



Press Release
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HEART OF HAMMERSMITH – FIRST COMMUNITY PLAY FROM THE LYRIC HAMMERSMITH THEATRE CELEBRATING STORIES OF WEST LONDON

- FIRST EVER LARGE-SCALE COMMUNITY PLAY IN THE LYRIC HAMMERSMITH THEATRE'S 125-YEAR HISTORY TO TAKE OVER THE MAIN HOUSE THIS SUMMER WRITTEN AND CREATED BY NICHOLAI LA BARRIE WITH THE LYRIC COMMUNITY COMPANY, DIRECTED BY EVA SAMPSON WITH ALEX HURST
- INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY BRINGS TOGETHER A COMMUNITY CAST OF MORE THAN 40 PEOPLE FROM WEST LONDON INCLUDING 17 YOUNG MEMBERS, A COMMUNITY CHORUS AND NOW RECRUITING FOR ADULT ROLES
- ALONGSIDE THE PLAY, THE LYRIC IS INVITING THE PUBLIC TO SHARE THEIR MEMORIES OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM AS PART OF *YOUR HAMMERSMITH STORY* CELEBRATING THE HISTORY, PEOPLE AND PLACES OF THE BOROUGH
- *HEART OF HAMMERSMITH* RUNS FROM 12 TO 14 AUGUST 2021. ALL TICKETS ARE £10 AND GO ON SALE TODAY AT WWW.LYRIC.CO.UK

Heart of Hammersmith, the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's first large-scale community play in its 125-year history will take over the main house this August, bringing together a cast of over 40 West Londoners, including 17 young members, aged 18-25, made up of first time actors, a secondary school teacher, drag artist, call centre worker, students, new graduates and community volunteers. Written and created by **Nicholai La Barrie** (*Tina – The Tina Turner Musical* Resident Director) with **The Lyric Community Company**, and directed by **Eva Sampson** (*Decades*) with **Alex Hurst** (Lyric Resident Assistant Director, Birkbeck Placement), *Heart of Hammersmith* celebrates West London stories past and present. The production will also feature a community chorus from Young Lyric partner organisations and the Lyric is now inviting applicants to sign up for adult cast roles. *Heart of Hammersmith* will run from **Thursday 12 to**

Saturday 14 August with socially distanced seating. All tickets are £10 and go on sale today at www.lyric.co.uk

Working together with Nicholai La Barrie, the script has been created with the Lyric Community Company's 17 young members who started rehearsals online during the pandemic. They are: **Gehna Badhwar, Eva Bate, Wes Bozonga, Ömer Cem Çoltu, Tom Claxton, Kitty Cockram, James Douglas-Quarcoopome, Harry Drane, Harri-Rose Hudson, Lex MacQuire, Ella McCallum, Ele McKenzie, Alfie Neill, Priyanka Patel, Danielle Tama, Wilf Walsworth, Aliyah Yanguba.**

The Young Lyric partner organisations collaborating on *Heart of Hammersmith* are **Action on Disability, Amici Dance Company New English Ballet Theatre, Turtle Key Arts, Tri-Borough Music Hub and Zoo Nation Academy of Dance.**

Heart of Hammersmith tells intergenerational stories of the people, places, sights and sounds of Hammersmith past and present. From lives lived to lives lost, lives forced out and lives brought together, *Heart of Hammersmith* celebrates West London through all of its hardships and triumphs and the vibrant individuals who make it what it is. Inspired by true stories from West London, the play tracks immigrant arrivals, million-pound homes and social housing sitting side by side, the rise of gentrification and the shadows left by the Grenfell tragedy, the changing of attitudes, facing of tragedies and the rallying of a resilient community. It is set on Dieppe Street, a street from West London's past that today unites us.

