

# National Theatre

## Press Release

### **National Theatre to premiere new plays staged by young people at 2018 Connections Festival**

Ten UK school and youth theatre companies will stage ten new plays at the **2018 National Theatre Connections Festival**, which takes place in the Dorfman Theatre from 26-30 June.

Connections is the largest youth theatre festival in the UK which celebrates new writing for young people aged 13-19. Ten new plays by both established and emerging contemporary playwrights have been exclusively commissioned for young people to stage and perform at this year's Festival.

With over 6,500 young people taking part in Connections this year, the plays have been premiered across the UK by 250 youth theatre companies and schools. All the companies had the opportunity to transfer their production to one of 28 leading regional Connections Partner Theatres across the UK, with ten companies selected to perform at the National Theatre between 26-30 June. Young people have the opportunity to get involved in all aspects of creating and staging the play both on and offstage, from set design to costume, lighting and stage management.

Rufus Norris, National Theatre Director said, "I look forward to the Connections Festival every year as it is always such a joy to welcome young people from every corner of the UK to perform at the National Theatre. Programmes like Connections are more vital now than ever as they give young people the opportunity to experience and take part in theatre no matter where they are in the UK, and I can't wait to see each of the ten companies' productions in the Dorfman Theatre in June and celebrate another fantastic year of theatre-making."

The productions invited to appear at the NT in the final week of this year's Festival are:

#### **Tuesday 26 June at the Dorfman Theatre**

7pm – [ *BLANK* ] by Alice Birch performed by See&Eye Theatre, City and Islington College (London)

8.30pm – *The Changing Room* by Chris Bush performed by Cornwall College (St Austell, Cornwall)

#### **Wednesday 27 June at the Dorfman Theatre**

7pm – *Want* by Barney Norris performed by St Brendan's Sixth Form College (Bristol)

8.30pm – *The Sweetness of a Sting* by Chinonyerem Odimba performed by Haggerston School (Hackney, London)

#### **Thursday 28 June at the Dorfman Theatre**

7pm – *The Ceasefire Babies* by Fiona Doyle performed by Yew Tree Youth Theatre (Wakefield)

8.30pm – *These Bridges* by Phoebe Eclair-Powell performed by Chichester Festival Youth Theatre (Chichester)

## **Friday 29 June at the Dorfman Theatre**

7pm – *The Free9* by In-Sook Chappell performed by TRANSMISSION, Jacksons Lane (London)

8.30pm – *The Blue Electric Wind* by Brad Birch performed by Collision (Central Scotland)

## **Saturday 30 June at the Dorfman Theatre**

7pm – *When They Go Low* by Natalie Mitchell performed by CAPA College (Wakefield)

8.30pm – *Dungeness* by Chris Thompson performed by PACE Youth Theatre (Paisley, Scotland)

All performances will be captioned.

Tickets are on sale from Friday 25 May 2018. To book tickets, visit [www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/connections](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/connections)

## **Connections 2019**

Applications are now open to take part in next year's Connections Festival. The National Theatre is looking for 300 school and youth theatre companies across the UK to take part. For more information and to sign up, please visit [nationaltheatre.org.uk/connections](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk/connections)

Connections is supported by:

The Mohn Westlake Foundation, The Buffini Chao Foundation, Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, Delta Air Lines, Jacqueline and Richard Worswick, The Peter Cundill Foundation, Mactaggart Third Fund, The EBM Charitable Trust, Samantha and Richard Campbell-Breeden, The Garvey Family Trust, Susan Miller and Byron Grote, Anthony P. Skyrme, The Derrill Allatt Foundation, Hays Travel Foundation, Faithorn Farrell Timms and supporters of the Connections Appeal.

The National Theatre's Partner for Learning is Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

The ten new plays for this year's Festival are:

### **THE BLUE ELECTRIC WIND**

#### **Brad Birch**

When people at school start forgetting things, Scott wonders if he's the only one who's noticed. It seems it's only him and some of the school misfits who can see what is happening. Is it the weather? Is it a strange virus? They must join forces to try and work out what is causing everyone in town to lose all sense of who they are.

The Blue Electric Wind is a play about why we remember what we do, it is a play about bravery, it's a play about growing up.

### **THE CHANGING ROOM**

#### **Chris Bush**

Chris Bush writes a lyrical piece about existing on the cusp and all the inevitable questions and confusions that come with it. Are we teenagers? Are we children? Do our parents embarrass us? It's about bodies in flux and perspectives shifting; knowing change is coming but not what that change will look like. Set in and around a swimming pool, it follows a group of teens full of excitement, impatience and uncertainty, each with their own secret worries and desires for what comes next.

### **THE FREE9**

#### **In-Sook Chappell**

In-Sook took the tragic, true story of the *Laos Nine* as her starting point and used it to interrogate ideas of hope, escape and cultural difference.

Nine teenagers have fled North Korea and dream of their escape and a new life in the South. Their journey is far from over and with threats around every corner, perhaps the mysterious figure of The

Big Brother can help them or is he the very person they're running from. Their lives hang in the balance and could it all ultimately come down to a garish South Korean gameshow?

