadway. Against the backdrop of the civil rights struggle, its story of a poor Black family, the Youngers, preparing to move into a predominately white neighbourhood must have felt incendiary.

This engaging production for touring company Headlong, directed by Tinuke Craig, retains the play's power to shock and challenge – and it bursts, too, with surprising warmth and optimism. Craig gives the piece a lively, busy staging, often playing scenes for laughs, blunting some of its sharpest edges, yet ensuring that the tone remains overwhelmingly uplifting.

Cécile Trémolières' set depicts the Youngers' sparse apartment in detail – a cramped space, housing a few scant sticks of cheap, well-cared-for furniture. The stained yellow walls are subtly transparent, giving us an impression of the larger building beyond. A frosted window lets in just a little tepid grey light, but Joshua Pharo's unobtrusive lighting design grows more symbolic as the drama heats up, with vivid magenta and lime-green tones bleeding in from the wings to underline the characters' heightened emotions.

Heading the cast, Doreene Blackstock is a forceful, steadying presence as formidable grandmother Lena, holding the family together with pride, religious faith and a knack for reading her children's innermost feelings. Blackstock brings just the right balance of toughness and tenderness to the part.

Solomon Israel plays her adult son Walter Lee, furious at the limited opportunities available to him and frantically pursuing a big break, which leads him to a disastrous financial miscalculation. In early scenes, Israel nails the character's swagger and seething resentment; when his mistake is revealed, he explodes, finding dignity in his devastating loss. Cash Holland gives a quietly shattering performance as his wife Ruth, utterly exhausted by her domestic obligations and finding herself constantly filling the role of family mediator. Her elation and relief when she learns that they may be able to move to a nicer neighbourhood is transformative. And Kenneth Omole is strong as idealistic Joseph, a Nigerian studying in America with the ultimate intention of improving conditions in his home country. Omole taps into the humour in the writing, without ever tarnishing the sincerity of Joseph's goal.

The characters' clashing personalities and conflicting dreams open up the deep wounds created by the legacies of slavery and colonialism. Yet Craig's production also seeks out moments of joy and hope. Despite the setbacks that the Youngers face, their deep commitment to each other carries them forward, while society continues its slow progress towards a more just world.

Rousing revival of a pioneering play about a Black family  
navigating prejudice and poverty in the late 1950s ★★★★★



Cash Holland, Doreene Blackstock  
and Adiel Magaji





# The New Real

THEATRE

October 3-November 2,  
PN October 10  
Running time: 2hrs 45mins

**Author**  
David Edgar  
**Composer**  
Monika Dalach Sayers  
**Dramaturg**  
Chris Campbell  
**Director**  
Holly Race Roughan  
**Movement director**  
Michela Meazza  
**Set/costume designer**  
Alex Lowde  
**Lighting designer**  
Joshie Harriette  
**Sound designer**  
Max Perryment  
**Video/projection designer**  
Luke Halls  
**Producer**  
Royal Shakespeare Company  
in association with Headlong

THE OTHER PLACE, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON  
REVIEW BY HOLLY WILLIAMS

This is a year of elections: half the world will head to the polls in 2024. Perfect timing, then, for David Edgar’s gripping, intelligent play about how elections are lost and won – the septuagenarian playwright’s 10th work for the Royal Shakespeare Company, co-produced with Headlong. It covers a sweep of recent history, 2002 to the present day – from democratic revolutions in post-Soviet countries through to the global rise of populism. It’s also a battle between two American electoral strategists, Rachel and Larry, who are former romantic partners. Sick of Larry’s unethical tactics, Rachel goes to run a campaign in a fictional Eastern European country, fighting for democracy against rigged elections – taking her British polling whizz, Caro, with her. Leaping forward to 2010, Larry’s been recruited as a spin doctor for an opposition figure in the same country. By this time, Caro’s become uneasy about how personal data is used to predict, and manipulate, elections. She’s also troubled by the tendency of the politicians, whom she and Rachel help get elected, to focus on “urban aspirational” – socially and economically liberal – while neglecting “rust-belt nostalgics” – socially conservative, often the poorest in society. When Larry sees the potential in speaking directly to those left-behind voters, the seeds of populism are sown, and they’ll cross-pollinate right back across the pond. No prizes for guessing whom Larry ends up working for. The play is beautifully plotted, full of betrayals, reversals, blind spots and unintended outcomes, with the consequences of human flaws playing out on the widest scale imaginable. Headlong’s Holly Race Roughan directs with the heel-snapping speed of a fast-talking political TV drama, demanding the audience keep up. And there’s much to keep up with: Edgar’s drama spans decades and continents, geopolitical shifts and interpersonal rifts, launching headfirst into rapid-fire discussion of everything from data-collection techniques to antisemitic conspiracy theories to the political import of the Eurovision Song Contest. Race Roughan could have gone to town more when staging an imagined entry for that, and mostly this is simply staged in traverse, with video footage on oppressive banks of screens nudging us through the years and establishing place via rather literal projections. The play more than earns its running time – in fact, it needs an extra scene or two. I wanted to know Rachel and Larry as a romantic couple; their competitive interactions could be grounded in hearts and guts as well as intellect. But they’re inhabited brilliantly by Martina Laird and Lloyd Owen, both rustling with drive, determination and all-American confidence. The cast is uniformly great, with Jodie McNee bringing a notable dry wit to the torn Caro. And most of all, Edgar proves to be a playwright who, far from slowing down, seems barely to pause to draw breath.

David Edgar’s new electoral drama is sharply topical and beautifully crafted ★★★★★

# Brace Brace

THEATRE

October 3-November 9,  
PN October 9  
Running time: 1hr 10mins

**Author**  
Oli Forsyth  
**Director**  
Daniel Raggett  
**Movement director**  
George Mann  
**Fight director**  
Alex Payne  
**Set/costume designer**  
Anna Reid  
**Lighting designer**  
Simeon Miller  
**Sound designer**  
Paul Arditti  
**Video/projection designer**  
Matt Powell  
**Casting director**  
Arthur Carrington  
**Cast includes**  
Anjana Vasan, Craige Els,  
Phil Dunster  
**Production manager**  
Marius Rønning  
**Stage manager**  
Lavinia Serban  
**Company manager**  
Mica Taylor  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Lizzie Cooper  
**Producer**  
Royal Court

JERWOOD THEATRE UPSTAIRS, ROYAL COURT, LONDON  
REVIEW BY DAVE FARNOLI

Exploring the life-changing impact of post-traumatic stress, Oli Forsyth’s short, sharp shock of a play follows newly married couple Sylvia and Ray, who find themselves caught up in a plane hijacking. In the months that follow, they process the events in very different ways, growing apart as their scarred psyches attempt to heal. Forsyth puts his characters through a well-researched emotional wringer, contending with false memories and flashbacks, avoidant behaviours and self-defeating coping mechanisms. Dynamically directed by Daniel Raggett, the play has a breathless momentum, unfolding in a rush of tightly focused, if overly brief scenes. Raggett handles the pacing skilfully, allowing tension to build in opening passages lightened with humour, then shattering that sense of safety with a thrilling action sequence that leaves the audience shaken. Anna Reid’s elegantly ingenious set design features a narrow, steeply angled walkway that slopes from a cockpit door elevated some way above the stage, down through a pit in the floor below. A narrow light box suspended overhead tilts dramatically to suggest changing altitude, pressing down upon the actors with the crushing force of pressures both atmospheric and psychological. Fight director Alex Payne brings a frantic, visceral quality to recreations of the hijacking itself. Desperate, adrenaline-pumping fight sequences see the actors hurled about the claustrophobic space by gravitational forces, grappling and climbing over each other in a feral tangle of thrashing limbs and blood. And Simeon Miller’s lighting clearly delineates phases of the play. A cold, grey glare defines scenes set aboard the aircraft itself, with crackling strobes and lurching blackouts accompanying turbulence. When characters address the audience directly, there’s a shift to warm, soft tones of peach and rose. Phil Dunster gets to grips with a tricky part as the flawed Ray, contending with internalised toxic masculinity that sees him struggle with self-respect after his wife is praised as a hero. But Dunster makes clear Ray’s deep care for Sylvia, working to understand her emotional needs even as they clash over their differing recollections of events. Craige Els plays both the hijacker – with imposing muscularity and ferocious focus – and the plane’s pilot. As the latter, he presents an appearance of collected calm, but it only takes a few unguarded words to send him spiralling into paranoid feelings of victimisation. Anjana Vasan’s richly drawn Sylvia provides the play’s heart. By turns steely, assertive, and terrified, Vasan is never less than magnetic. Haunted not only by the memory of what she survived, but by the knowledge of the violence she is capable of in a life-or-death situation, she finds it impossible to move on. Her refusal to accept that the danger is truly over creates a fascinating central conflict in this bracing character study.

Anjana Vasan gives an electrifying central performance in this lean, focused, visually arresting drama about PTSD ★★★★★





## REVIEWS



Safiyya Ingar and Dominic Holmes

## King Troll (The Fawn)

## THEATRE

**October 4-November 2,**  
**PN October 8**  
**Running time:** 1hr 30mins

**Author**  
Sonali Bhattacharyya  
**Composer/sound designer**  
Xana  
**Director**  
Milli Bhatia  
**Assistant director**  
Neetu Singh  
**Movement director**  
Iskandar Sharazuddin  
**Fight director**  
Bret Yount  
**Set/costume designer**  
Rajha Shakiry  
**Lighting designer**  
Elliot Griggs  
**Casting director**  
Arthur Carrington  
**Cast**  
Dominic Holmes, Safiyya Ingar, Zainab Hasan, Ayesha Dharker, Diyar Bozkurt  
**Production manager**  
Chris Burr  
**Stage manager**  
Stacey Nurse  
**Assistant stage manager**  
Masha Kononovs  
**Producers**  
Kali Theatre,  
New Diorama Theatre

**NEW DIORAMA THEATRE, LONDON**  
**REVIEW BY TOM WICKER**

Grim, modern-day reality and folklore chillingly collide in Sonali Bhattacharyya's new play, which was a finalist for the 2023 Women's Prize for Playwriting. Milli Bhatia's production brims with an anger fuelled by dark playfulness.

Once upon a time, on a "shithole island" that might seem very familiar, migrant sisters Nikita and Riya, who have lived their entire lives there, are battling a sly, bureaucratic monster trying to cast them out while pretending that it only wants to help. Nikita is a caseworker to other immigrants, while Riya is anxiously preparing for her leave-to-remain interview.

One night, in desperation, Riya follows the instructions given to her by the mysterious Shashi, an old friend of their mother's, and creates a "sponsor" out of the Earth. This mythical being, "the Fawn" (Dominic Holmes), exists only to do her bidding. It is an empty vessel waiting to learn. But in a land so lacking in fairness, where you can be expelled by the authorities with the flick of a pen, however long you've called it home, what could this power unleash in Riya? What is the Fawn capable of?

Bhattacharyya captures the utter disempowerment of those caught in the immigration system. Nikita's fears for her sister as she falls under the thrall of the Fawn are counterpointed by her attempts to help asylum seeker Tahir (movingly played by Diyar Bozkurt) to stay on the island. His spirit has been crushed by the cruel promise of "work schemes" that simply move the goalposts further away. The skin separating parable from reality is thin here.

But where this play most enthralls is in its exploration of the anger bubbling corrosively away under its surface. This is a story of rage. The Fawn manifests Riya's every dark, frustrated thought, while also symbolising the seduction of assimilation. In one darkly funny scene, it wins over the sisters' heartless landlady, Mrs B, while doing nothing more than repeating their words as a man. Ayesha Dharker is deliciously good as the perfectly coiffed Mrs B and winkingly terrifying Shashi.

Holmes is electric as the Fawn, initially diving deeply into the uncanny valley as an awkward bundle of limbs in search of an identity. As an impressive Safiyya Ingar transforms Riya from anxious into cold and distant, self-advancement beckoning, he adopts a sinister corporate emptiness. Zainab Hasan conveys Nikita's hardening cynicism as she watches her sister become a stranger.

From the ragged barbed wire of Rajha Shakiry's set to the disorientating light-bulb flash of Elliot Griggs' lighting, Bhatia's production is drenched in sinister impishness. Sound designer Xana captures this in a brilliantly baroque confection of strings. By the end, we get a cracked waltz in a cracked world.

Sonali Bhattacharyya's new play is a brilliant parable for our times, combining impish humour with social fury ★★★★★

## Gigi and Dar

## THEATRE

**October 3-November 2,**  
**PN October 8**  
**Running time:** 1hr 30mins

**Author**  
Josh Azouz  
**Composer**  
Jack Baxter  
**Director**  
Kathryn Hunter  
**Assistant director**  
Ralph Jeffreys  
**Movement/fight/intimacy director**  
Adi Gortler  
**Set/costume designer**  
Michael Vale  
**Lighting designer**  
Ciarán Cunningham  
**Sound designer**  
Jack Baxter  
**Casting director**  
Helena Palmer  
**Cast**  
Tanvi Virmani, Lola Shalam,  
Roman Asde, Chipo Chung  
**Production manager**  
Lewis Champney  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Kayleigh Atkinson  
**Assistant stage manager**  
Amy Moore  
**Producers**  
Arcola Theatre, Frenzy Productions, Matthew Schmolle Productions, MMXX Productions

**ARCOLA THEATRE, LONDON REVIEW BY TOM WICKER**

The personal and the existential collide in Josh Azouz's devastatingly effective new play about war. It shades comedy into tragedy with such skill that you can't see the seam, and is brilliantly directed by theatre heavyweight Kathryn Hunter.

Gigi and Dar are two privates in an unnamed war and territory. They're guarding roadblock 432 and they're bored, eagerly anticipating what beach they'll end up on when their service ends in a few days. Dar is planning her wedding, but is haunted by a dream of being shot. Gigi is harbouring a friendship-ending secret. Then a pregnant mother and her teenage son arrive.

A shimmering Beckettian unreality pervades the start of Hunter's production. Gun-toting Gigi and Dar sit on a stage that is bare other than an illuminated parasol in place of the sun, two chairs and, ominously, a spade in a bucket. Michael Vale's set design lends their time-passing banter a feverish air of expectation. Their isolation feels dangerously mundane.

Lola Shalam and Tanvi Virmani anchor these early scenes, bringing to life the rhythm and humour of Azouz's sharp dialogue, while shading in the differences between DJ Dar and well-connected Gigi, with her far-right cabinet minister father. An effortlessly charismatic Shalam, in particular, brings a cheeky, twinkly swagger to Dar.

Sometimes, theatre that elides time, place and context to assume a quasi-parable status can feel as though it's assuming a lofty position of commentary without putting in the work. Here, though, Azouz's carefully crafted characters carry the themes. When he upends the pair's cosily conspiratorial asides to the audience, we feel in our gut how lethally easy it is for likeable people to do awful things.

Chipo Chung's pregnant Zoz and Roman Asde's Sim arrive in desperate need of passing the roadblock to get to a hospital at exactly the wrong time – after Dar has listened to a voicemail from her fiancé that has clearly devastated her. What follows is gruellingly, unsparingly staged by Hunter, who skilfully weaponises the rapport she's established to turn us into voyeurs of abuse. In a powerful professional debut, Asde collapses Sim's initial teenage bravado and defiance into stark fear. It's painful to watch. Chung imbues Zoz with a wariness that develops into a powerful and condemnatory grief as the play moves into its final act with its characters in disarray.

We never know which side anyone is on or what they're fighting for. But that's the point. In effect, it's as though Azouz hands automatic machine guns to Vladimir and Estragon from Waiting for Godot, and shows us what happens. What arrives, however dustily remote the outpost, is always death. That feels sharply relevant right now.