Nicholai La Barrie, Creator/Writer, said: *"Working with this group of 17 young performers has been a revelation, their stories and the stories of their communities have broken my heart and built it back up again. We didn't know what we were going to make when we started off, so we just talked and what started to emerge was this sense of family, and friends that become family, of lives that crash into each other and become ever changed as a result. The question of what it means to live and grow up with people, the question of how my endz informs the rest of my life, the question of who is my family. This is where we ended up with a deeply personal play about the beautiful lives of our neighbours and friends that hold us, and define us and teach us how to be more human."*

Alfie Neill, company member, said: *"I have lived beside the theatre all my life, from a young boy playing on the roof areas of the Lyric causing mischief to becoming directly involved in projects in my teenage years. We are being listened to and Heart of Hammersmith is a truly collaborative experience like never seen before from any theatre on this scale. West London has defined my journey, character and outlook on life, my heart has been crafted on these streets and in my home."*

Priyanka Patel, company member, said: *"It makes me excited to know by August 2021 there will be a main stage show, based around community and the love of the area at such an important theatre in London – and I get to be a part of that process. Shepherds Bush has been my home for 25 years and I feel incredibly lucky to share why it's so special to me. Hopefully these messages will resonate with every West Londoner who walks through the doors."*

As part of the Lyric Community Company, the Lyric is now seeking adults from West London to perform in the production in August. There will be a mix of speaking and non-speaking roles and no previous acting experience is required. Adults aged 25+ who live in West London and are passionate about the community are invited to apply via the Lyric website www.lyric.co.uk by 10am on Monday 24 May. Expenses for all in person engagement will be provided for by the Lyric.

Your Hammersmith Story

Residents and workers across Hammersmith & Fulham are being invited to share their memories of the area in *Your Hammersmith Story* which will see selected stories featured in a new podcast from the Lyric.

Rob Lehmann, Director of Young Lyric said: “We’ve loved hearing from our community members for *Heart of Hammersmith*, and now we want to invite residents and workers from Hammersmith & Fulham to share their memories with us as part of *Your Hammersmith Story* to celebrate the history, people and places of our home borough. What does Hammersmith mean to you? It could be a story from your first visit, a special occasion, celebrating a local hero, your favourite places to visit, anecdotes from your time here, you name it.”

To take part in *Your Hammersmith Story*, forms are available to download from the Lyric website and in person from the box office and from various local businesses in the area. Selected individuals will be invited to tell their story in a new podcast set to be released this summer. See www.lyric.co.uk for further information.

Creative team biographies:

Nicholai La Barrie, Creator/Writer, is a theatre and film director, an Artistic Associate of the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and has been a MOBO Fellow. His work in theatre includes: *Tina - The Tina Turner Musical* as Resident Director (West End), *Liar Heretic Thief* (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre), *Portrait For Posterity* (Arcola Theatre), *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* (Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama), *Grey, There is Nothing There* (Oval House), *White* (Edinburgh Festival), *Gob* (London International Festival of Theatre), *The Book of Disquiet* (Blue Elephant Theatre), *I'll Take You There* (Gate), *Chet Baker: Speedball* (606 Jazz Club). Film Credits Include: *Hamlet Sort Of*, *North East South West*, *Aingeal*, *Dark Stranger* (2009 Official selection Caribbean film festival). Dramaturge credits include: *Feels*, *The Mob Reformers* (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre).