### **THE CEASEFIRE BABIES**

#### **Fiona Doyle**

Fiona began by looking at the rise in the youth Republican movements across Ireland and in this found a story that looks at the relationship our identities and beliefs have with the past. Do we inherit our beliefs? Can a cycle of ideology and disagreement be broken and who can take the first step? In a city still divided by a crumbling wall, siblings Mikey and Jamie no longer see eye to eye. There's change in the air and not everyone's ready for it. Jamie wants to reignite the old conflicts of her father and uncle but Mikey and their friends must decide to either take hold of their own destinies, or allow the ghosts of the past to dictate their futures.

### **THESE BRIDGES**

#### **Phoebe Eclair-Powell**

Proud Londoner, Phoebe imagines a community divided by politics and water. When the Thames burst its banks, the North and the South became separated. Myths abound about 'the other side' - is it really better? Four sets of teenagers ignore the risks of the treacherous crossing to find out whether the other side is all it's cracked up to be. The drowned commuters of the Circle Line conjure memories of the past. These Bridges looks at a fearful future and seeks to show that if we stick together, we may just survive it all.

### **WHEN THEY GO LOW**

#### **Natalie Mitchell**

Natalie began writing this play when the prospect of woman leading the free world seemed a sure thing - then things changed.

Social media goes into a frenzy over pictures of Sarah at a party on the weekend - no one knows quite what she got up to. When Miss Reef lectures the girls on taking more responsibility for their actions, Louise becomes enraged that the boys who took the pictures have nothing to answer for. She wages war on the misogyny but when she threatens school stalwart Scott and his claim to the School Captain title, things get very nasty. A website appears, rating the girls on their appearance and shaming them for their actions.

A play about everyday feminism and the changing face of teenage sexuality in an online world. When they go low, we go high.

### **WANT**

#### **Barney Norris**

Barney and his theatre company *Up In Arms* champion work that reaches out into forgotten rural communities. His play locates itself firmly in that world. Ross wants Jenny, but Jenny wants adventure. Heather wants Claire to get better and Claire wants a normal life. Gabby wants to go to uni but worries about her brother. Mark and Chris just want something to do. WANT tells the stories of a constellation of young people through a series of charged, longing exchanges. A cycle of characters try to decide what kind of life is waiting for them.

### **THE SWEETNESS OF A STING**

#### **Chinonyerem Odimba**

Chino was inspired by the fables of West African storytelling, using nature to tell human stories. Badger's parents decide they want to return to their home country, so he is confronted with the possibility of leaving everything he knows and becoming a visitor in a strange world. Attempting to run away and escape his parent's plans, Badger finds himself in a world full of insects, stories and Thunder - a land beneath our feet that he cannot escape from. This fantastical story looks at what it means to be young - disconnected from nature, and from your identity.

### **DUNGENESS**

#### **Chris Thompson**

Fifty years on from the partial decriminalization of homosexuality in England, Chris Thompson wanted to write a play about the struggles and the joy of being gay. In a remote part of the UK, where nothing ever happens, a group of teenagers share a safe house for LGBT+ young people. While their shared home welcomes difference, it can be tricky for self-appointed group leader Birdie

to keep the peace. The group must decide how they want to commemorate an attack that happened to people like them in a country far away. How do you take to the streets and protest if you're not ready to tell the world who you are? If you're invisible, does your voice still count? A play about love, commemoration and protest.

## **[ BLANK ]**

**Alice Birch**

*A National Theatre/Clean Break co-commission*

Alice Birch's theatrical provocation is a co-commission between Connections and theatre company Clean Break. Clean Break work with women in the criminal justice system, inspiring playwrights and audiences with their ground-breaking work.

[ BLANK ] is no traditional play, it's a series of 60 scenes - some of which may feel connected, others less so - about adults and children impacted by the criminal justice system. It's about what life is like when adults feel absent from it. But it can be about whatever you like - you can choose as many or as few scenes in order to construct your own narratives.

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To download images from previous National Theatre Connections Festivals, click [\[here\]](#)

For press enquiries and press tickets, please contact Rhian Bennett at [rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk](mailto:rbennett@nationaltheatre.org.uk) / 020 7452 3235

## **Notes to Editors**

### **About National Theatre**

At the National Theatre, we make world-class theatre that is entertaining, challenging and inspiring, and we make it for everyone. In 2016-2017, the NT staged 26 productions and gave 2,585 performances at our home on the South Bank. The NT's award-winning programme had a UK paying audience of 1.8 million, 400,000 of which were NT Live audiences.

The work the National Theatre produces appeals to the widest possible audiences with new plays, musicals, reimagined classics and new work for young audiences. The NT's work is seen in the West End, on tour throughout the UK and internationally, and in collaborations and co-productions with partners across the country. Through NT Live, we broadcast some of the best of British theatre to over 2,500 venues in 60 countries around the world.

Our extensive Learning programme offers talks, events and workshops for people of all ages, and reaches nationwide through programmes such as Connections, our annual festival of new plays for schools and youth theatres. In 2016-2017 there were 196,826 participations through the NT Learning events programme. Over 3,000 schools have signed up to the free streaming service, *On Demand. In Schools*, since its launch in September 2015.

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