Kathryn Hunter directs Josh Azouz's scalpel-sharp, tragi-comic delve into the dangerous mundanity of the theatre of war ★★★★★



Lola Shalam and Tanvi Virmani

ALI WRIGHT





## Signal to Noise

### THEATRE

**October 10-11, then touring until December 7, PN October 10**  
**Running time: 1hr 30mins**

**Author/producer**  
 Forced Entertainment  
**Dramaturg**  
 Tyrone Huggins  
**Director/sound designer**  
 Tim Etchells  
**Set/costume designer**  
 Richard Lowdon  
**Lighting designer**  
 Nigel Edwards  
**Cast**  
 Cathy Naden, Claire Marshall, Richard Lowdon, Robin Arthur, Seke Chimutengwende, Terry O'Connor  
**Production manager**  
 Jim Harrison

**QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL, SOUTHBANK CENTRE, LONDON**  
**REVIEW BY DAVE FARGNOLI**

In sound-engineering terms, the concept of signal to noise is used to compare the strength of a transmission against the strength of background interference. In our era of information overload, deepfakes and deliberate hoaxes, cutting through the static that constantly surrounds us seems harder than ever.

Capturing some of the anxiety and absurdity of our troubled, technology-driven times, this anarchic piece is the first of several productions marking hugely influential performance-making collective Forced Entertainment's 40th anniversary. The company's London season sees five productions running at venues around the capital – including L'Addition, a comic collaboration with dance artists Bert and Nasi at Battersea Arts Centre, and improv piece Go On Like This with the Necks' drummer Tony Buck.

Even by Forced Entertainment's standards, this is an abstract, alienating piece. Devised by the company and directed by founder member Tim Etchells, it explores the erosion of meaning in our media and public discourse by recreating the endless, unsatisfying repetition that characterises much of the banal content we consume. Etchells deploys the language of memes and talk shows, confessions and weather reports, utilising a text generated using AI tools and performed – if that's the word – by eerie AI voices that blankly state questions and provocations. "Are we live?" the voices ask. "Are you alive?"

Lip-syncing to these disembodied recordings, a committed six-strong ensemble engages in frenetic activity, investing the endlessly reiterated lines with tantalising traces of meaning through mimed gestures. Performers cycle through costumes and wigs, pull apart the set, and dance – sometimes with cringey awkwardness, sometimes with graceful abandon.

Among the chaotic tableau, fleeting details catch the eye: a woman weeps into her hands, a man unobtrusively suffers a heart attack, an interview is interrupted by a shell game played with buckets. There are fascinating moments, but the piece is too off-puttingly monotonous to sustain the runtime.

Of the cast, Seke Chimutengwende emerges as an especially vivid presence, capering and beaming in a succession of dresses or trench coats, and leaning into the potential for absurd comedy at every opportunity. And Claire Marshall seems to remain in constant, buzzy motion throughout. Always engaged in some fascinating bit of business while rarely pulling focus from the other performers, she is a generous and endlessly inventive improviser.

Etchells' sound design adds to the bewildering atmosphere, sampling compressed snatches of almost-recognisable classical pieces, tinny muzak and decelerating brass melodies that drift through a soundscape of jagged electronic noise, which varies from spaced-out, fragmentary trills to dense howling static. Through it all, the voices drone on, occasionally raising laughs or suggesting strange, poignant juxtapositions, but more often simply washing over the audience to numbing, never fully satisfying effect.

**Forced Entertainment's 40th anniversary season kicks off with this playful but deliberately alienating performance piece**  
 ★★☆☆☆

## Statues

### THEATRE

**October 9-November 9, PN October 14**  
**Running time: 1hr 15mins**

**Author**  
 Azan Ahmed  
**Composer/sound designer**  
 Holly Khan  
**Director**  
 Esme Allman  
**Assistant director**  
 Maryam Shaharuddin  
**Movement director**  
 Hamza Ali  
**Set/costume designer**  
 Cara Evans  
**Lighting designer**  
 Rachel Sampley  
**Cast**  
 Azan Ahmed, Jonny Khan  
**Production manager**  
 Adam Jefferys  
**Stage manager**  
 Lois Sime  
**Producers**  
 Two Magpies Productions, Bush Theatre

**BUSH THEATRE, LONDON REVIEW BY DAVE FARGNOLI**

While sorting through his father's belongings after his funeral, 20-something English teacher Yusuf discovers an old cassette tape in the pocket of a garish Day-Glo tracksuit. When he plays the tape, Yusuf discovers a side of his father he never knew, setting him on a journey of self-reflection that sees him reappraise his identity as a man of British-Pakistani heritage.

Written by actor and poet Azan Ahmed – who plays both Yusuf and his father Mustafa in Esme Allman's production – this promising, but frustratingly flimsy piece tells the familiar story of a bereaved son coming to terms with a distant father figure. The plot hops between the present day and 1996, as Yusuf takes up a new post at a low-achieving school, and Mustafa puts his first demo tape together. Both men are full of passion for their chosen careers but find themselves stifled by a racist system that views outspoken Muslim men as inherently dangerous.

In Allman's staging, the piece has an uneven pace. The action is interrupted continually by micro-soliloquies offering insights into Yusuf's thoughts, at the cost of jarringly interrupting the play's momentum. It accelerates with a handful of hugely energetic scenes of Mustafa rapping; memorable tracks from composer Holly Khan combine driving beats with gorgeously jangling Bhangra samples, providing a bed for Ahmed's densely verbose lyrics.

Ahmed is convincing as the charismatic Mustafa, full of swagger and excitement, flowing capably on the tracks, yet revealing a believable grain of self-doubt that visibly gnaws at his confidence when he relinquishes the mic. As Yusuf, he is a deliberately stiff, uncomfortable presence, trying to project cool teacher vibes while spiralling into grief. Meanwhile, Jonny Khan works hard in two underdeveloped parts, as sweetly optimistic DJ Omar and – in the play's most interesting, but least developed storyline – as sullen high school student Khalil, whose undirected anger and disrespect for authority threatens to derail a promising future.

Designer Cara Evans gives the piece a bleak aesthetic, with a slate-grey set evoking the brutalist architecture of the South Kilburn estate where the characters grew up. A flinty carpet is broken up by rectangular patches suggesting the outlines of cemetery plots or prayer rugs. Colour arrives explosively in this sombre world courtesy of Rachel Sampley's funky lighting, pulsing with magenta, royal purple and bronze tones during the musical numbers, dipping into a cool subaqueous green for the monologues.

Movement director Hamza Ali adds further visual texture to the piece, with loose-limbed b-boy posturing, lively synchronised dance steps and a few stylised beats that see Yusuf frozen in place by self-doubt, limbs stiffening as though petrifying. Stripped of voice or agency by society's judgement, he becomes, symbolically, a statue.

**Energetic rap music lifts this underwritten story of family and identity, told from a British-Pakistani perspective** ★★☆☆☆





## REVIEWS



# Come Alive! The Greatest Showman

## THEATRE

**October 10-March 30,**  
**PN October 11**  
**Running time: 1hr 50mins**

**Creator/director**  
Simon Hammerstein  
**Composers/lyricists**  
Benj Pasek, Justin Paul  
**Book writer**  
Bells Prendergast  
**Orchestrator**  
Matthew Brind  
**Musical supervisors**  
Greg Arrowsmith,  
Matthew Brind  
**Choreographers**  
Lukas McFarlane,  
Jerry Reeve, Tilde Björfors,  
Mattias Andersson  
**Set designer**  
Ruby Law  
**Costume designers**  
Susan Kulkarni,  
Martina Trottmann  
**Lighting designer**  
Adam Bassett  
**Sound designer**  
Gareth Tucker  
**Casting director**  
Pearson Casting  
**Cast includes**  
Simon Bailey, Aaliya Mai,  
Korri Aulakh, Dean Murrell,  
Antino Pansa, Yann LeBlanc,  
Charlotte-Hannah Jones,  
Fallon Mondlane, Jaz Ellington,  
Whitney Martins, Maisie  
Axton, Maisie Axton Genie  
Gledhill, Konnie Karachaliou,  
Mia Jayne, Emma-Louise  
Stansall, Ebby Sama,  
Ross Wilkins, Juan Anyosa,  
Klodi Dabkiewicz, Bella Diosa,  
Tybald Griesbacher  
**Production manager**  
Gary Beestone Associates  
**Producers**  
Outside The Box Amusements,  
TSG Entertainment

## EMPRESS MUSEUM, LONDON REVIEW BY PAUL VALE

There's very careful wording around the publicity for this circus extravaganza that differentiates it from the 2017 Hugh Jackman movie, from which it draws inspiration. Creative director Simon Hammerstein calls on a wealth of experience from the circus world to forge his spectacular, and Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, the songwriters behind Dear Evan Hansen and the Jackman movie's soundtrack, are credited as consultant creative producers. Their memorably emotive numbers from the film are fully repurposed here for a completely new story.

The narrative has nothing to do with PT Barnum. We follow Aaliya Mai making her professional debut as Max, a circus roustabout who has yet to realise her full potential. As her partner Korri Aulakh bids for higher billing for his trapeze act, Max realises that she, too, could take centre stage. Following a confrontation with Simon Bailey's wily Showman, Max takes her place under a sequinned top hat, but her new role threatens to overshadow Korri's moment in the spotlight. Meanwhile, the Showman has second thoughts about retirement and returns just in time for the finale.

Working on the assumption that nobody goes to the circus for the plot, director Hammerstein and choreographers Jerry Reeve and Lukas McFarlane throw everything into some astounding acrobatics and a succession of spectacular set pieces. There are aerialists, acrobats, trapeze artists and fire jugglers. A team of expressive vocalists and dancers is woven into the action, bringing to life the movement and sounds of the movie. It has to be one of the most intense circus experiences ever. On occasion, this leads to a lack of focus, with so much going on in the ring at once that it's difficult to know where to look.

Some routines stand alone, such as see-saw acrobats performing staggering multiple somersaults as they fly into the air. Antino Pansa showcases an astounding sense of balance on the soft wire, and Dean Murrell confidently soars above the ring in an exuberant display on straps. Bailey fully embraces the immersive nature of the experience, engaging with the audience, and leading several of the musical numbers, including the anthemic From Now On. Likewise, Mai as Max confidently belts out a transcendent Rewrite the Stars as partner Korri flies on the trapeze.

Ahead of the show, there's lots going on in this newly developed space, including food, drink and plenty of immersive fun, thoughtfully designed by Ruby Law to offer the impression of an old-fashioned tented circus complex. Just as the London run of this show was announced, Disney unveiled its plan to bring the 2017 movie to the stage on Broadway. A transfer of that production might turn out to be a welcome addition to the West End – but until then, this provides much of the drama, and all of the songs.

**Intense circus spectacular featuring songs from the**  
**Hugh Jackman movie ★★★★★**

# Hofesh Shechter Company: Theatre of Dreams

## DANCE

**October 10-12,**  
**PN October 10**  
**Running time: 1hr 30mins**

**Creator/choreographer**  
Hofesh Shechter  
**Composers**  
Hofesh Shechter,  
Molly Drake  
**Set designers**  
Hofesh Shechter, Niall Black  
**Costume designer**  
Osnat Kelner  
**Lighting designer**  
Tom Visser  
**Cast includes**  
Juliette Valerio, Natalia  
Gabrielczyk, Rachel Fallon,  
Robinson Cassarino, Tristan  
Carter, Yeji Kim, Cristel  
de Frankrijker, Zakarius  
Harry, Alex Haskins, Keanah  
Faith Simin, Chanel Vyent,  
Frédéric Despierre, Mickaël  
Frappat, Yaron Engler, Sabio  
Janiak, Alex Paton  
**Company stage manager**  
Rebecca Moore  
**Stage manager**  
Leon Smith  
**Assistant stage manager**  
Leah Butterworth  
**Producer**  
Hofesh Shechter Company

SADLER'S WELLS, LONDON  
REVIEW BY SIOBHAN MURPHY

"Good evening everyone, and welcome to your theatre of dreams," a dancer announces some way into Hofesh Shechter's latest piece. In fact, we're already pretty far down the rabbit hole with the 13 dancers of the Israeli choreographer's company – a couple of them have already had their kit off. But it's part of the game that Shechter is playing here with the idea of the observer and the observed, heightening the theatricality and pulling the curtain back, in a very literal sense.

The staging for this piece is a feat of technical ingenuity and razor-sharp timing. The set is a series of theatre curtains, acting as doorways to different scenes, or dividing the space, obscuring, revealing or flowing across the stage to move the action along. With the aid of Tom Visser's lighting, they enable frequent jump cuts where an involved ensemble scene will "vanish" in a swish of material and a momentary blackout, to be replaced with a totally different scenario – a riotous mêlée becomes a group sitting cross-legged and contemplative, for instance. The three red-suited onstage musicians and all their instruments (including full drum kit) keep popping up in different places too, silently disassembling and reassembling.

There's nothing so clear as a theme here – but at least, given that "dreams" is in the title, there's no real need for the piece to make sense. Instead, we have 90 minutes of a whirling maelstrom of the usual Shechter choreography, which hovers somewhere between rapturous folk dance, warehouse rave and full-on fight. There are nods to anxiety dreams – being naked in public, having to perform on stage – and some Bauschian touches, as when the wistful poetry of Molly Drake's I Remember suddenly replaces the pounding beat of Shechter's soundtrack and dancers drop like dead bodies. And there's a feel-good flourish about two thirds of the way in, when dancers descend into the stalls and invite audience members to join in with a shimmying jazzy lounge interlude.

But we're always soon back to the mass skirmish of his familiar, muscular, protean ensemble choreography – the dancers en masse with crouched frame, arms high and flailing, semaphoring frantically, almost simian in their swinging gait. Furious speed is contrasted with cinematic slo-mo. It's high energy and energising, targeting an adrenaline release rather than communicating anything with emotional nuance. But 90 minutes of turn on, tune in, drop out dance is not necessarily a bad thing. It lacks focus, sure, but it's undeniably full-on Shechter.

**Meticulous stagecraft from the Israeli choreographer**

★★★★★







Dorothea Myer-Bennett,  
Caroline Catz, Joshua Malina,  
Gabriel Howell and Simon Yadoo

# What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank

THEATRE

October 4-November 23,  
PN October 14  
Running time: 2hrs

**Author**  
Nathan Englander  
**Director**  
Patrick Marber  
**Associate director**  
Natalie Simone  
**Movement director**  
EJ Boyle  
**Fight director**  
Tim Klotz  
**Set designer**  
Anna Fleischle  
**Lighting designer**  
Sally Ferguson  
**Sound designer**  
David Gregory  
**Casting director**  
Helena Palmer  
**Cast**  
Dorothea Myer-Bennett,  
Simon Yadoo, Caroline  
Catz, Joshua Malina,  
Gabriel Howell  
**Production managers**  
Alex Firth, Harry Armytage  
**Company stage manager**  
Matthew Revell-Griffiths  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Elspeth Watt  
**Assistant stage managers**  
Ellie Cummings, Jodie Devlin  
**Producer**  
Oliver King

MARYLEBONE THEATRE, LONDON  
REVIEW BY HOLLY O'MAHONY

“There’s only one Jewish,” a character declares early on before this explosive, refreshingly political play from Nathan Englander unravels to prove quite the opposite. Over fierce debate between two American Jewish couples – one a pair of Florida-dwelling liberals, the other Orthodox and based in Jerusalem – it explores the many facets of Jewish identity in 2024. Everything is on the table here, from intergenerational trauma dating back to the Holocaust to the current war in Gaza and taboos around interfaith marriages. In Patrick Marber’s taut, tense production, it is riveting in its arguments, simultaneously an up-to-the-minute political drama and a musing on how to own and honour an inherited religious identity, regardless of your faith.

It is based on the title story from Englander’s 2012 collection of short stories, which was first adapted for a New York theatre audience in 2019 and has been revised for a British one in the light of events since October 7, 2023.

Shoshana (Dorothea Myer-Bennett) and Yerucham (Simon Yadoo) have returned to America from Israel and are paying a visit to Shoshana’s estranged childhood best friend Debbie (Caroline Catz) and her husband Phil (Joshua Malina). “Just don’t mention the war,” Debbie cautions her cynical, secular husband, who finds plenty more ways to antagonise their visitors before starting a discussion of the Middle East conflict, from taking swipes at them for changing their names from Lauren and Mark, to fetishising Shoshana’s wig.