Eva Sampson, Director, trained on the National Theatre Studio Directors' Course and at the University of Birmingham. Work as Director includes: *The Little Gardener* (Kew Gardens), *The Last Nine Months* (Vaults Festival), *Sticky* (Southwark Playhouse), *The Tide* (Young Vic), *The Scarecrows' Wedding* (Watford Palace Theatre), *A Peter Rabbit Tale* (Singapore Repertory), *Rudolf* (Leeds Playhouse) and *Decades* (Ovalhouse). Work as Staff Director at The National Theatre includes: *The Visit or The Old Lady Comes to Call* and *Downstate* with Steppenwolf Theatre. Work as Associate and Assistant Director includes: *Four Quartets* with Ralph Fiennes (UK Tour), Olivier Award winning *Noye's Fludde* (Theatre Royal Stratford East and ENO), *Twelfth Night* (Young Vic, Jerwood Assistant Director) and *Raymond Briggs' Father Christmas* (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre). Eva was Resident Assistant Director for Chichester Festival Theatre's 2019 season: *This is My Family* and *8 Hotels*. Digital Theatre work includes: *Meet Mo*, *Ribena* and *Jack and the Beanstalk: A Pocket Pantomime* (Theatre Royal Stratford East) and *At the Statue of Venus* (Royal Opera House). As Associate Director: *Unprecedented* (Headlong and Century Films), a major digital project broadcast on BBC Four and BBC iPlayer as part of BBC Arts' Culture in Quarantine Season. For TV/Radio: *That's How It Feels*, REED TVC Campaign (MYNT and Kingdom Creative) and *Keep the Home Fires Burning* (The Culture Trust Luton). Eva Sampson is the Co-Artistic Director of How It Ended theatre company and is an Associate Artist of National Youth Theatre.

Alex Hurst, Director, is the Resident Assistant Director at the Lyric and is currently training for an MA in Theatre Directing at Birkbeck. He is a graduate of the BA Drama course at the University of Manchester and has directed for the Edinburgh and Manchester fringes. *Heart of Hammersmith* will be his professional directing debut. Assisting credits include the Lyric's upcoming production of *Out West* marking the theatre's reopening this June, and *Market Boy* (Rose Bruford College).

Lyric Community Company biographies:

Eva Bate was born in Chester, grew up in Brighton and has lived in Hammersmith for the past 8 months where she has loved getting to know local people. She has worked flyering along King Street to promote her local pub and volunteers for a homeless charity and hostel. She said: *I feel really lucky to give the people of West London a voice through which we will tell their stories. This is something we all care about and we want to ensure we make it the most truthful and spectacular play possible.*" Eva graduated from the Brit School in 2019.

Gehna Badhwar grew up in Delhi and spent a part of her childhood in Delhi before moving to the UK. She said: *"The concept of Heart of Hammersmith really stood out to me, devising with other creatives and young people from West London based on our shared and unique experiences and the opportunity to learn more about each other. I'm passionate about making theatre more accessible to young students especially from under-represented backgrounds. I want to get involved in initiatives that are bringing this cause to life."*

Wes Bozonga was born in East London, has grown up in Wandsworth, Ilford, Manor Park and Ladbrooke Grove and now lives in Acton. He said: *"I love that I am part of the Lyric's first community show. This is a chance for the community to come together and make something magical. I've been involved with the Lyric for so many years, I feel like part of the building - it's my second home."*

Ömer Cem Çoltu was born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey and moved to Notting Hill Gate aged 19. He said: *"I'm looking forward to creating devised and verbatim theatre working with young, passionate directors and talking about community issues with full honesty and reality. These personal stories are a valuable and important representation of this society and to stage this at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre plus with the grand architecture of its auditorium really excites me."* Ömer is currently studying drama at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and has previously performed in *The Lower Depths* and *The Cherry Orchard* at the Arcola Theatre.

Tom Claxton recently graduated from LAMDA and this is his first experience working with the Lyric. He said: *"This is a great chance to tell the stories of local people and widen accessibility to the arts, People might think that they don't belong in the theatre but we want to change preconceptions about what it can be."* Tom is from Manchester and now based in Ealing, he has previously worked in telesales selling magazine subscriptions to help support his acting training. Other performances include an ensemble role in *Frankenstein* at Manchester Royal Exchange. Tom's future aims are to help other young, working-class northern creatives looking to enter the industry.

Kitty Cockram was born in Mitcham and raised in Brentford where she currently lives. She said: *"West London has built me into the person I am today. I feel very grateful for the opportunity to live here and feel the Heart of Hammersmith is a great way to express that. The chance to devise, write and perform with other young adults in West London on the Lyric Main stage,*

what an experience. It has really spiced up Lockdown 3.0." Kitty has previously worked with Questors Theatre in Ealing and graduated from the East 15 BA acting course in 2019, she is also involved with Brentford Penguins Downs Syndrome Football Club.

