

SHAKESPEARE NORTH PLAYHOUSE

We are ready to unveil our Opening Programme with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Christmas Carol* and Audiences with Johnny Vegas and Jimmy McGovern among highlights all coming to this incredible new £30m theatre in Prescot, Knowsley

Our stunning new venue, home to the only 17th-century style timber theatre outside London, also includes a fully accessible outdoor performance garden, exhibition gallery, 60-seater studio theatre, learning centre, exhibition and events spaces, and a café and bar with outdoor piazza. We will open our doors to the public with a joyful weekend of free festivities, from July 15-17.

Kicking off events, *'All the Joy You Can Wish'* will be a glorious ceremony for 'local heroes' including builders who helped construct the venue, and Prescot Cables FC players. Co-created by Slung Low Theatre it will celebrate the opening, as well as the heritage and community of Prescot.

Events continue with a weekend of *'Open Up'* performances, curated by inspirational Prescot-born playwright, actor and community champion Ashleigh Nugent and featuring The Candle Project by Abigail Conway. There will be free activities including dance and drama alongside classical music, rap, DJs crafts and tours throughout the weekend, including tours of the extraordinary new 470-seat Cockpit Theatre. Inspired by Inigo Jones' historic 1629 Cockpit-In-Court London masterpiece, it is the jewel in the crown of the new Playhouse.



Among the highlights of the opening season will be Shakespeare's classic comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a co-production with Northern Stage and Not Too Tame. Directed by **Matthew Dunster**, (Young Vic and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre) and Co-directed by Warrington-born actor **Jimmy Fairhurst**, of Shakespeare North Playhouse's associate company Not Too Tame. This version is a riotous ride through the forest at night.

The Playhouse will also host comedy and music from a wide variety of artists, with two local legends, Liverpool screenwriter Jimmy McGovern and St Helens comedian and actor Johnny Vegas booked for the first ticketed events inside the Cockpit Theatre - *An Evening With Jimmy McGovern* on July 23 and *An Evening With Johnny Vegas* on July 29.

The first plays to grace the Cockpit stage, will be those written by three young winners of the *As You Write It* national playwriting competition, run in conjunction with BBC's The One Show, as part of the theatre's mission to nurture new talent.

And this Christmas, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, recreated with a distinctly Knowsley feel, offering 'a slightly bonkers, fast and furious retelling of the original text with some familiar local references and a sprinkling of pantomime fun. Our version is written by Nick Lane and is directed by Ellie Hurt.

In addition to the shows that we are producing for the space we also have a wonderful season of shows brought to us by other theatre makers, including *Imaginarium Theatre*, *Shakespeare Schools Festival* and the *Serious Nonsense Festival* in partnership with Knowsley Borough of Culture and Writing on the Wall. So take a look at the full listings of our openings season and pick the show for you.

Tickets will go on sale for all Shakespeare North Playhouse shows at the end of April.

Some tickets for each performance will be available on a 'Pay What You Decide' basis, with a large proportion reserved for Knowsley residents, giving everyone the opportunity to come and enjoy a show.

A supporter's scheme will also launch in April, giving people the opportunity to get priority booking, invitation to an opening welcome event and more and we'll be looking for volunteers to join the team very soon.

We will offer a range of workshops and activities for families and will work in partnership with every school in Knowsley to offer children and young people inspirational arts and cultural experiences. We want young people to celebrate this new resource and we'll work with our D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent community to ensure opportunities are as open and inclusive as possible to all.

The Shakespeare North Playhouse is inspired by Prescott's historic connections to William Shakespeare and a love of storytelling and is operated by the charitable Shakespeare North Playhouse Trust.

Honorary Patrons of Shakespeare North Trust are Oscar and BAFTA winning Dame Judi Dench and Glenda Jackson. Special advisers to the Playhouse are Trainspotting and Slumdog Millionaire director Danny Boyle, and Bootle-born writer Frank Cottrell-Boyce, who collaborated on the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics, partly based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*



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LAURA COLLIER

Creative Director at Shakespeare North Playhouse

“ We want the building to be a beacon for creative excellence, as well as a supportive and nurturing playground for people to explore ideas and develop their own creative voice.”

MAX STEINBERG CBE

Chair of The Shakespeare North Trust

“ It is wonderful to see this iconic, national resource come to life. The venue is truly stunning and a testament to the skill and expertise of all involved in making this vision a reality.”

ALAN LANE

Slung Low

“ What Prescott has achieved in the building of this new theatre is extraordinary - it demands a fabulous ceremony, a ceremony that looks to the past of course but also shows the brilliance of Prescott now. To work with trail blazers is always exciting.”

JIMMY MCGOVERN

Liverpool Screenwriter (An Evening With Jimmy McGovern - July 23)

“ I found it breath-taking, there's a cosiness and an intimacy in there and yet it can seat over 400 people at times, and you feel as though you are right on top of all the action, it's incredible. I think that's a great boon to this area. I'm thrilled by it.”

MELANIE LEWIS

Chief Executive of the Shakespeare North Playhouse

“ Construction of the venue is nearing completion and it is looking absolutely wonderful. Everyone is invited to come along and join in the opening celebrations, and dive into a weekend of joyful moments, this place is yours – so please turn up and own it!”

CLLR GRAHAM MORGAN

Leader of Knowsley Council

“ After many years of planning and preparation we are absolutely thrilled that the opening of the Shakespeare North Playhouse is almost upon us, as this year we celebrate being the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture. I cannot wait for our communities to be able to go and explore this amazing venue.”

JOHNNY VEGAS

Comedian & Actor

“ It doesn't feel like there's a cheap seat in the house and that's beautiful. You walk in there and you feel like we've taken culture back. Creatively this can be that beacon for us to start coming together and proving for the rest of the world just what talent we have in the north. We breed talent here so let's celebrate it.”

ASHLEIGH NUGENT

Playwright & Rapper RiseUpCIC, curators of the OPEN UP

“ Open Up is going to be an amazing opportunity to really be part of this incredible new project. Shakespeare North Playhouse is going to bring a lot of opportunities to the area, great arts and culture, and we are so excited for the local community to get involved.”

“ Our mission to promote and encourage the study of Shakespeare and arts education has never been more vital and we invite everyone to get involved ”

MAX STEINBERG CBE - Chair of The Shakespeare North Trust