Yerucham is quick to jibe back, reprimanding the couple’s vast living space – an open-plan kitchen set from Anna Fleischle – when they have only one child to his eight. Should they not be helping Jewish efforts to repopulate? Debbie and Phil’s son Trevor (Gabriel Howell), meanwhile, has renounced his Jewishness altogether – he’s more concerned about his home state sinking as a result of climate change.

If the rapid escalation of tensions is a little unrealistic, the play is thrilling in its five-way articulate arguments, which Englander is careful to balance, and his characters are pleasingly nuanced. Debbie thinks about the atrocities of the Holocaust every day, but she’s first to mention the genocide in Gaza. Yerucham is the son of a Holocaust survivor, but is tickled by Phil’s crass restaurant names for his imaginary Holocaust theme park.

Tension rises and abates, and the tone swings continuously between funny and fiery. While not the entire focus, it bravely, exhilaratingly confronts knotty politics, covering Israel’s war on Palestine, October 7, the decades of oppression and the land’s history dating back thousands of years. It acknowledges the messiness, and in so doing it is a reminder that even when we don’t have the answers, we should be having the conversation.

Fiery exploration of Jewish identity is explosive and intelligent  
★★★★★

# Reverberation

THEATRE

October 2-November 2,  
PN October 8  
Running time: 2hrs 30mins

**Author**  
Matthew López  
**Composer/sound designer**  
Nicola T Chang  
**Dramaturg**  
Ben Atterbury  
**Director**  
Jack Sain  
**Assistant director**  
Lex Kaby  
**Movement director**  
Jade Hackett  
**Intimacy director**  
Robbie Taylor Hunt  
**Set/costume designer**  
Ti Green  
**Lighting designer**  
Robbie Butler  
**Video/projection designer**  
Daniel Denton  
**Vocal/dialect coaches**  
Aundrea Fudge,  
Carol Fairlamb  
**Casting director**  
Matilda James  
**Cast**  
Eleanor Tomlinson,  
Michael Ahomka-Lindsay,  
Jack Gibson  
**Production manager**  
Aled Thomas  
**Company stage manager**  
Lucy Topham  
**Deputy stage manager**  
Verity Clayton  
**Assistant stage manager**  
Eve Richardson  
**Producers**  
Bristol Old Vic, Glass  
Half Full Productions

BRISTOL OLD VIC REVIEW BY BEN KULVICHIT

Before The Inheritance shot US playwright Matthew López on to the international stage, there was the chamber piece Reverberation, which now receives its UK premiere, directed by Jack Sain, in a version relocated from New York City to London.

Jonathan (Michael Ahomkah-Lindsay), a 30-year-old illustrator, barely leaves the flat he has lived in for most of his adult life. In Ti Green’s impressive design, this apartment, like Jonathan, gives little away: a sleek, grey box that could just as well be an Airbnb, completely impersonal but for the collection of well-thumbed books that Jonathan waxes lyrical over. Green casts the flat’s walls in gauze, revealing spaces beyond: the corridor outside, the stairwell, the flat upstairs. The space is porous: Robbie Butler’s lighting spills through from many directions, and the walls come alive with video designer Daniel Denton’s back-projected splashes of colour and glitching dreams.

While Jonathan’s borderline agoraphobia (the reasons for which are revealed later) keeps him confined, he invites others in: Grindr hook-ups, and then Claire (Eleanor Tomlinson), an American woman who has just moved in upstairs. Claire is Jonathan’s opposite: kooky, forthright and nomadic, but equally lost in her own way. She’s a Zooey Deschanel-esque manic pixie dream girl – the type of person who only exists in stories, though there is a rationalisation for this that would spoil the play’s last-minute twist.

Young director Sain handles the play confidently, and together with intimacy coordinator Robbie Taylor Hunt stages a sex scene as gratifyingly mundane as I’ve seen on stage. There are flourishes that strike a bum note – the Charli XCX needle drops are a little eager to telegraph hipness – but there is also a mature attention paid to wordless breathing space. It’s in these tender, vulnerable moments that Ahomka-Lindsay excels as Jonathan, though he doesn’t fully convince when wearing his steelier, grief-hardened carapace of emotional unavailability and casual nastiness.

While the play focuses on Jonathan and Claire’s unlikely, semi-platonic relationship, it is bookended by two important encounters with a young gay man Jonathan meets on Grindr. Here, López is eloquent on the loneliness of hook-up culture and urban gay life. When Jonathan reveals his crushed dream of a quiet, settled family life in the Cotswolds with his late partner Gabriel, we recognise it as a homonormative one.

It’s no mistake either that it is Claire, a straight woman, who steps in to fill the hole that Gabriel’s death has left in his life. Jonathan craves true intimacy of a kind that his queer life isn’t providing. López doesn’t provide an answer for what queer family-making might look like for Jonathan, only that it must involve a leap of faith; faith in a world beyond grief, and in the possibility of new, different intimacies.

Sensitive production of Matthew López’s chamber play  
about urban gay life and loneliness ★★★★★



Michael Ahomka-Lindsay  
and Eleanor Tomlinson



## REVIEWS

ROGER MOORE PHOTOGRAPHY

Yolanda Ovide



# Slave: A Question of Freedom

## THEATRE

**October 9-12, then touring until November 9**  
**PN October 9**  
**Running time: 2hrs 10mins**

**Authors**  
 Mende Nazer, Damien Lewis  
**Adapters**  
 Kevin Fegan, Caroline Clegg  
**Composer**  
 Carol Donaldson  
**Director**  
 Caroline Clegg  
**Musical director**  
 Dan Willis  
**Fight director**  
 Kevin McCurdy  
**Intimacy director**  
 Tolu Oshodi  
**Set/costume designer**  
 Lara Booth  
**Lighting/video/projection designer**  
 Tracey Gibbs  
**Cast includes**  
 Chris Jack, Ebony Feare, Joseph Jordan, Yolanda Ovide, Oluwalonimi Oweyemi, Teddy Oyediran, Mohand Abdalrahman, Sara Faraj, Darlene Sanangurai  
**Stage manager**  
 Alexandra Grace Brown  
**Producer**  
 Feelgood Theatre Productions

## THE LOWRY, SALFORD REVIEW BY CHRIS BARTLETT

This adaptation of Mende Nazer's autobiography about her experiences of being abducted from her village in Sudan and sold into slavery is proof positive of theatre's ability to amplify a cause and help enact real change. Since it was first staged in Manchester in 2010, and performed at the House of Lords in support of a campaign for fresh legislation, the Modern Slavery Act was passed into UK law in 2015. But this revival, which marks 30 years of Feelgood Theatre, is a timely reminder that the fight is far from over.

Early scenes portraying Mende's idyllic childhood on her parents' farm in the Nuba mountains, surrounded by familial love, buzzing with movement and evocatively lit by Tracey Gibbs, contrast sharply with the horrors that come. The play's origins as a biography are evident in places, as Nazer's descriptions are shared out among the cast. But Kevin Fegan and director Caroline Clegg's adaptation does a good job of selecting which events work best enacted, and which are more effectively recounted directly to the audience. Yolanda Ovide does a tremendous job of conveying Mende's anguish in the moment, and her anger and disbelief over what she had to endure after the event.

At times, the details of the 12-year-old's treatment at the hands of her captors are almost too much to bear. The brutal, almost unfathomable, extent of what Mende suffered and witnessed first-hand is viscerally conveyed in a heart-stopping sequence depicting the raid on her village. But almost as upsetting are the smaller indignities dealt out to her as she works for 10 years as an unpaid servant in two Arabic households in Khartoum and London, as we witness the pain of her being separated from her only friend and the distress of eating and sleeping alone.

The first glimmers of hope appear when she arrives in London and the other Sudanese people she encounters start to recognise her plight, prompting a plot to aid her escape. The section in which she is finally rescued takes on the pulse-quickenning urgency of a spy drama or heist movie, while the emotional phone call she eventually makes home to talk to her family is touchingly realised.

Although Nazer's two-year fight to avoid deportation back to Sudan, aided by British journalist Damien Lewis (a reassuringly avuncular Joseph Jordan), was eventually successful, the play doesn't shy away from showing how her experiences still impact her life. But it also makes it clear how important it was for to be able to share her story.

**Powerful, heart-rending true story of survival in the face of unthinkable adversity ★★★★★**

# Eurydice

## THEATRE

**October 3-November 9,**  
**PN October 8**  
**Running time: 1hr 30mins**

**Author**  
 Sarah Ruhl  
**Director**  
 Stella Powell-Jones  
**Associate/movement director**  
 Elliot Pritchard  
**Intimacy director**  
 Hannah Goalstone  
**Set designer**  
 Tina Torbey  
**Costume designer**  
 Emily Stuart  
**Lighting designer**  
 Chris McDonnell  
**Sound designer**  
 Carmel Smickersgill  
**Casting director**  
 Marc Frankum  
**Cast includes**  
 Dickon Tyrrell, Eve Ponsonby, Joe Wiltshire Smith, Katy Brittain, Tom Morley, Keaton Guimarães-Tolley, Leyon Stolz-Hunter  
**Production manager**  
 Lucy Mewis-McKerrow  
**Stage manager**  
 Lisa Cochrane  
**Producer**  
 Gabriele Uboldi

**JERMYN STREET THEATRE, LONDON**  
**REVIEW BY HOLLY O'MAHONY**

Part of the enduring appeal of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is that its story of lovers separated by death is a universally lived experience. Who among us wouldn't attempt to make a similar, seemingly simple pact (don't look back until you've returned from the underworld) to have more time with someone we've loved – romantically or platonically – and lost?

American playwright Sarah Ruhl's adaptation of the tale, directed here by Stella Powell-Jones, drops Orpheus from the title (although he's still in the narrative) and focuses primarily on Eurydice adjusting to life underground, navigating language and memory loss. But through the introduction of a father figure waiting for her in the afterlife, it continues to resonate as a story of love transcending worldly boundaries.

The production opens with Orpheus (a puppyish Keaton Guimarães-Tolley) wooing Eurydice (a feistier Eve Ponsonby) through song, and although the pair get engaged, their love is not convincing: Ruhl suggests their relationship is one of intense hormones rather than deep passion. Orpheus is goofily besotted with Eurydice, but can't listen to her; their few exchanges include a lovers' tiff as he questions, then dismisses, her love of reading.

In Powell-Jones' production there is also little sense of Orpheus as a fine musician; he sings a brief, bland line from a melody once and asks Eurydice to remember it. But music, and sound, are integral to her production. Carmel Smickersgill's sound design infuses the land of the living with the cooing of exotic birds and the underworld with echoey drops of water. Her music adds tension, triggers laughs and provokes sorrow along the way.

There are also charming touches of magical realism. Eurydice is ensnared on the night of her wedding by a shadowy predator (Joe Wiltshire Smith) with a letter from her dead father (Dickon Tyrrell) – one of the few souls who remembers his life. Through letters passed by worms between the worlds of the living and the dead, there's a sense that boundaries aren't fixed. And Tina Torbey's skyscape set design, which covers the stage floor and walls in a cloudy blue sky, further distorts our sense of where the underworld really is.

Besides her father, the characters Eurydice meets underground are reminiscent of those in Lewis Carroll's Alice books in their skewed logic and lack of empathy. There's a chorus of stones who demand she doesn't cry, and the Lord of the Underworld (Wiltshire Smith again) is a sinister schoolboy on a hobby horse.

Some giggles: in a play supposedly following Eurydice's story, her father is given more time fondly remembering his life than she is. And would Orpheus really attempt to contact the dead Eurydice via a call operator? Still, it's an imaginative take on the beloved myth.

**Imaginative take on the timeless myth ★★★★★**



Eve Ponsonby and  
 Keaton Guimarães-Tolley

ALEX BRENNER





Caoimhe Farren

# Yerma

THEATRE

October 10-November 3  
PN October 10  
Running time: 1hr 30mins

**Author**  
Federico García Lorca  
**Adapter/director**  
Patrick J O'Reilly  
**Composer/sound designer**  
Garth McConaghie  
**Associate director**  
Ciaran Haggerty  
**Set designer**  
Tracey Lindsay  
**Costume designer**  
Niamh Kearney  
**Lighting designer**  
Mary Tumelty  
**Casting directors**  
Natalie Murphy,  
Mary-Ellen O'Hara  
**Cast**  
Caoimhe Farren, Hazel  
Clifford, Laura Hughes,  
Matthew Forsythe, Sophie  
Robinson, Stefan Dunbar,  
Niamh McAllister  
**Production manager**  
Jordan Nelson  
**Stage manager**  
Sophie Thompson  
**Producer**  
Tinderbox Theatre Company

LYRIC THEATRE, BELFAST REVIEW BY JANE COYLE

Federico García Lorca's drama examines the plight of a woman who, after five years of marriage to her nice but dull husband, has been unable to conceive. Its title is a Spanish adjective meaning barren. This cruel label has been hung on her as a mark of her failure to fulfil the most basic duty demanded of a woman. As with the other plays in this trilogy of female-dominated rural tragedies, Blood Wedding and The House of Bernarda Alba, Lorca pours undiluted passion, acute behavioural observation and lyrical poetry into this parable of despair and desire, here directed by Patrick J O'Reilly.

In narrative style and dramatic content, the play, which is originally set in a devout, deeply conservative village in Lorca's native Andalucía, is made for Le Coq-trained O'Reilly's playful, European-inspired imagination and expressive vision. He relocates his full-throated adaptation from the steamy heat of 1930s Spain to the glowering hills along the political and social interface of the Irish borderlands. It is a place where dark deeds occur and are summarily dealt with, where conventional religion rubs shoulders with pagan ritual, where the land yields natural cures for every malady.

Caoimhe Farren's Yerma begins her emotional journey with quiet introspection before hitting her stride. She meets public disapproval with defiance, reaching for the bottle when incessant gossip about her attraction to the swaggering Vincent (Matthew Forsythe) becomes unbearable. She trails trouble in her wake; those around her brace themselves, waiting, watching for signs of the chaos she will inevitably precipitate.

The storyline unfolds at a christening party for her youngest sister's baby, a raucous family affair attended by assorted relatives and their hoards of children, an outpouring of fertility not wasted on Yerma. Presiding over this long-practised combination of religious ceremony and hooley is Laura Hughes' matriarch, part-mother hen, part-witchy woman, who works hard to ramp up the celebratory atmosphere. The sisters (Hazel Clifford, Niamh McAllister and Sophie Robinson) are sexy, girly versions of their mammy, weary of their eldest sibling's attention-seeking antics and failing to see her mounting torment until it is too late.

Tracey Lindsay's set design is full of surprises. It is centred on a shabby car in a hotel car park, which mirrors as the church, the ladies' toilet and a function room; its doors are wrenched opened and slammed shut; the engine lid is lifted to reveal a hot buffet; the boot and back seats enclose all manner of madcap comings and goings. In all the fun and fury and surreal out-of-body experiences, Lorca's glorious poetry at the breaking heart of the play risks being submerged, but O'Reilly's creative concept holds steady through to the end.

Resetting of Lorca's tragedy from the heat of Spain to the chilly Irish borderlands loses some of its poetry ★★☆☆

# Santi and Naz

THEATRE

October 8-10, then touring  
until February  
PN October 9  
Running time: 1hr 10mins

**Authors**  
Guleraana Mir,  
afshan d'souza-lodhi  
**Director**  
Madelaine Moore  
**Associate director**  
Vikesh Godhwani  
**Movement director**  
Rakhee Sharma  
**Set/costume designer**  
Sascha Gilmour  
**Lighting designer**  
Laura Howard  
**Composer/sound designer**  
Tom Penn  
**Cast**  
Aiyana Bartlett, Farah Ashraf  
**Production manager**  
Brent Tan  
**Company manager**  
Courtenay Johnson  
**Producer**  
The Thelmas, Pleasance

WARDROBE THEATRE, BRISTOL  
REVIEW BY BEN KULVICHIT

Santi and Naz, in Guleraana Mir and afshan d'souza-lodhi's co-written play for the Thelmas, are two inseparable teenage best friends. Santi is Sikh and Naz Muslim – both live in a village in pre-partition India, somewhere near where a historic line is about to be drawn by white men. While their country goes through seismic changes around them, they do what children their age do: play, bicker, gossip, read banned saucy literature and ogle the village hunk. Under Madelaine Moore's relentlessly pacy direction, Aiyana Bartlett (Santi) and Farah Ashraf (Naz) deliver explosive energy, recounting their friendship in short, illustrative, highly choreographed scenes. It's a bombastic style that's sometimes endearing, but mostly a little exhausting.