Harry Drane was born in Slough, grew up in Güéjar Sierra, Spain, and is now based in Wandsworth. This is his first encounter with the Lyric. He said: *"There are so many untold stories in every avenue of London which are often the most visceral. The chance to showcase how vital art is and bring a community together, especially during the pandemic, is extremely rewarding. The Lyric is creating the highest quality contemporary theatre while nurturing young people, it's the perfect place to support my goal to provide more queer space and stories in theatre."* Harry is also a drag artist and recently graduated from Arts University Bournemouth.

James Douglas-Quarcoopome grew up in Uxbridge. He said: *"We need to show West London some love and why it's a great place, no one raves about it like East, South or North! I really wanted to do something creative during lockdown about something that has personal value and impact, what better than where you were born?"* James has a degree in English and had his first article published in the summer on Black Lives Matter. He added: *"To write an article on real stuff that actually matters is the most impactful thing to come of 2020."*

Lex MacQuire was born in and grew up in Clapham. They first engaged with the Lyric through START, a flagship programme and learning alternative for marginalised 16-21 year olds not in education, employment or training. Lex said: *"Heart of Hammersmith is an opportunity to get more involved in theatre and learn new skills, I wanted to open myself up to new experiences with open-minded people."* Lex is an usher with the Lyric and also volunteers with their local LGBT+ social group and helps with activities and the support of members.

Ella McCallum is pursuing an acting career whilst working with young people and SEN young adults. She is based in Chiswick, is a co-founder of Skin and Blister Theatre, and is also the producer of the 'Starts and Grafts' podcast and online creative community, which aims to demystify the arts industries and champion emerging talent. Contributors include Kathy Burke, Hanif Kureishi and Simon Stephens. She said: *"I can't wait to finally do a show in West London. Growing up, the Lyric was the first 'proper' theatre I knew of, it feels like a huge moment to perform on the main stage and I get to shout about how much I love where I grew up."*

Ele McKenzie joined the Lyric's Acting Up classes five years ago, she was a member of the Lyric Ensemble 2018/19 and has performed in *Lyric in the Square* and *Ad Nauseam* as part of the Evolution Festival. She said: *"To me theatre is people, coming together and merging their different arts and skills as a means of creating a visual, aural, living expression of ideas. Therefore, it was collaborative essence of this project, and the emphasis on community, on people, that really excited me, especially after such a long period of isolation."* Before the pandemic she was working in a cinema and has also performed with other youth groups in London.

Alfie Neill. Born and raised in Hammersmith, Alfie fell in love with theatre aged 8. In 2018, he produced and directed *An Evening for Grenfell* dedicated to the lives of those lost and showcasing the talent of local community and in 2019 he performed in *Liar. Heretic. Thief* in collaboration with The Science Museum. He recently graduated from ArtsEd drama school.

Priyanka Patel has lived in Shepherds Bush for 25 years. Prior to the pandemic she was working in various roles, including facilitating acting classes at the Lyric, assisting on a new pilot theatre project and teaching creative writing to children in an after school club. She is also part of the Theatre Peckham REP company.

Danielle Tama grew up in Ealing and has previously performed with the Young Lyric in 2019 in *The Mob Reformers* and *Liar, Heretic, Thief*. Her favourite place in West London is her home and her dream is to work in production in the West End and to appear in film and television. She said: "I'm looking forward to celebrating the best parts of our community. The opportunity to be involved in a creative project that was community centred is one I didn't want to miss."

Wilf Walsworth was born and grew up in Brixton as well as Streatham and Tooting before settling in Earlsfield, Wandsworth. He said: "Seeing a large theatre like the Lyric putting stories from young, local people front and centre on their main stage is so exciting. Growing up in London is a unique experience, and I think there will be a lot that people who grew up in all areas of London can relate to, as well as enjoying wonderful local stories. Wilf graduated from Sheffield University in 2020 where he studied Engineering and is currently training with The Actors Class.