As the play progresses and partition nears, the political realities around them encroach on their friendship. Naz is betrothed to a tailor from Rawalpindi, a repulsive man whom the friends jokingly nickname "keema-breath"; he showers her with lavish gifts and the prospect of life in Pakistan comes to represent safety and stability for Naz, even as she realises that she is queer and the grim reality of a potentially abusive arranged marriage begins to dawn on her. Santi, meanwhile, cannot understand Naz's desire to leave and falls under the spell of her infatuation with Rahul (the aforementioned hunk), who's an advocate for Hindu nationalism. Chaos erupts as religious violence and mass migration lead to death in the streets. It becomes clear that a sea change is coming for them and their friendship.

Bartlett and Ashraf use their natural British accents as the girls, but slip into local voices when impersonating elders, suitors and political leaders (making a passage in which they read speeches by Mahatma Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah the most entertaining of the play). It emphasises that these girls are not political actors themselves, but islands of innocence amid religious tension, nation-building conflict and political manoeuvrings that they do not fully comprehend and are powerless to change.

And there's the rub: for a play that is nominally about the partition of India, it doesn't really tackle its theme. There's little exposition to elaborate on the circumstances or events leading up to partition, nor does it stake a political claim beyond the self-evident fact that change has consequences for blameless victims and humanitarian crises are bad. What we are left with is a play of well-trodden coming-of-age and loss-of-innocence plot beats, set against a historical backdrop. It is fluent, engaging, professional and performed with conviction, but we're left wondering quite to what purpose.

Story of female friendship and coming of age set during Indian partition is energetic, but lacks substance ★★☆☆



Aiyana Bartlett and Farah Ashraf

PAUL BLAKEMORE



# HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

advertising enquiries Christopher Porter

christopher.porter@thestage.co.uk

0207 939 8465

ATLANTIC ACTING SCHOOL



Professional Conservatory in NYC!

Applications Open for the World Renowned Full-Time Conservatory 2025, follow the footsteps of acclaimed actors like Rose Byrne, Jessica Alba, and Clark Gregg, who honed their skills with the Practical Aesthetics technique at Atlantic.

Scholarship Opportunities Available! Application Due Date: November 15!

Apply early and take advantage of this chance to train at one of the leading acting schools in the heart of New York City!

atlanticactingschool.org | admissions@atlantictheater.org | 212.691.5919  
76 Ninth Ave, Suite 313 New York, NY 10011

Est. 2006  
peer productions

PEER ACTOR DEVELOPMENT

A FREE LAUNCH PAD FOR YOUR CAREER

TRAIN with industry professionals.  
TOUR as part of an award-winning company.  
GET INTO DRAMA SCHOOL – We had 100% success rate last year!

WWW.PEERPRODUCTIONS.CO.UK  
OR CALL 01483 921473

APPLY NOW FOR SEPT 25



ESSENTIAL BOOKS FOR ACTORS



bloomsbury.com/drama

methuen | drama

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

STORYTELLERS OF THE FUTURE LISTEN UP!

WE IGNITE CREATIVE CAREERS.  
LET'S GET STARTED ON YOURS...

NEW TECHNICAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2025  
FULL-TIME, PART-TIME & SHORT COURSES AVAILABLE

oldvic.ac.uk/course-finder







# How to choose your drama school



## 26

### Altering course

How drama schools are evolving to meet industry demands



## 30

### Quality assurance

Industry figures on whether accreditation is fit for purpose



## 34

### Backstage courses

Rob Halliday offers his top tips on choosing the best technical training



## 36

### The Green Room

How did established theatre workers choose their drama school?



## HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

# Changing courses: how training is evolving to meet industry demands

Drama schools are having to adopt a more collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to ensure students have the skills necessary to succeed in today's world and the future. Leaders at some of the UK's top institutions tell **John Byrne** how they are adapting their courses to keep up with the demands of an ever-changing industry

**F**rom established theatrical actors portraying supervillains in big-screen fantasy films, to movie stars selling out West End and Broadway runs of classic plays, to one-person fringe shows being developed into hit TV properties, high-profile 'crossovers' between stage work and other creative disciplines are a symbol of an ever-widening range of opportunities that actors can find on the other side of training.

However, to equip students to make the most of these developments, drama schools, which were historically focused on training up performers for relatively uniform stage careers, are also having to evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing industry.

"We want to enable graduates to work in any medium they want to, and to feel confident moving between different creative environments," says Gilly Roche, head of interdisciplinary practice at Guildhall School of Music and Drama. "We do this by working with a team of teachers and external professionals who have up-to-date industry expertise in a range of performance mediums. We also create learning environments that reflect the types of environments students might encounter upon graduation. For example, in spring 2024, acting students watched the premieres of their own screen productions at the Barbican Cinema and showcased new work that they had written and performed as part of the multidisciplinary, end-of-year Making It Festival."

Applicants whose aspirations to 'make it' are in the field of musical theatre are also likely to find an increasingly interdisciplinary approach informing courses they are considering.

"At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the BA Musical Theatre degree programme is the only one in the UK (possibly the world) that offers integration of actor musicianship skills alongside the traditional focus on acting, singing and dance disciplines," says Jane Hensey, head of musical theatre. "The programme was established 15 years ago, predicting the industry shifts towards a demand for multi-skilled performer-creators and has continued to flourish and secure its reputation as being sector leading in this field."

Hensey's RSC colleague Mark Stevenson, interim head of BA Performance, says that, for one innovative course in particular, the interdisciplinary approach has proven particularly relevant: "The BA Performance degree for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Actors is the only three-year undergraduate programme of its kind in the UK. We exist to train Deaf performers to make a career in the performance industries. Recognising the need for a broad-based portfolio, we develop skills in a variety of fields, including Acting for Stage and Screen, Creating New Work, Visual Theatre, workshop facilitation and short film writing and directing. Our students use either British Sign Language or spoken English."

The programme has dedicated three-year training pathways, which prepare students for careers in different performance media: Actor and Script trains actors to develop performance from narrative theatrical text from fundamental basics, through scene study and monologue work to fully realised main stage productions. Actor and New Work develops devising and writing skills, which



GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

**'We want to enable graduates to work in any medium they want to, and to feel confident moving between different creative environments'**

Gilly Roche, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

students apply to their own theatrical creations as well as adaptations of existing material.

Over the three years, Script to Screen develops students' ability to be actors in front of the camera, write their own short film scripts and finally act in and direct student-led shorts. They also take on production roles such as production planning, art department and editing.

"Where possible we also look to collaborate with other programmes," adds Stevenson. "Working with stage management and design students is built into our theatrical productions while we work closely with colleagues in the BA Filmmaking department to realise our shorts. When timetables allow, we share practice across performances courses – both with BA Acting (in our Devised Theatre work festival and Industry Showcase) and BA Musical Theatre (for example, in an upcoming production of A Christmas Carol). This cross-fertilisation is valuable in that students not only learn from each other's methods but also in developing an awareness of the richness of British Sign Language and its culture."



Presenting students with as broad a range of inputs and experiences as possible is an important aspect of interdisciplinary training, as Will Hammond, director of school of performance at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, explains: "We have five acting degrees, each programme having a cohort of 20 actors per year: Acting, Acting (Contemporary Performance), Acting (Musicianship), Acting (Musical Theatre) and Acting (Screen and Digital). We enable integration of these distinct courses in a shared module, Artistic Practice."

"It brings together students from all the acting courses to share ideas and skills as they work together on creating original material for a diverse range of mediums and platforms. Training within a specialist performing arts institution, which actively encourages independent work, means students also get opportunities to work on a wide range of projects alongside their studies by collaborating with students from other courses including, filmmaking, sound technology, music and dance."

Hammond says that across the programmes there is a common approach to actor training, with all students receiving the same core technical training.

"But every actor, like every person, is different – there isn't a one-size-fits-all for successful actor training," he adds. "We emphasise to our students the need for them to harness what is unique to them as a performer and encourage them to cherry pick the techniques and practitioners that work for them. Then through their specialism they are presented with a methodology by which they can select, adapt and interpret those skills according to different platforms and mediums."

Philippa Strandberg-Long, director of actor training and drama school at LAMDA makes the point that other course leaders have also echoed: that diverse experiences need to be underpinned by a strong foundation.

"At the core of our training is the belief that strong acting skills form the foundation for success in any medium. We focus on core techniques that can be adapted to various performance contexts while fostering a deep commitment to ensemble work and collaboration. Our ethos centres on teamwork, making our students highly adaptable



# HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

BELOW: ROBBIE MCFADZEAN; INSET: NINA PHOTOGRAPHY

LAMDA

**BA Musical Theatre students bring the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's actor-musician staging of Urinetown to life; inset: RADA short film**



**‘At the core of our training is the belief that strong acting skills form the foundation for success in any medium’**

Philippa Strandberg-Long, LAMDA

and enjoyable to work with in any setting – qualities that are essential in an industry where collaboration is key.”

In addition to core techniques, students are guided through a comprehensive artistic journey supported by “artist development” sessions that cover reflection, resilience, writing, pitching and staying informed about current industry trends. “We also encourage imaginative exploration through improvisation, devising, and creating original work for both stage and screen,” she adds. “By placing ensemble work and collaboration at the heart of their development, we prepare students to be versatile, collaborative, and ready to thrive in a wide range of scenarios within the industry.”

Collaboration as a key skill is also a principle RADA’s Sinéad Rushe, lead tutor in acting, and Pamela Jikiemi, head of film, television and audio are keen to jointly espouse. They explain that actors with a clear understanding of working in digital environments can work in gaming, animation and podcasting and also point to a long tradition of actors writing at RADA.

Acting and technical theatre arts students also train together and industry-facing professional preparation is embedded in the core curriculum from an early stage of the training. They also say there are plans underway to create a regular Studio Scratch Night curated by students and alumni to test drive their own emerging new work.

Richard Patterson, head of the performance department at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama agrees collaboration and networking are essential not only within the training environment but also in the wider industry.

“The RCSSD department of performance is supported by a large team of industry partners who deliver training and support the student experience as visiting professionals and visiting lecturers. This maintains a currency and relevance in the training the students receive and the opportunity to experience the true rigour, workings and expectations of the industry within the kind, safe and supportive environment of education.

“Public productions allow acting students to understand the broader landscape of the industry, as they work with visiting creative teams made up of visiting professionals and teams, but also our own staff and students. Within the two other academic departments of Central, students can engage in theatremaking with peers from other programmes of study that together represent the wider ecosystem of performance as an art form and industry. This networking not only produces a diverse and broad range of creative and original student work but will also provide links and opportunities for collaborative ventures beyond and outside of their time on the course.”

**The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's BA Performance degree (for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Actors) recruits every three years. Applications are now open for September 2025 entry; [rsc.ac.uk/courses/ba-performance-deaf-hoh-actors](https://rsc.ac.uk/courses/ba-performance-deaf-hoh-actors)**

ROBBIE MCFADZEAN

LIVERPOOL INSTITUTE FOR PERFORMING ARTS




**‘At the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the BA Musical Theatre degree programme is the only one in the UK that offers integration of actor musicianship skills alongside the traditional focus on acting, singing and dance’**  
Jane Hensey, head of musical theatre


**‘[Our shared module], Artistic Practice, brings together students from all the acting courses to share ideas and skills as they work together on creating original material for a diverse range of mediums and platforms’**  
Will Hammond, LIPA



# HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL


advertising enquiries Christopher Porter      christopher.porter@thestage.co.uk      0207 939 8465






Foundation (CertHE), Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes in:






- Acting
- Actor-Musician
- Applied and Contemporary Theatre
- Movement Direction
- Musical Theatre
- Stage and Production Management
- Teaching and Practice of Voice and Singing
- Theatre Production
- Theatre (part-time online learning)



**APPLY NOW**

- ▶ Top 3 in the UK for Dance and Drama (The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2024)
- ▶ Consistent high overall student satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey
- ▶ World-class facilities ranking amongst some of the best professional training facilities in the UK Conservatoire sector
- ▶ **Learn more about studying with us: [gsauk.org/study-with-us](https://gsauk.org/study-with-us)**



 [guildfordschoolofacting](https://www.instagram.com/guildfordschoolofacting)     [Guildford School of Acting](https://www.facebook.com/GuildfordSchoolofActing)     [@The\\_GSA](https://twitter.com/The_GSA)     [gsauk.org](https://www.gsauk.org)     [SCAN ME](#)



## BA Acting for Stage and Screen at LSBU

Training brave, versatile actors for the industry, with the industry.

Our creative stage and screen training programme will launch your career as a well-connected, industry-ready actor with access to transformative opportunities, international artistic projects and collaborations with top UK theatre makers.

Join us at our next open day to learn more, on Saturday 16th November 2024.







[lsbu.ac.uk](https://lsbu.ac.uk)



BRISTOL SCHOOL OF ACTING

This is an advertisement feature

# A success story that continues to thrive

Despite a challenging time for drama schools, Bristol School of Acting continues to go from strength to strength, reimagining training for the 21st century through its four degree programmes and equipping students with the skills to succeed in the industry

**F**ounded in 2020, Bristol School of Acting is one of the UK’s youngest drama schools – but it has already established itself as an innovative and prestigious institution. Now entering its fifth year of operations, it continues to go from strength to strength.

“This is a challenging time for drama schools, but Bristol School of Acting is thriving,” says head of school and co-artistic director Stuart Wood. “We are achieving impressive results thanks to the quality of our teaching and the care we take of our students.”

Bristol School of Acting offers four programmes: a three-year BA (hons) in Acting for Stage and Screen, a three-year BA (hons) in Acting for Screen, a two-year BA (hons) in Acting and Devised Theatre, and a two-year BA (hons) in Technical Theatre Arts.

“Our degree in Acting for Stage and Screen is unique,” Wood explains. “The default training is still largely based on Stanislavski. We base ours on Michael Chekhov. We think his techniques offer a more imaginative, dynamic and physical approach to acting that chimes with what a lot of people in the industry are looking for at the moment.

“Our Acting for Screen degree is also unique, providing that highly focused training that is already being valued in the industry and a quality that is seeing our graduating films being invited to film festivals,” he adds. “It has been developed by Matthew Humphreys, who set up Pace University’s pioneering programme before joining us here in Bristol.”

Bristol School of Acting’s degree in Acting and Devised Theatre, meanwhile, is delivered in partnership with locally based, internationally acclaimed company the Wardrobe Ensemble, while its degree in Technical Theatre Arts is delivered in partnership with Tobacco Factory Theatres. Both, explains Wood, are accelerated, two-year courses.

**‘Bristol School of Acting provides the training that every drama school should strive to achieve’**  
Student Salome Haertel

“With Technical Theatre Arts there is a national shortage in technical skills,” he says. “It makes sense for students to get skilled up and into the workplace quickly. Plus, completing a degree in two years, rather than three, makes it much more cost-effective, for the student too, which is really important.”

Teaching at Bristol School of Acting is delivered by an experienced faculty led by Wood and Olivier award-winning director Miranda Cromwell, and the school’s activity is overseen by a board of acclaimed theatre practitioners, including Olivier award-winning playwright John Retallack and BAFTA-winning screen director Philippa Lowthorpe.

Students will find themselves right at the heart of Bristol’s thriving cultural scene, too, learning and working at Tobacco Factory Theatres, Bristol Old Vic and elsewhere. And, as Bristol School of Acting is relatively small, students will get more individual attention, which helps to engender a family feel around the institution.

“Bristol School of Acting provides the training that every drama school should strive towards achieving,” says Salome Haertel, a second-year student. “You will



Gloria Mabika in an Acting for Screen project

be pushed and nurtured in ways that bring you to levels in your art that you didn’t even realise you were capable of. The staff are wonderful at pinpointing your needs as an individual and all of the courses go above and beyond to provide the highest quality training.”