Aliyah Yanguba was born and raised in West London and now teaches secondary school drama in East London. Aliyah got into theatre through her primary school productions and continued studying performing arts in West London and at university. She lives locally to the Lyric where her favourite places to visit are Ravenscourt Park in the summer, Ladbroke Grove and Portobello Market.

- ENDS -

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Notes to Editors

IMAGES available to download [here](#)

Listings

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre presents *Heart of Hammersmith*
Written and Created by **Nicholai La Barrie** and **The Lyric Community Company**
Directed by **Eva Sampson** with **Alex Hurst**

Dates: Thursday 12 to Saturday 14 August 2021

Performance Schedule: Thursday to Saturday at 7.30pm plus Saturday matinee at 2.30pm

Open Captioned Performance: Saturday 14 August, 2.30pm

Audio Described Performance: Saturday 14 August, 7.30pm

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre
Lyric Square, King Street, London, W6 0QL
Box office: 020 8741 6850

www.lyric.co.uk

Tickets from £10

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#HeartOfHammersmith

Also upcoming at Lyric Hammersmith Theatre

Out West

18 June – 24 July 2021

The Lyric Hammersmith Theatre reopens this summer with *Out West*, a triple bill of plays by multi-award-winning UK playwrights Tanika Gupta (critically acclaimed 2019 adaptation of *A Doll's House*), Simon Stephens (Olivier and Tony Award winning writer of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* stage play) and Roy Williams (BAFTA nominated *Soon Gone*, *A Windrush Chronicle*, *Sucker Punch* starring Daniel Kaluuya). *Out West* explores race, geography, identity, belonging and hope rooted in multicultural England of past and present, from Tanika Gupta's *The Overseas Student* - a sharp and witty reimagining of Ghandi's formative student years in Victorian London; to 2020 with Simon Stephens' *Blue water and cold and fresh* which confronts white male privilege in the wake of city lockdown living and Black Lives Matter protests; and present day in Roy Williams' *Go, Girl* which follows Donna, a shopping centre security guard and mum to a teenage daughter who discovers her brilliance in the face of adversity in this celebratory story of Black female empowerment and everyday heroism. The plays are co-directed by Rachel O'Riordan, who looks to build upon her celebrated work following a critically acclaimed 2019/20 debut season as Artistic Director of the Lyric, and co-director Diane Page, with design by Soutra Gilmour, lighting by Jessica Hung Han Yun and sound and composition by Simon Slater. In addition to the live shows running from 18 June to 24 July with socially distanced seating, there will also be an online streaming available from 12 to 17 July. All tickets available now from www.lyric.co.uk

Aladdin

Christmas 2021

Expect the usual Lyric twist on all of your favourite characters as well as live music, magic lamps, plenty of laughs and a journey to a faraway land as *Aladdin* arrives at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre this Christmas.

A new adaptation by award-winning comedian, actress and composer Vikki Stone who returns to write her debut pantomime for the Lyric following critically acclaimed appearances as Abanazar in the 2016 production of *Aladdin* and Fleshcreep in *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 2017. Vikki is well known for her original comedy songs. Credits include: *The Now Show* (BBC Radio 4), *Essential Classics* (BBC Radio 3) and presenting two series of the official *BBC Proms* podcast. TV appearances include *The John Bishop Show* (BBC1), *Partners in Rhyme* (BBC1) and the BAFTA award-winning *Ten Pieces*.

Further details to be announced.

The Lyric Hammersmith Theatre is 'See It Safely' approved

Ensuring the safety of our artists, audience and team is our number one priority. Our socially distanced seating and industry standard 'See It Safely' approved cleaning and Covid-safety measures complying with the latest Government guidelines mean that everyone can experience the joy of live theatre again at the Lyric. You can find out more at <https://lyric.co.uk/faqs/>