“We are really proud of what we have done as a staff team so far at Bristol School of Acting,” adds Wood. “The school has become a real success story.”

[bristolschoolofacting.com](http://bristolschoolofacting.com)

BSA

Bristol School of Acting

BA (HONS)

ACTING FOR STAGE AND SCREEN.

BA (HONS)

ACTING FOR SCREEN.

BA (HONS)

ACTING AND DEVISED THEATRE.

TWO YEAR ACCELERATED DEGREE

BA (HONS)

TECHNICAL THEATRE ARTS.

TWO YEAR ACCELERATED DEGREE

ALL AUDITIONS ARE FREE!

Find out more and apply at [bristolschoolofacting.com](http://bristolschoolofacting.com)

Angels in America 2024



## HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

# Quality assurance: how can you tell if a course is up to the grade?

The landscape of drama school accreditation has changed significantly, particularly with the demise of Drama UK. But with so many courses to pick from, it can be confusing for prospective students to choose between institutions. **Giverny Masso** talks to some of the industry's key players to help you navigate the process and make the right training choices for you



**'[LAMDA] is required to conform to the Office for Students' multiple conditions of registration, which include a range of factors such as quality of provision, continuation rates, progression, financial sustainability, etc'**

LAMDA principal and chief executive Mark O'Thomas



LEEJAY TOWNSEND

**'[The industry needs to] re-establish what elite training is. I think we've lost that. We now get into a sort of factory training, and I think that's to the detriment of the industry, and indeed, to the students'**

Former MTA principal Annemarie Lewis Thomas

Anyone wanting to train on a drama-related course has a multitude of options to choose from. On UCAS, there are more than 50 institutions offering a variety of acting courses (excluding programmes that are more academic). There are further drama schools not listed on UCAS with their own application process. With so many courses to pick from, how can prospective students be assured of their quality? And how are these courses and institutions being accredited?

In the current landscape, accreditation is patchy. There is no single body that fully oversees the accreditation of all drama schools or vocational performing arts courses. There are also differing opinions on whether current systems are sufficient, or if there needs to be better quality indicators.

Drama training accreditation has a chequered history. In 2012, two organisations providing accreditation – the Conference of Drama Schools and the National Council for Drama Training – merged to form a single accreditation body called Drama UK.

In 2016, it was announced that Drama UK was to close, after several high-profile member schools quit the

organisation. In a statement at the time, Drama UK said that “significant changes in higher-education funding” meant its role as an accreditation body was “no longer required or sustainable”. Trustee Pauline Tambling added that drama schools that were independent in 2000, with no state funding, were now funded through the higher-education funding system, meaning they “get their accreditation and quality assurance via the state system and no longer need any accreditation from the industry”.

In 2017, a new membership body called the Federation of Drama Schools launched as a “partial replacement” to Drama UK. It has 17 partner schools, with the FDS stating on its website that these have a “track record of producing graduates with long-term careers [and] providing professional training with recognisable identity”.

In 2018, the Council for Dance Education and Training relaunched as CDMT and took on accreditation and advocacy roles previously carried out by Drama UK. The organisation's role differs from Drama UK in that it offers independent accreditation for drama institutions rather than courses, and it also offers validation for organisations that award qualifications, such as Trinity College London.

Membership of CDMT is voluntary, and it has 26 member schools. The inspection process for accredited schools involves the submission of a self-evaluation document and a visit by industry consultants.

A CDMT spokesman said: “The professional courses delivered by CDMT-accredited schools offer exceptional levels of training by highly experienced practitioners, underpinned by studio work, face-to-face sessions in group and individual classes, and performance rehearsals totalling over 30 contact hours per week.”

However, there are many leading drama schools that are not members, including RADA and LAMDA.

LAMDA's principal and chief executive Mark O'Thomas explains that the drama school has its own degree awarding powers, and, like any university, is registered with the Office for Students, which is an independent public body that regulates higher education in England.

“As such, [LAMDA] is required to conform to the Office for Students' multiple conditions of registration, which include a range of factors such as quality of provision, continuation rates, progression, financial sustainability, etc,” O'Thomas says.



# HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL



**'If you've got, say, 17 schools everyone thinks are providing the right training, and you say, 'you've got to get into one of those to be a professional actor', [there must be] adequate progression pathways for students of working-class families or diverse ethnicities to get every chance to get in'**  
Hilary Strong, director of Making Theatre Gaining Skills



NICK KELLY

**'I'm interested in students going to schools with a proven track record of success, along with current evidence these schools are consistently producing graduates who become working actors, technicians and production design artists'**  
Actor David Mumeni, who runs Open Door

The drama school is also a member of Conservatoires UK, which acts as a voice for 11 UK conservatoires, the FDS, and higher education body GuildHE.

"However, none of these bodies are accrediting organisations and act more as mission groups," O'Thomas adds.

He argues that prospective students looking to get assurance on the quality of courses should look at rankings and tables such as the Guardian University Guide and the National Student Survey and visit schools on open days.

However, others argue that it can be confusing for students to choose between institutions, and claim that the current system for accreditation is unsatisfactory.

Former MTA principal Annemarie Lewis Thomas explains that there are two ways for drama training institutions to access funding: "either via the degree route, which the vast majority have decided to go down, or by... going down the diploma route and trying to get validated, as opposed to accredited, by Trinity College London".

She argues that CDMT is effectively "just a member organisation that does some check-ins" and that there needs to be an overall regulator for drama schools to ascertain that the right standards are being met.

"It's very much every school does its own thing... The degree route isn't necessarily fit for purpose. Because everybody's chased that government funding stream, it shoehorns our training into a model that wasn't designed for it."

Thomas also argues that drama schools are under pressure to keep expanding in order to remain financially viable, because "degree funding just does not pay for the level of contact time that a student needs to properly train".

She says courses are expanding the number of students they are taking and shaving down contact hours. As a result, Thomas argues, smaller colleges are getting "squeezed out".

Indeed the MTA closed in 2022 after "game-changing" validation that the school thought it was likely to get from Trinity College London – and subsequent funding as a result – was not secured in the time frame it needed to survive. The school first revealed financial difficulties in 2021.

Thomas argues that Trinity College London is a "gate-keeper" to funding streams for vocational performing arts colleges. She has been involved in a lengthy, ongoing dispute criticising Trinity's validation process with the MTA.

Trinity College London has 22 course providers offering Professional Performing Arts Diplomas in the UK, and states that in the year 2022/23, 1,728 candidates were enrolled with a UK course provider and 569 candidates graduated with a Professional Performing Arts Diploma.

In response to Thomas' comments, Trinity College London claims the MTA was "not achieving [the] standards" necessary to have its course validated. The MTA was seeking validation for a two-year diploma, which is run over three years by all other Trinity College London course providers.

It claims it "instigated a review of the validation process by an independent expert", which was reportedly shared with the MTA in September 2022 and allegedly upheld the "integrity and diligence of [its] validation processes".

Thomas also argues that the industry needs to "re-establish what elite training is".

"I think we've lost that. We now get into a sort of factory training, and I think that's to the detriment of the industry, and indeed, to the students," she adds.

"We're in an oversaturated industry, and we're churning more and more people out, and more and more of those people are substandard."

This view is echoed by Hilary Strong, who was director of the National Council for Drama Training from 2007 to 2010 and is now director of theatre training organisation Making Theatre Gaining Skills. Strong references the large number of acting courses run by universities, as opposed to specialist drama schools, and argues that students on these courses have "limited" chances of "getting really good work" as actors.

She questions whether the industry wants an "unlimited market for students to study acting" and "who decides how many actors [need] to be trained" and argues that increasing the availability of acting courses actually limits rather than improves access for working-class students.

"If you've got, say, 17 schools which everyone thinks are providing the right kind of training, and you say, 'you've got to get into one of those in order to be a professional actor', then you [need to] make sure there are adequate progression pathways for students of working-class families or diverse ethnicities to make sure they get every chance possible to get into those drama schools," Strong says.

"But if you say, 'don't worry about going there, you can go to [a university acting course]', then actually, what are the chances of those people from diverse communities actually having a career in the business? None."

Strong argues that the FDS – which did not respond to The Stage's requests for comment – is "the best method we have" currently for recognising quality of drama schools because it has a set of standards that its members agree on.

Actor David Mumeni, who runs drama schools audition organisation Open Door, however, argues that it would be useful to have a body responsible for accrediting all drama schools. "With so many new things popping up that say they're drama schools, I think it's important to have quality marks because there's quite confusing messaging for young actors," he tells The Stage.

He argues that it is important for the industry to define "what we call a drama school" and says training – as opposed to classes – should involve a holistic journey for students.

In terms of selecting partner schools for Open Door, Mumeni says: "I'm interested in students going to schools with a proven track record of success, along with current evidence that these schools are consistently producing graduates who become working actors, technicians and production design artists." Mumeni adds it is also important that the drama schools Open Door works with have robust safeguarding policies in place.

Unless and until a more holistic approach to accreditation is introduced, his advice to aspiring drama school students is: start by looking within the FDS and then consider whether the work recent alumni of the schools are undertaking tallies with your own aspirations. ■



# HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

advertising enquiries Christopher Porter

christopher.porter@thestage.co.uk

0207 939 8465

## EAST 15 ACTING SCHOOL



**APPLY NOW**  
**east15.ac.uk**

**Undergraduate and Postgraduate training**

**For stage, screen and behind the scenes careers**



University of Essex



Global Top 10  
for Performing Arts  
(QS World Rankings 2024)



Royal  
Conservatoire  
of Scotland

**Like  
Nowhere  
Else**

**Applications open for:**

BA Acting  
BA Musical Theatre  
BA Performance for Deaf &  
Hard of Hearing Actors  
MA/MFA Acting/Directing  
Classical and Contemporary  
Text

**Apply by 29 January 2025**  
**rsc.ac.uk/drama**



ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY

This is an advertisement feature

# St Mary's University is pioneering an 'optionality' approach to arts training

The London university is empowering students to navigate a fast-changing industry...

St Mary's University School of Liberal and Creative Arts in Twickenham is leading the way this year when it comes to holistic training, having embraced what it terms an "optionality approach".

In a nutshell, it means that students studying across its Creative Arts programmes can opt to take modules across three subjects, BA Acting, BA Creative Production and BA Film-making. So, an actor could study stage management or a film-maker may want to study screen acting and vice versa.

The aim, explains Kim Salmons, head of the school, is to develop "real world skills".

"We wanted to facilitate students' entrepreneurialism," she says. "People who succeed typically have a range of skills they can take into the industry. We are also aiming to help students build up a network across the creative arts to help them be industry ready when they graduate."

This is the first academic year that students have had this opportunity to



St Mary's offers a BA in Film-making

cross-pollinate, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"The students are loving it," says Mark Street, subject lead of Creative Arts. "Actors are asking about technical opportunities, film-making, design – the take-up has been huge. And likewise, students on those courses are getting an opportunity to act, write or direct."

The impact of social media on casting is another reason this broadening of the skill set is so vital. As Street says, a lot of students are already generating their own material online, but now St Mary's is "teaching them the skills to create their own content and to tell their own stories in today's competitive market".

St Mary's prides itself on offering practical drama training rooted within a university setting.


Salmons lays out the university's four key values: respect, excellence, generosity of spirit and inclusivity. "We instil these in everything we do," she says. "Our mission is

to develop the whole student, so the learning process isn't just about giving them the methodology of acting or film-making, it's about how they go out and make that into something useful for both themselves and wider society."

To ease the transition into self-sufficiency after graduation, St Mary's has been supporting students to stage their own productions. This year saw the inaugural SCALA Festival of Creativity, a module inviting final-year students from across the creative arts programmes to showcase their work at local venues (it will return next spring). The facilities at the university are second to none, with the campus boasting a main theatre, three studios, plus rehearsal spaces, recording studios and creative suites. The teaching staff are joined every year by a range of freelance coaches and directors who enrich the learning experience, and help prepare students for a showcase in the West End. And the support even continues after graduation, with alumni invited back to stage their own productions with no hire fee.

But what really sets St Mary's apart, says Street, is its focus on tangible, real-world experience, putting the power back into students' hands. "Ultimately, we want to create self-empowered artists, so the industry comes to them, rather than the other way around. We are supplying our students with the tools to get out there and create."

[stmarys.ac.uk](https://stmarys.ac.uk)





St Mary's University  
Twickenham  
London  
Creative Arts



Applications Open!  
Audition for free!

BA Acting  
BA Filmmaking  
BA Creative  
Production

St Mary's University Creative Arts programmes provide professional training across a range of disciplines. Students can take a selection of options in acting, filmmaking and creative production to develop a range of skills.





Follow us on:  
 @acting\_stmarys  
 @Acting\_StMarys



## HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

# Want a career in technical theatre? Here are tips on the route forwards

Lighting designer and programmer **Rob Halliday** offers advice on what the training options are if you are looking to pursue a career in technical theatre



Rob Halliday

Over the years I've spoken at lots of them, lit shows for many of them, and have a regular annual 'guest slot' at one of them, but I didn't actually go to drama school. My route was instead through the sort of 'unofficial' drama school of the day, the lighting team of the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain, then doing a 'proper' degree (computer science, since you ask, most of it now horribly outdated) at the behest of my academic parents.

However, I ended up spending most of my time in the theatres on or around campus, then the 'school of life' of actually doing shows, particularly two years of going around the world with the English Shakespeare Company.

Every week in a different city, sometimes in a different country, is a fantastic opportunity to learn about so many things, from the feel of different places to the diversity of theatre architecture, to the about five minutes you have to get a (usually tired, having just finished someone else's get-out) crew on-side to get your show in.

There is a generation of theatre practitioners who grew up on the job, in many cases in theatres where the previous generation of practitioners were happy to hand their skills down, who'd wonder why you'd ever need to go to drama school to learn what we do.

But that isn't necessarily true now. Times have certainly changed. The range of skills required in any of the technical fields has increased exponentially: just to take lighting as an example, you used to plug a light into a dimmer and then turn it on; now, you'll have to rig it, plug it into power and data, address it, chose from one of many modes and then quite possibly get involved in configuring a network infrastructure to make it work. It's more complicated. And that rep theatre where you used to get the hand-me-down knowledge? It has quite possibly closed. Instead, very often you'll become freelance, turning up job to job with the expectation that you'll arrive knowing what you're doing.

So, you need somewhere to learn. This might, or might not, be a drama school; maybe it's an apprenticeship with a technical supplier.



TECHNICIANS PHOTOS: ALEX BRENNERTIATA FAHODZI

If you think that drama school is the right route for you, there are many to choose from, so how do you choose? Go look, is the obvious starting point. Get a feel for the location – do you want to step out into the buzz of the city or the calm of a quieter campus? Talk to people while you're there, staff and students. What do their answers seem to tell you? What do the pauses between their answers, the subtext in their words, tell you? How stable does it feel? New staff might be good – fresh opinions, points of view, experiences are always welcome. On the other hand, a new head tutor every year for the past three years could suggest some kind of turmoil – but what if the latest one is the one who'll stick around and be brilliant? Don't be afraid to do your research on the staff, or to ask them about this.

**'Times have certainly changed – the range of skills required in any of the technical fields has increased exponentially'**

Then the practical stuff: what gear will you have access to? How current is it? What suppliers does the course have good connections with, and how are they used?

Spending some time out in the real world is useful. Spending all your time palmed off on one supplier and perhaps you could just have done an apprenticeship there and cut out the organisation in the middle (and the related cost!).

And, of course, think about it the other way round as well. What will your relationship with the institution be? How will you take advantage of what it has to offer you? I think

what drama schools can offer you, should offer you, is a freedom to experiment, a freedom to – in effect – 'play', though it can be hard to use that word now, especially given the costs involved. They should offer an ability to try things without the overriding pressure for it to be 'right' that will become a driving force post-college, and with time to do so free from the neverending deadline pressure that seems to arrive the moment you step out of college. A good college will offer that (though they sometimes should impose deadlines, so you get used to them!), but it takes a good student to take advantage of it.

The other thing a good drama school should offer is good fellow students, since almost everything we do as technicians needs a team to make it happen: be prepared to support others in their playing, and they'll support you in return. Quite possibly for far, far longer than just your time together in college; the main thing I still carry from my NYT days is the people.

Other things? Be sure 'this' is what you want to do before you commit to these years of expensive training. 'This' might be a vague notion: precisely what 'job' you want to do will quite probably change as you learn (and probably beyond), but really it means understanding and accepting the peculiar working hours and work-life balance that being a part of this industry brings.

And, most importantly, whatever technical training route you choose, keep in mind that even when you graduate in a few short years' time, that's the start of a learning journey, not the end. A drama school can teach you many things, but it cannot teach you about walking into a new theatre in a new town early on a cold winter's morning and getting everyone on your side. That, and so much more, you do still have to learn; for the best people that learning journey never ends. ■



## LAMDA

*This is an advertisement feature*

# How LAMDA is leading the way in modernising drama school training

The London drama school, with its state-of-the-art facilities, has extended its training options to include virtual production and is making strides to evolve the tuition it offers students

**M**any will know LAMDA as one of the world's oldest and most renowned drama schools. But they might not realise the esteemed institution is still very much at the forefront of pioneering conservatoire training.

At a time when the performing arts is rapidly evolving, LAMDA is adapting its offering accordingly, being one of the first conservatoires in the UK to extend its training to include virtual production and motion capture for screen. Meanwhile, the school is keen to challenge perceptions of the performing arts being 'elitist' and has placed diversity and inclusion at the heart of its ethos.

Marketing executive Kimberley Ballard tells *The Stage*: "We'll always respect our heritage, but we also want to focus on what LAMDA can give to young people today, especially young people who are interested in the performing arts but could be a bit intimidated by a place like LAMDA and think it might be closed off to them."

Ballard says that the west London school prides itself on being a "very open, welcoming space". Its "training without borders" strategy includes a Pathways Programme to help remove barriers to the performing arts for young people.

"LAMDA is a space where students can come and discover who they are and have the space and the freedom to hone their own unique voice," she adds.

The conservatoire's BA Acting course, which has a long list of successful graduates including David Oyelowo and Leah Harvey, does not need much of an introduction. Anyone looking to train as an actor will be likely to have this course on their radar. However, Ballard says, there is much more to LAMDA's offering. To this point, the school's current president, Benedict Cumberbatch, is a graduate from one of LAMDA's postgraduate programmes.

The school has a second BA programme in Production and Technical Arts, a pioneering programme founded in 1965, which includes modules in production

management, stage management, scenic construction, lighting and sound. Recent graduates include Corben Jones, head of lighting on the new production of *Starlight Express* at Wembley's Troubadour Theatre, and the sound designer Tingying Dong, who graduated in 2019 and won The Stage Debut Award 2023 for best creative West End debut for her work on *The Crucible* at the National Theatre and Gielgud Theatre.

LAMDA boasts a selection of postgraduate master's degree programmes, spanning a variety of acting options, directing and musical theatre performance. In 2024, the school took its musical theatre students to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe with a production of *Into the Woods*, and will return to Edinburgh in 2025.

Technology is an important part of LAMDA's focus moving forward. In 2023, the school received a £1.9 million government grant to invest in virtual production and motion capture technology to help address an "industry-wide skills gap". These facilities are now integrated into the training courses,



LAMDA students

along with LAMDA's three theatre spaces and its audio broadcast studio.

LAMDA's facilities are state-of-the-art, with the drama school's £28.2 million redevelopment having opened in 2017. Based in Baron's Court in south-west London, the school boasts 16 rehearsal spaces, well-equipped theatre technical inventories and industry-standard screen and audio facilities.

The strides LAMDA has been taking to evolve its training are reflected in its recent achievements. The conservatoire got the top spot for Drama and Dance in the 2025 Guardian University Guide and was ranked in the top 10 drama schools in the world in the most recent Hollywood Reporter list.

Ballard adds: "We pride ourselves on being diverse, international, multicultural and having things in place that help young people from different backgrounds come to LAMDA."

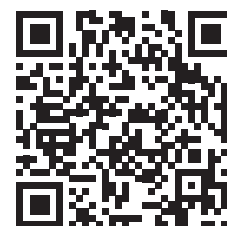
[lamda.ac.uk](https://lamda.ac.uk)

# LAMDA

London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art

Train on one of our industry-leading acting or production & technical degree courses and kickstart a thrilling career in the performing arts. Ranked first in the Guardian's 2025 UK league table for drama.

Apply Now



[lamda.ac.uk](https://lamda.ac.uk)



# HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

## Q&A



### Pid'or Tampa

Teacher and somatic coach

#### How did you start off in the arts?

I began drawing, singing, and writing poems, songs and stories as a child. My official entry into the arts, however, was about age 14, when my parents put me into Sylvia Young Theatre School to do singing and acting.

#### What led you to begin coaching?

The coaching was instigated by health challenges. I was burnt out. I often disregarded my physiological and emotional needs to meet targets. The push to overachieve meant that I and ignored signals my body was giving me to slow down. My body staged an abrupt intervention and 'shut up shop' so to speak. When I became too unwell to function as I had been, I gained perspective, identifying a trail of signals my body had been giving me. Somatic coaching enables us to listen to our natural body wisdom, so we don't have get to that point.

#### What would you change about the industry?

I was recently discussing with coach Mike Simon the need for somatic coaches in production teams. Performers often dig deep into their emotional and psychological streams to build resonant characterisations. A performer can live through the character's experience show after show, with no aftercare. That material can still live in the body. A somatic coach can help in release or redirect that material.

#### Who are the arts practitioners you admire and why?

Breathe Arts is an organisation centred around arts health research that asks how artistic practice and expression supports our health and well-being. They do brilliant work.

#### What is the one skill that every successful theatre professional should have?

Don't limit yourself on what creativity is. Your originality is a muscle strengthened by willingness to pull from unlikely sources.

#### What can readers do to increase their mental and physical well-being?

Make a list of all the ways you used to play, and don't any more. Circle two that you miss the most and figure out how to reincorporate them into your life as a regular practice.

Pid'or Tampa was talking to John Byrne

## THE GREEN ROOM

Welcome to our weekly discussion forum for key issues facing those working in theatre and the performing arts. This week, we ask...

# What were your criteria when choosing a drama school?



UK-wide drama schools, clockwise from top left: Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Rose Bruford College, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and RADA



**JON DRYDEN TAYLOR** is an actor, writer and editor of The Green Room. If you work in theatre and would like to join in the conversation, email [greenroom@thestage.co.uk](mailto:greenroom@thestage.co.uk)

**Seamus** "I'll take the first one that offers me a place."

**Peter** I didn't go to drama school. I went to university and didn't want to continue being a student. I entered theatre as an acting assistant stage manager.

**Jon** Are we the same person? I'm exactly the same. Although that route had largely disappeared by the time I started, so I was lucky.

**Peter** In my day, people came into the profession by a lot of different routes. I think that was quite healthy – a mix of traditions.

**Jon** Even now, at my advanced age, I sometimes get a bit of a 'oh no, an intruder' vibe when I say I didn't train.

**Roland** I auditioned two years on the bounce, the first year was everything and everywhere as I was from a small town in the middle of north nowhere.

**Seamus** I was in no position to be picky. I had no background in acting, no familial connections and no money. Back then, an audition cost about 25 quid (plus rail fare if you was in London), so I picked five schools and hoped for the best.

**Roland** The next year I'd done my homework and only went for five schools I thought would be a good fit. The one I was accepted into was the one I enjoyed the most and felt that the teachers were doing something different.

**Emily** I had a gut feeling when I went to audition in some of them and knew it wasn't the right place for me. Always trust your gut in life.

**Seamus** Like Emily, the school I ended up going to was the one where I thought: "Yeah, I like this place".

**Emily** I remember going to one of them and there was a chat with some of the students

PHOTOS: KENNETH DUNDAS & RCS/RICHARD MILDENHALL / PETE CARRSHUTTERSTOCK



as part of the day. They were talking about how much they loved going out and hanging in the bar and I was like, I'm not coming here for the freshers' experience – I couldn't care less about that. I also had an auditioner who was more interested in her green smoothie.

**Jon** I love the idea of them thinking: "We really persuaded her; we showed her what fun it is here" and you were like: "Nope."

**Riley** I went for London schools as I was brought up close to London, and auditioned for the schools that had alumni whose work I enjoyed.

**Seamus** Yes, another criterion when I was young and impressionable was looking at the schools' alumni. If actors who I admired went there, then I was more likely to apply.

**Jon** That's two mentions of admiring alumni, which I find fascinating as that idea never crossed my mind.

**Peter** I'm wary of the alumni feel. Some people would have been good actors wherever they went.

**Seamus** True, but if the alumni represent a cross-section of 'who' that school is, they can often be a very helpful indicator.

**Riley** The alumni steer for me was just one way to whittle it all down as it was quite overwhelming.

**Seamus** For what it's worth, the alumni at the drama school I got negative vibes from are generally actors who leave me pretty cold. It's all subjective obviously, but at the time it felt like a big deal.

**Peter** I suspect a better steer is not the good actors who come out of a school but the bad ones who do.

**Jon** Did anyone get more than one offer of a place? Is that where gut feeling came in?

**Seamus** Not necessarily. Just the vibe you got when you turned up at the audition. How you were treated, what the panel and the other students were like.

**Riley** I had a crap time at drama school, but I'm grateful for the leg-up it gave me.

I trained during the Covid pandemic, everyone was angry at one another, there was a huge reshuffle in all departments and nobody knew what to do.

**Jon** I cannot imagine how stressful it must have been to train during Covid. Hats off to your entire year.

**Seamus** Sorry to hear that, Riley.

**Jon** What we haven't talked about at all is the teaching and the syllabus.

**Seamus** The syllabus is only really revealed once your training has started. Before then, it's an abstract idea.

**Riley** Agreed. And teachers were most important for me but, my God, did some of them not know what they were doing, or had a massive chip on their shoulder.

**Emily** Ha ha – yeah, I can relate to that.

**Jon** There's nothing worse than being with a teacher – especially when you've paid a load of money – and thinking: "Oh no, you have nothing to offer me."

**Emily** Some of them were incredible, though, I have to say. I feel like drama school was about filling up that toolkit and trying stuff out.

**Peter** It's important that teachers draw out rather than put in.

**Seamus** One top drama school loves doing animal work and the students will visit the zoo regularly and become the animals. My drama school never did that, and had that aspect been revealed before applying, I would have steered way clear.

**Emily** I love animal studies and, before drama school, I probably would've thought that was a load of shite, but unless you try something you don't know.

**Riley** A friend of mine said drama school will give you the tools to work with people who are difficult. I couldn't agree more.

**Seamus** Definitely.

**Jon** A negative positive!

**'If the alumni represent a cross-section of 'who' that school is, they can often be a very helpful indicator'**

# MY FIRST JOB



DAVID REISS

## Heather Agyepong

**Age** Undisclosed  
**Training** Part-time drama schools  
**Theatre includes** Shifters (Bush Theatre; School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play (Lyric Hammersmith); Celebrated Virgins (Theatr Clwyd); The Body Remembers (Battersea Arts Centre); Noughts and Crosses (UK tour); Girls (Soho Theatre); So Many Reasons and Best Friends (Ovalhouse); Hatch (Hackney Showrooms); Jagged Edge (Acrylick)  
**Film and TV includes** The Power (Amazon); This is Going to Hurt and Enterprice (BBC), Joy (film) and Sylvia (film)  
**Other credits** Photography at the National Portrait Gallery as part of the Taylor Wessing Photo Portrait Prize  
**Agent** United Agents

My first professional theatre job was Girls, written by Theresa Ikoko for Talawa Theatre company. I had made a beeline for Talawa the year before – in fact, as soon as I found out they existed. I just followed everything they did and got on to their Young Peoples Programme at the time, which was called TYPT. I don't know if it was an open audition for Girls, but somehow, I heard about it and researched the hell out of that script.

In my visual art career, which had taken off before my acting, I knew that I needed mentors and organisations I aligned with. So I did the same thing when it came to setting out on my acting career. Talawa felt like home and the people there at the time very much became my acting family who helped nurture me and grow in confidence. I definitely think they helped to advocate for me to step into roles such as Girls.

At the audition, I felt as though I had nothing to lose so I was really relaxed. I just wanted to do a good audition because I truly believed I could do the job. When I got the part, that's when the fear kicked in, but the Talawa team, particularly Mimi Findlay, was a rock. Looking back on it now, I don't think there is anything I would have done differently except that maybe I would have been a bit more compassionate to myself.

As a multidisciplinary artist, the advice I would give somebody starting out now – in whatever or however many disciplines – is to find mentors in your own areas of work. That could be a person or an organisation or a community but, whoever that is for you, they can really help sustain and nourish you on this wild journey of being an artist.

Heather Agyepong was talking to John Byrne

### MEET OUR PANEL

We have given our panellists pen names and used stock images, but their biographies reflect their real career details.



**Emily Cohen** is in her 20s and works in theatre and TV and runs her own theatre company. She is also an associate member of a national company



**Peter Quince** is in his 70s and is an actor working in theatre and television



**Seamus Wallace** is in his 40s and has appeared regularly at the National Theatre, as well as at the RSC, in the West End, on tour and on TV



**Roland Reese** is an actor in his 30s who has appeared at the National Theatre, in the West End, on TV and film



**Riley Waters** is in her 20s and since graduating has worked at the National, in subsidised theatres both in London and regionally, as well as in TV and film



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

advertising enquiries Christopher Porter christopher.porter@thestage.co.uk 0207 939 8465



STELLA ADLER  
STUDIO OF ACTING®  
NEW YORK CITY

World-Class Professional Actor Training  
in the Heart of Downtown Manhattan

LONDON AUDITIONS  
COMING MARCH 2025!

Contact [ryan@stellaadler.com](mailto:ryan@stellaadler.com) for more details.

**Stella Adler Studio of Acting**  
65 Broadway Floor 2  
New York, NY 10006  
[classes.StellaAdler.com](http://classes.StellaAdler.com)

The Stella Adler Studio of Acting is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization and is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre.



ROYAL  
BIRMINGHAM  
CONSERVATOIRE

APPLY YOUR

PASSION

Top 5 in the  
UK for Drama  
and Dance

[Guardian League Table 2025]

Apply now for courses in:

- BA Acting
- BA Stage Management
- BA Applied Theatre
- MA Acting
- MFA Acting

[www.bcu.ac.uk/acting-courses](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/acting-courses)



Birmingham City University



# PERFORMANCE PREPARATION ACADEMY

*This is an advertisement feature*

## ‘Lively, tight-knit school is like family’

At PPA, small class numbers and a strong support network mean that the school has a real sense of community, while also keeping a clear focus on what each student has to offer as an individual

**A**t Performance Preparation Academy in Guildford, the environment is electric. The bright and airy canteen is buzzing with chatter as students get stuck into the new academic year. The focus in various studios – where students take acting and dance classes and rehearse upcoming performances – is palpable.

The drama school, which is a 40-minute train ride from London, was founded by Louise Pieri and is run by Sarah Thorne (head of faculty and education) and a long-established senior management team. It has a friendly, family atmosphere, where everyone knows each other's names, and there is a clear network of support and care.

As PPA gears up to welcome its next intake of auditionees for the 2024/25 academic year, third-year student Rónán Evan Johnson tells *The Stage* about his experiences on the BA (hons) Acting for Stage and Screen course.

Johnson, who is from a small town called Coalisland in Ireland, received a scholarship to train at PPA, after undertaking a one-year musical theatre foundation course.

He describes what attracted him to PPA: “It’s really lively. I’m from the back end of nowhere, so I love that it’s quite a small, tight-knit community here.”

There are only 20 people in Johnson’s year group, which means he has had the opportunity to get to know students on the other courses.

“It’s nice knowing that I’m going to leave here and have 70 other people in the industry at the same time that I know will help me out and that I would help out,” he tells *The Stage*.

Another big draw was that, while Johnson is on an acting course, there are still plenty of opportunities for him to get involved with musical theatre, including classes specially aimed at male-presenting dancers.

In terms of the course itself, there is an even split between stage and screen training. The cohort also receives classes in dance, singing and stage combat, as well as industry preparation sessions to ready them for things such as finances and auditions.

Other highlights include an agent showcase in central London, and the option to take self-made work to the Guildford Fringe.

Unlike many other drama schools, the students do not have an enforced dress code but are instead encouraged to choose appropriate clothing that they feel comfortable in. This is reflective of PPA’s ethos to allow performers to flourish as individuals.

“They want you to come in with the person that you are and build on it,” says Johnson. “They want everyone to feel seen, and to know that we have PPA as a family, but also that we are very fine, crafted individual performers.”

Johnson says that he has felt supported by the school throughout his time there, which included PPA putting him forward for the 2024 Laurence Olivier Bursary for talented students in need of financial support. Johnson says his whole year group “went crazy” in celebration when he received the bursary.

PPA is nestled in a state-of-the-art 30,000 sq ft facility, which includes 15 studios, dressing rooms, a costume store, library, self-tape studio, canteen, parking and a fully equipped studio theatre seating 130 people.

Other courses that PPA offers include both the BA (hons) Acting for Stage and



PPA's student canteen

Screen and Musical Theatre courses with a foundation year.

PPA is validated by De Montfort University and has a long-standing partnership with DMU.

Prospective students can apply for September 2025 entry online via PPA’s admissions team.

[ppacademy.co.uk/how-to-apply](https://ppacademy.co.uk/how-to-apply)



# BA (HONS) ACTING FOR STAGE & SCREEN DEGREE & FOUNDATION COURSES

## BOOK YOUR AUDITION TODAY!





**Awarding Body**  
De Montfort University



**Location**  
Guildford



**Duration**  
3 or 4 years



**Funding**  
Student finance available



SCAN TO BOOK YOUR  
AUDITION AND WATCH  
OUR VIDEO

 [www.ppacademy.co.uk](https://www.ppacademy.co.uk)

 [admissions@ppacademy.co.uk](mailto:admissions@ppacademy.co.uk)

 01483 459080



HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL

advertising enquiries Christopher Porter christopher.porter@thestage.co.uk 0207 939 8465

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR DRAMA SCHOOL?

IN A YEAR GROUP,  
HOW MANY IS TOO MANY?

SELECT ONE:



20 - 30



50 - 100



100 - 250

arts1.co.uk/mt-degree





FONTAINEBLEAU  
SCHOOL  
OF ACTING

FONACT offers a rigorous and explorative space to hone your skills, and build your confidence as an actor. Experience high quality practice in a supportive, joyful environment, and discover the true meaning of the ensemble.

- Fontainebleau FRANCE
- Athens GREECE

www.fonact.com @fonact\_international



THE BRIDGE  
THEATRE TRAINING COMPANY

Flexible Courses to Suit You!

Train 3 or 5 Days a Week  
Courses for Students 18+

www.thebridge-ttc.org  
0207 424 0860  
admin@thebridge-ttc.org

@TheBridgeTTC  
@thebridgettcc  
@thebridgettcc  
@thebridgettcc  
@thebridgetheatretrainingco



# PERFORMERS COLLEGE

*This is an advertisement feature*

## Performers College broadens horizons for the next generation

Meet the performing arts institution working across Birmingham, Brighton, Essex and Manchester

**P**erformers College prides itself on being a leading vocational institution offering elite performance training in musical theatre and dance. From September 2025, it will merge with the Institute of Contemporary Theatre, under the Performers College brand, expanding its provision into areas including acting, film and digital media performance training.

“Both schools are part of BIMM University and have been sister organisations for the past few years,” explains Adam Davenport, dean of Performing Arts, “and it made sense to unite the university’s Performing Arts curriculum and continue to deliver an outstanding, quality training experience under the Performers College brand, offering a new and increased suite of training pathways that reflect the different career ambitions of our students, and the variety of employment opportunities available in today’s industry.”

That means bringing the four campuses – in Birmingham, Brighton, Essex and Manchester – under one umbrella, while

maintaining the distinct areas of special practice that each of them is known for.

Across the campuses, students can study specialist degree courses, as well as Trinity diplomas and postgraduate qualifications, but as Davenport notes: “Having these four locations allows us to create bespoke campuses that have individualised courses and specialist facilities, while also forging collaborations with regional creatives and national industry partners.”

Performers College in Manchester boasts a purpose-built theatre that allows students with an interest in technical theatre and production to hone their skills. Birmingham’s campus shares its building with the MetFilm School, giving students access to fully equipped industry standard film and TV studios. Essex has specialist purpose-built dance facilities with more than 30 studios, while Brighton has a state-of-the-art motion capture suite.

“They all have their own specialisms, and with this new identity we’re building a portfolio of courses across our campuses that appeal to people with different aspirations, and harness our connections,

contacts and expertise to ensure they are industry-ready and equipped to enjoy successful careers,” says Davenport.

That’s already evident on the Birmingham campus, which opened in 2021. “We have a partnership with Birmingham Royal Ballet and our students regularly collaborate on projects and performances with BRB at the Hippodrome. We are also building relationships with the BBC who are creating exciting new studios in Digbeth,” Davenport explains. “The Essex campus recently worked with Europe’s leading dance agency AMCK to provide commercial dancers for the BRIT Awards. We want to continue to build on that, taking advantage of the thriving performing arts scenes in Manchester and Brighton.”

While these distinct campus identities are an important part of the way Performers College works – with students given the option to pick a specific course and campus location when applying through UCAS – there is also a powerful ethos that unites the training and student experience. “We develop each person as an individual artist. We help them to discover what is unique about them and build on that.”

Performers College students



Performers College doesn’t have a single vision of what a graduate should be or what they should do. Studying at Performers College is about exploring as wide a variety of opportunities as possible, with masterclasses and projects on everything from costume, to casting and combat.

As part of this new chapter in its evolution, as well as actors, singers and dancers, Performers College will help to develop the next generation of creatives. As Davenport says, “for us, success is not defined by one pathway or expectation. Alongside our professional performance courses, we look forward to guiding the directors, choreographers, writers and producers of the future. We aspire for our graduates to be people who make a living in the creative industries in whatever area inspires them, and provides them with creative fulfilment”.

[performerscollege.co.uk](https://performerscollege.co.uk)



Performers College now spans four vibrant campuses, offering courses in acting for stage and screen, dance, musical theatre and performing arts.

**BIRMINGHAM** **BRIGHTON** **ESSEX** **MANCHESTER**


**Elevate your passion  
at our Open Day**

**Book now:** [performerscollege.co.uk/open-days](https://performerscollege.co.uk/open-days)





# Enhance your roles with brand-new features



We have introduced a whole host of products on the new The Stage Jobs website to make finding the perfect candidates even easier, including:

- Premium Job and Featured Job upgrades
- Self-service job postings
- Recruiter dashboard
- And much more coming soon!

Email [recruitmentsales@thestage.co.uk](mailto:recruitmentsales@thestage.co.uk)  
Phone 020 7939 8465

## Find onstage, offstage and backstage vacancies on The Stage Jobs



[Sign up](#) for email alerts to never miss a role

### Featured Job



London

£16.06 per hour

## Technical Performance Staff – Oliver!

### Delfont Mackintosh Theatres Ltd


Delfont Mackintosh is looking for enthusiastic and highly motivated individuals to fill its technical performance staff roles on the production of Oliver! at the Gielgud Theatre in London.

Successful candidates will be responsible for the delivery of first-class technical services across both stage crew and follow-spot positions.

Successful applicants will have experience in a technical performance role, such as follow-spot operator or stage crew/fly crew, with a flexible approach to work. They must be proactive and self-motivated, with a proven ability to problem-solve and deal quickly and effectively with unexpected situations.

Evening and weekend work is required.

Applications close November 7. Search 'Delfont Mackintosh Theatres Ltd' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.



### Skyline Performance Auditions

Butlin's

Salary: unspecified

UK-wide

Join our Skyline Performance Team and star in our spectacular pantomime Snow White and her Magnificent Friends, and our high-energy family adventure shows. If you sing, dance and act then this could be the role for you. Open auditions will be held on November 5 at Pineapple Studios in London, with registration opening at 9.30am.

Applications close November 4. Search 'Butlin's' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.



### Assistant Stage Manager (book cover) – Cabaret


ATG Entertainment

Equity minimum

London

The stage management team oversee all aspects of the physical production of Cabaret both in performance, rehearsal and ongoing maintenance and repair. The team looks after the overall movement of props, furniture and actors on and off the stage to ensure the smooth running of performances. The ability to work as part of a team is vital in this role.

Applications close November 4. Search 'ATG Entertainment' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.



### Marketing Manager

ATG Entertainment

Salary: £30,000

Sunderland

Join the dynamic team at Sunderland Empire, where you'll play a pivotal role in promoting a diverse range of shows – from West End productions to leading comedians, pantomime and performances showcasing local talent. Reporting to the head of marketing and communications, you'll work closely with the communications manager, sales and development manager, and box-office team.

Applications close October 25. Search 'ATG Entertainment' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.



### Production Assistant


Glyndebourne Productions Ltd

Salary: £36,000

Lewes

We currently have a vacancy for an experienced production assistant to join our production department on a permanent contract. Reporting to our production managers, you will assist in the realisation of opera for the stage at Glyndebourne and other performance spaces, for both new productions and revivals

Applications close November 4. Search 'Glyndebourne' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.



### Senior Sound and Video Technician – Bectu Grade 3B


National Theatre

Salary: £50,037

London

This is a hands-on, operational position working directly on performances, based in the NT sound and video department. You will play a key role in the production process, undertaking jobs such as sound programmer/operator, radio mic supervision/running, support technician as well as providing specialist technical services to a consistent and high standard.

Applications close October 29. Search 'National Theatre' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.



### Stage Technician

Royal Albert Hall

Salary: £32,188

London

The production and technical department is responsible for the preparation, set-up, and operational requirements of every event across the hall. The stage technician's primary role is to undertake responsibility for the management and delivery of turnovers between events while supporting the wider department in day-to-day operational tasks.

Applications close October 28. Search 'Royal Albert Hall' at [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.





## **Development Manager (Organisations)**

**Salary: £41,360 – £46,050 DOE**

The development and alumni relations team is looking for an experienced, confident and talented individual to manage a portfolio of prospects and donors, securing gifts supporting the school and its work developing outstanding creative artists and artistic citizens.

The role is highly target-driven and the focus will be to secure donations from trusts and foundations, corporations and livery companies. The successful candidate will have substantial experience of gifts fundraising and meeting personal income targets, as well as having excellent communications skills, plus the ability to manage multiple projects and deadlines.

*Applications close November. Search 'Guildhall School' on [jobs.thestage.co.uk](http://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.*

## **SOUTHBANK CENTRE**

### **Production Manager**

**Salary: £60,500**

**We are currently looking for a production manager to join our production department on a full-time permanent basis.**

The successful candidate will play a key role in the production management team and will work closely with the head of technical production, and wider department and colleagues throughout the organisation. They will ensure the effective use of systems and resources to deliver the technical elements of a varied programme – including classical and contemporary music, live performance, conferences and commercial events – to the highest standards.

*Applications close November 1. Search 'Southbank Centre' on [jobs.thestage.co.uk](http://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.*



## **Head of Theatre Programming**

**Salary: up to £60,000 DOE**

**Blackpool Entertainment Company Limited (BECL) is seeking a dynamic and strategic person to lead the programming function at the iconic Winter Gardens in Blackpool. This is a pivotal role in the company's management team, aimed at creating a high-performance venue programme and driving the business to new levels of success.**

Key responsibilities include:

**Strategic Leadership:** Providing strategic direction and management of the venue's programming function. Leading, identifying and delivering on commercial opportunities, ensuring a first-class programme of shows and events.

**Business development:** Developing and executing a sales strategy that aligns with the shareholder vision. Cultivating and maintaining relationships with key clients, particularly UK promoters and booking agents, to increase the number of shows hosted.

**Commercial management:** Instigating and negotiating a wide spectrum of commercial contracts. Preparing and presenting updates on commercial activities and new initiatives to the executive team and board.

**Performance management:** Setting and monitoring challenging KPIs, ensuring the programming team operates at the highest level. Regularly reporting on KPI achievements.

**Financial accountability:** Managing budgets effectively, identifying and rectifying any negative variances. Optimising the allocation of staff and financial resources to maintain efficiency and productivity.

*Applications close November 1. Search 'Blackpool Winter Gardens' on [jobs.thestage.co.uk](http://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today.*



# DIRECTORY

For advertising enquiries, contact [sales@thestage.co.uk](mailto:sales@thestage.co.uk)

## Artists, acts and tribute bands



**ENTERTAINMENT TO IMPRESS**

Top entertainers and musicians for parties, corporate events, weddings and more!

0800 55 000 35  
[www.entertainment-nation.co.uk](http://www.entertainment-nation.co.uk)

ENTERTAINMENT-NATION

## Charity



#light #video #design #tech

The ALPD is the professional body representing all those who work or are interested in the creation of lighting, video & projection for live performance and events.

[www.thealpd.org.uk](http://www.thealpd.org.uk)



**ABTT Training**

We offer a wide range of practical and theoretical Technical courses on demand and scheduled during the year covering various topics.

[www.abtt.org.uk](http://www.abtt.org.uk)  
office@abtt.org.uk

"Our ABTT Course was extremely beneficial for my team. They learned a lot, and the teaching was both effective and directly applicable to all of our working practices. It was the best and most effective in-service training that I have been able to arrange for my staff, ever." *In-venue Bronze Award*



**ACT**

**Funding for actors' children**

[www.actorschildren.org](http://www.actorschildren.org)

## Film studios and recording services



**thebackstagecentre**

World-class rehearsal and production facilities on London's doorstep

9814 sq. ft. Sound Stage	35m x 25m Space	15m Grid Height
Free Parking & WiFi	1000A Power	60 Tonne Rigging

**0203 668 5753**  
info@thebackstagecentre.com



**BUSH STUDIOS**

Rehearsal facilities 300 - 700sq/ft  
Mirrors, Air-Con, Wooden Floors, Green Rooms  
Free Parking  
Next to Shepherds Bush Market tube, W12

**0208 740 1740** [www.bushstudios.co.uk](http://www.bushstudios.co.uk)

Follow @TheStageUK on Instagram



**3 MILLS STUDIOS**

REHEARSAL SPACES RANGING FROM 1,700 TO 4,000 SQ.FT.  
OFFICES AND COSTUME SPACES.  
40 MINS FROM THE WEST END.

+44(0)20 8215 3330 [www.3mills.com](http://www.3mills.com)  
bookings@3mills.com @3MillsStudios

## Health and well-being



**Primrose Hill Psychotherapist**

Specialising in performance psychology, addiction and GSRD, Martin Fisher offers bespoke 60-minute sessions remotely, walk-and-talk ecotherapy around London's beautiful Regent's Park or home visits.

[www.primrosehilltherapist.com](http://www.primrosehilltherapist.com)  
07960 414894 | martin.n.fisher@me.com

## Other



**WEBSITE DESIGN**

Elegant websites that steal the show  
Crafting unforgettable online experiences for the entertainments industry.

Get a free quote at:  
[webdabble.co.uk](http://webdabble.co.uk)

WEBDABBLE



**MODULAR ACCESS RAMPS & STEPS**

**Rapid Ramp**  
THE EXPERTS IN MODULAR RAMPS

CONTACT US FOR QUICK QUOTE  
EMAIL: [SALES@RAPIDRAMP.CO.UK](mailto:SALES@RAPIDRAMP.CO.UK)  
VISIT: [RAPIDRAMP.CO.UK](http://RAPIDRAMP.CO.UK)

## Programmes



Panto season is just around the corner.

Contact us today for a magical show programme!

[johnngood.com](http://johnngood.com)  
0755 425 1472

john good

email: [adam.laidlow@thestage.co.uk](mailto:adam.laidlow@thestage.co.uk)



**A great show requires a great programme**

Beautifully designed and printed programmes with first class customer service, no minimum quantity and the lowest possible prices.

**HARVEST HTDL**  
[www.great-programmes.com](http://www.great-programmes.com)

## Rehearsal rooms and venue hire

**THE VICTORIA PALACE REHEARSAL ROOM**

Built as part of the restoration in 2017, this new space is available for exclusive hire from £250 per day.

Call 020 7043 5110 or email  
vpmanagers@delfontmackintosh.co.uk



**South Bank Studio Hire**

New flexible spaces with natural light including studio theatre, wellbeing suite, dance studios and meeting rooms.

**Contact**  
info@csbschool.co.uk | 020 7837 6332  
centralschoolofballet.co.uk/venue-hire

- Casting & rehearsals
- Dance & theatre
- Film & photography



**The Dickens Room | Covent Garden**

play readings | meetings | training sessions | auditions

admin@trtf.com | 0207 836 3322 | [www.trtf.com](http://www.trtf.com)

**Increase the number of visitors to your website with a listing**

email: [sales@thestage.co.uk](mailto:sales@thestage.co.uk)



**GREAT HALL**  
THE PEOPLE'S PALACE

**UNIQUE ART DECO THEATRE**

visit [qmgreathall.co.uk](http://qmgreathall.co.uk) call 020 7882 5379



**oh! oxford house**  
in Bethnal Green

**DO YOU NEED GOOD VALUE SPACE FOR YOUR SHOW, CONFERENCE, OR EVENT?**

We have a range of great spaces – including 120 seat studio theatre and dance studio– all include audio visual support and sublime catering. It's a great place for conferences, arts events, meetings, rehearsal or training.

[www.oxfordhouse.org.uk](http://www.oxfordhouse.org.uk)  
room.bookings@oxfordhouse.org.uk



**Affordable. Convenient. Inspiring.**

Rehearsal spaces across London  
Find out more at [tutti.space](http://tutti.space)

**tutti**  
Creative space for all



DIRECTORY

Rehearsal rooms and venue hire



**Troubadour**  
WEMBLEY PARK THEATRE

INTRODUCING BRAND NEW REHEARSAL STUDIOS FOR HIRE

Harlequin sprung floors \* AC \* Mirrors  
Sound System \* Piano \* Production Offices

hires@troubadourtheatres.com \* 02037444431

**CENTRAL LONDON  
STUDIO HIRE**

**STUDIO 68**

- CASTING - FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY  
- MEETINGS - PRODUCTION & CREATIVES  
- REHEARSALS - CORPORATE & PRIVATE EVENTS

+44 7903 188552 • MANAGEMENT@STUDIO68LONDON.NET • WWW.STUDIO68LONDON.NET



**Room  
Hire**

Poplar Union,  
East London

Get in touch to enquire about hiring a space: hire@poplarunion.com | 020 3039 3333



Husky Studios offers a wide variety of versatile, air-conditioned studios and rehearsal rooms. Reasonable rates.

bookings@huskystudios.co.uk  
020 3289 9374

Central, convenient location with outstanding transport links - Bus, Tube, National Rail and ThamesLink.

**LONDON STUDIO SPACE HIRE**

From £16p/h

7 Studio Choices      Tables, Chairs & PA On Request  
Sprung Floors      Step-Free Access  
Full Length Mirrors      Special Full-Day & Week-Long Rates



**FOURTHMONKEY.CO.UK**  
OFFICE@FOURTHMONKEY.CO.UK      0207 281 0360  
THE MONKEY HOUSE, 97 - 101 SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, LONDON, N7 7QP

Follow @TheStageUK on Instagram

**CENTRE151**



Our Main Hall and Studio 1&2 are bright welcoming spaces ideal for rehearsals, workshops, auditions, meetings, filming, photoshoots, arts events and more. We are an arts and community centre based in East London/Hackney.

www.centre151.com  
020 7739 3650      info@centre151.com

Vietnam, Laos & Cambodia supporting the community



St Agnes Church Hall is a popular rehearsal space for performance and theatre companies.

For further information please visit  
www.stagneskenningtonpark.co.uk or call 020 7820 8050



Follow @TheStage on Twitter/X

**STUDIO HIRE**

Versatile studio spaces in South London. Ideal for workshops, rehearsals or classes.

0207 091 9650  
spacehires@siobhandavies.com  
www.siobhandavies.com



85 St George's Rd  
SE1 6ER

# Make your business stand out with The Stage Directory

Ensure your organisation is found by key decision-makers searching for performing arts services and suppliers.

For more information contact:  
**sales@thestage.co.uk**

Organisations already on The Stage Directory include:







# DIRECTORY

## Sets, scenery and props

- High quality backdrops available in a range of sizes.
- Props to complement
- Delivery anywhere in the UK

T: 0114 251 3587  
W: [www.backdropshire.co.uk](http://www.backdropshire.co.uk)  
E: [info@backdropshire.co.uk](mailto:info@backdropshire.co.uk)



**Backstage**  
shop  
Mirrors | Stage | Make up

Backstage Shop stock a wide range of products from all our suppliers including Ben Nye Media Pro HD range and Kryolan latex and special effects.

02088870082 | [info@backstageshop.co.uk](mailto:info@backstageshop.co.uk)  
[backstageshop.co.uk](http://backstageshop.co.uk)

### CARDIFF THEATRICAL SERVICES

Established in 1984, CTS have a hugely talented and experienced team of people who can create outstanding scenery for all your live events.



029 2063 4680  
[cts@wno.org.uk](mailto:cts@wno.org.uk)

[www.cardifftheatricalservices.co.uk](http://www.cardifftheatricalservices.co.uk)

### EXPERTS IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE FLOORINGS

0800 28 99 32  
[enquiries@harlequinfloors.com](mailto:enquiries@harlequinfloors.com)



[www.harlequinfloors.com](http://www.harlequinfloors.com)



Coppelia. Photography by Sarah Keayes



RELICS  
STRINGTOWN BUILDING  
29 HIGH STREET  
POLEGATE  
EAST SUSSEX  
BN26 5AB  
PHONE: 01323398376  
EMAIL: [RELICARM@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:RELICARM@HOTMAIL.COM)  
SITE: [WWW.RELICS.ORG.UK](http://WWW.RELICS.ORG.UK)

Reproduction weaponry, militaria and flags

**Celtic Prop Hire**  
[www.celticprophire.co.uk](http://www.celticprophire.co.uk)  
Medieval to modern props for film, tv, theatre, school/colleges, photographic shoots, wedding & themed party events.  
[enquiries@celticprophire.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@celticprophire.co.uk)  
029 2067 9912

**NORSE SKY LTD**  
THEMED SOLUTIONS  
**SETS & PROPS DESIGN AND BUILD**  
[INFO@NORSE-SKY.CO.UK](mailto:INFO@NORSE-SKY.CO.UK)  
[WWW.NORSE-SKY.CO.UK](http://WWW.NORSE-SKY.CO.UK)  
@NORSESKY

**Seedbed Studio**  
Together we Collaborate, Conceptualise & Create  
Providing solutions to:  
Design. Construction.  
Scenic Art.  
Sculpture/Prop Making  
[www.seedbed-studio.co.uk](http://www.seedbed-studio.co.uk) Tel: 0121 630 1669

Follow @TheStageUK on Instagram

### WHEN IT HAS TO GO RIGHT FIRST TIME EVERY TIME

Nothing compares to Triple E's range of silent, rugged and easy to install track solutions for curtains and scenery



W: [triplee.ltd](http://triplee.ltd) E: [info@triplee.ltd](mailto:info@triplee.ltd) T: 01959 570 333



Equipment Engineers for Entertainment

### UK PRODUCTIONS

As one of the UK's largest producers of musicals, plays and pantomimes we have extensive stocks of high quality sets, costumes and props available for hire, plus fully equipped workshops to create bespoke items to suit your exact needs.

Sets  
Costumes  
Props

Visit us at [ukproductions.co.uk](http://ukproductions.co.uk) to find out more

**SET & PROP DESIGNERS**  
To The Entertainment Industry  
Theatre • TV • Film & Arenas  
t: 01493 652055 w: [3dcreations.co.uk](http://3dcreations.co.uk)  
**3-D CREATIONS DESIGN**  
ESTABLISHED 1985

Increase the number of visitors to your website with a listing  
email: [sales@thestage.co.uk](mailto:sales@thestage.co.uk)

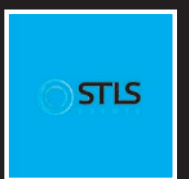
**THE STAGE**  
DIRECTORY

## Sound, lighting and SFX

**BLITZ HIRE LTD**  
Blitz Drape and Rigging Hire is a specialist rigging services company that has quickly developed a rock solid reputation in the field.  
[www.blitz-rigging.co.uk](http://www.blitz-rigging.co.uk) | [blitzrigging@mac.com](mailto:blitzrigging@mac.com) | 07931 377502

**TFG Stage Technology**  
Lighting • Sound • Audio Visual • Hire • Sales • Installation  
We make your performance and presentation spaces look and sound amazing. From the simplest hire to complex installations, we always make sure your message gets heard.  
We create, design, install, and maintain exceptional technical systems that really wow your audience.  
01706 849 469 | [sales@tf.com](mailto:sales@tf.com)

Located in the heart of Surrey, STLS is your number one production hire company offering a fantastic range of lighting, sound & Av equipment hire. From schools to conferences & Events we have a huge range of sound and lighting equipment available for hire, delivered to your door!



[stlsevents.co.uk/](http://stlsevents.co.uk/) • [info@stlsevents.co.uk](mailto:info@stlsevents.co.uk)

02082246039



Follow @TheStage on Twitter/X

Le Maitre Events are pyrotechnic specialists, offering a full range of services from hiring equipment through to designing and firing complete events.



[www.lemaitreevents.com](http://www.lemaitreevents.com)

## Theatre seating and upholstery

**hussey seatway**  
Bespoke retractable and fixed seating specialists for theatre and performing arts venues. Designed and manufactured in the UK.  
01985 847200 [info@husseyseatway.com](mailto:info@husseyseatway.com) [www.husseyseatway.com](http://www.husseyseatway.com)

**race FURNITURE**  
TURN A GOOD ENVIRONMENT INTO A GREAT EXPERIENCE  
Visiting your theatre should be a magical experience. A Race Furniture seat enhances that.  
Choose magic. Choose Race Furniture.  
Scan here to visit our website and find out more  
[racefurniture.com](http://racefurniture.com)  
[enquiries@racefurniture.com](mailto:enquiries@racefurniture.com)  
+44 (0)1451 821446

**UNIVERSAL CREATIONS**  
With a wide variety of techniques and technologies at our disposal in our 7,000sq ft workshop, no job is too small or too big. Call us today to find out what we can do for you.  
07881 305 643 / 01784 557 117  
[www.universal-creations.co.uk](http://www.universal-creations.co.uk)  
[info@universal-creations.co.uk](mailto:info@universal-creations.co.uk)



NEXT WEEK IN THE PAPER



MANUEL HARLAN

- 1 We meet Max Webster (left), whose starry production of Macbeth transfers to the West End as he directs The Importance of Being Earnest at the National Theatre.
- 2 UK theatre's biggest playwriting competition, the Bruntwood Prize, turns 20 this year. Our writer goes behind the scenes to find out what makes it so special.

- 3 My Favourite Play, in which theatre figures reveal their most treasured experience as an audience member, continues with the director Michael Grandage (right).
- 4 Scottish theatre is in an uncertain place today – what can its history tell us about where it could go next?, asks Fergus Morgan.



ALEX BRENNER

NOW ON THESTAGE.CO.UK



MARC BRENNER

- 1 Jamie Lloyd's lauded Sunset Boulevard (left) opens on Broadway this week. Can it replicate its London success?, asks Richard Jordan.
- 2 The death of artists should be an opportunity for one last honour, not the source of dispute, says Howard Sherman.

- 3 Roger Allam (right) will play Churchill in a new drama by Howard Brenton at the Orange Tree next year. Find out more about the theatre's 2025 season online.
- 4 All the latest reviews, including Robert Icke's Oedipus and The Duchess starring Jodie Whittaker, both in the West End.



REBECCA NEED

Subscribe to The Stage today



Every subscription includes a 10% discount on theatre tickets and more exclusive discounts.

Contact us at [subscriptions@thestage.co.uk](mailto:subscriptions@thestage.co.uk) 020 7939 8479

Print & Digital	£16.99 monthly or £150 annually
Digital Only	£5.99 monthly or £66 annually

THE STAGE

Issue number 7466  
© The Stage Media Company Ltd

Editorial [newsdesk@thestage.co.uk](mailto:newsdesk@thestage.co.uk)  
Editor Alistair Smith  
Deputy editor Matthew Hemley  
Reviews editor Sam Marlowe  
Features editor Georgia Snow  
Associate editor Lyn Gardner  
Obituaries editor Michael Quinn  
[Obits@thestage.co.uk](mailto:Obits@thestage.co.uk)  
Reporter Georgia Luckhurst  
Junior reporter Katie Chambers

Production  
Head of production Stuart Gidden  
Production manager Tom Hawker  
Senior production sub-editor Ian Shine  
Production sub-editors Molly Toolan, Daisy Game, Bella Green  
Content manager Catherine Gerbrands  
Head of design Danny Arter

Sales and marketing  
Sales and marketing director Rachel Scott  
Head of marketing Laura Buckley  
Marketing manager Mustak Kothia  
Customer services manager Derrell Ballard-Levy  
Customer services assistant Cat Fucecchi  
Head of events Grace Lewis  
Events executives Yasmin Norvill, Genevieve Osili  
Marketing executives Phoebe Wyatt, Ellie Lieberman  
Social media executive Cordelia Tarbrooke

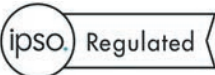
Sales manager Sarah DuMay  
Account manager Christopher Porter  
Classified senior sales executive Adam Laidlow  
Classified sales executive Katie Wood  
Sales administrator Natasha Carmichael  
[sales@thestage.co.uk](mailto:sales@thestage.co.uk)

Finance  
Finance director Keith Marriott  
Financial controller Christina.Booty@integral2.com, 01733 373128  
Credit controller Lee.Reynolds@integral2.com 01733 333554

The Stage Media Company  
Managing director Hugh Comerford  
Chairman Catherine Comerford  
Human resources manager Nicky Jooste  
Digital product director Erika Simpson  
Office manager Carole Wright

Published by  
The Stage Media Company Ltd  
47 Bermondsey Street  
London SE1 3XT  
020 7403 1818 (switchboard)  
020 7939 8479 (subscriptions)

Printed by  
Reach Printing Services (Watford) Ltd  
The Stage takes complaints about editorial content seriously. We are committed to abiding by the Independent Press Standards Organisation rules and regulations and the Editors' Code of Practice that IPSO enforces. Requests for corrections and clarifications should be sent by email to [alistair@thestage.co.uk](mailto:alistair@thestage.co.uk) or by post to: Editor, The Stage, 47 Bermondsey St, London SE1 3XT



A	L	L	E	G	R	O	R	A	F	A	E	L
L	I	E	X	B	M	N	A					
L	I	M	B	O	F	E	R	D	I	N	A	N
H	I	L	A	A	G	L	Y					
A	C	T	I	O	N	M	A	N	O	L	G	A
L	G	S	E	G								
L	E	S	L	I	E	J	O	E	P	E	S	C
O	I	S	I	N	R	I	A					
W	I	N	S	T	O	N	E	J	O	H	A	N
S	H	D	B	T								
H	A	N	S	I	A	N	H	I	S	L	O	P
I	L	A	A	O	O	O	A					
S	U	E	Z	C	A	N	A	L	T	U	R	I
L	S	H	A	A	I	D						
A	R	E	N	A	S	N	I	C	O	S	I	A

Last Week's Crossword

Here are the solutions to last issue's crossword. So, how did you do?

See page 8 for this week's puzzle.

Complete this interactive crossword on The Stage app. Download the app for free – print and digital subscribers get full access.





**THE STAGE**  
JOBS

# Find your dream role today.



Sign up to The Stage Jobs  
for free and apply to  
your next job in minutes.

Visit [jobs.thestage.co.uk](https://jobs.thestage.co.uk) today