

OVERVIEW & CONTENTS

This education resource has been created by the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre. We are committed to deepening and nurturing young people's understanding of theatre and the arts. We aim to raise the cultural aspirations of young people and make theatre accessible to all. With this in mind, this education resource is designed for teachers and Drama students. This resource is written from a theatre maker's perspective and we hope it provides some interesting insights into how a production like *Marriage Material* is created and performed.

Content Warning:

The play contains strong language and sexual references; racism and racial slurs; anti-immigrant sentiment; religious discrimination (in particular, Sikhphobia); arson as a form of martyrdom; misogyny; body shaming; family conflict; terminal illness; death and bereavement; mental health struggles; emotional abuse; infidelity; substance abuse; depictions of drunkenness.

Marriage Material is a Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and Birmingham Rep co-production.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

SATHNAM SANGHERA

AUTHOR OF MARRIAGE MATERIAL

What inspired you to centre your story around a family who own a corner shop in Wolverhampton?

Well, it wasn't because I grew up in a corner shop – a lot of people presume that! I wanted to write a novel about the Indian immigrant experience in Britain, and it seemed to me that the corner shop was the perfect place to set it. It's a microcosm of multiculturalism, and for some people the only interaction they have with multiculturalism. For many Britons their local shopkeeper is the only ethnic minority they talk to, and as such they have long aided race relations. It is notable that in a radio interview in 2001 Lord Tebbit praised his Asian newsagent even as he attacked multiculturalism. Though the symbolism of the shop goes beyond this, with Napoleon once having famously dismissed us as a “nation of shopkeepers.”

How has your work as a journalist influenced your fiction writing?

Intensely. Making things up should be easy, you'd think, but I find it difficult, so I built up the world in *Marriage Material* through intense journalistic research. If I wanted to know how Asian teenagers might have dressed in 1968, I didn't have a costume designer or a WHAM supervisor (Wigs, Hair and Makeup) to consult. I went to the British Library and spent a week looking up fashion magazines and newspapers from Britain and India at the time. If I wanted to find out how a corner shop in Wolverhampton – the setting for the play

– might have physically changed over the 50 years covered by the story, I didn't have a set designer to help. I went and worked in several shops in the West Midlands, waking up at 4am to help with the newspapers, and interviewing the exhausted families who ran them. When it came to building the character of the chocolate salesman in the novel, I even went and interviewed chocolate salesmen in the Midlands too! I probably made life needlessly hard for myself.



Photography by Helen Murray

How do you think the novel's themes reflect on today's society?

I feel the themes are universal – the generation gap (the poignancy of one generation watching the rise of the next), the tension between the provincial and the metropolitan (if you want to understand Britain, understand the gap between London and Wolverhampton), marriage, family. But I guess the politics that was in the air in the late 1960s in Wolverhampton are still in the air now. Certainly, immigration is even more of an obsession, and then there are endless debates about community integration, and what it means to be British.

What do you hope that people take away from either reading or watching *Marriage Material*?

Mainly I want people to be entertained, to laugh and to cry – just as I did when I read Gurpreet's fantastic script. I hope it makes

people think about the human beings on the other side of the counter of their newsagent. And I hope it spreads understanding and connects people, in the way that all good art should do.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to share a story that challenges or sits outside of the mainstream – especially one rooted in a different cultural or personal perspective?

Do the work. There are always reasons to give up, or not to try in the first place. I've wanted to give up many times – not least with this project. It took more than 12 years for this book to end up on stage. But you never know when something might get its moment – the key is to keep writing and working in the face of uncertainty and, sometimes, discouragement.



Photography by Helen Murray

HARPER K. HEFFERON

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Please could you explain your role as Assistant Director on *Marriage Material*?

My role as Assistant Director on *Marriage Material* is a really active one, I am not only assisting the director and the cast on the play itself, supporting the text and helping the actors with character work, but I have also been supporting stage management and production quite a bit. The show is a long family epic that spans multiple generations: we have quite a complicated set that requires a lot of props set up, so the stage manager needed some support in the room for example to move things around. This meant I was much more physically involved in rehearsals as opposed to watching and taking notes. This was really exciting and so much fun. I also spent time during the preview period taking character notes, supporting the writer as she made some amends to the script. I've had such a lovely time working with Iqbal (Khan, Director) and I think the show itself is really strong and I'm really proud of the work that has been made.

How have you collaborated with the cast and creative team on this specific production?

On this production I worked very closely with the cast. There are a lot of characters, props and costumes to negotiate, so I have forged strong relationships with them to support them in what ever they have needed including learning lines of dialogue but also keeping track of props and scene transitions. I have also formed a close relationship with the writer who has been very involved in the creation of this play (Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti) and the Director (Iqbal Khan) who has been so generous to work with and has listened to my ideas and notes as part of the process in creating the work.



Photography by Helen Murray

When you read the script what was your initial response – what moments caught your imagination?

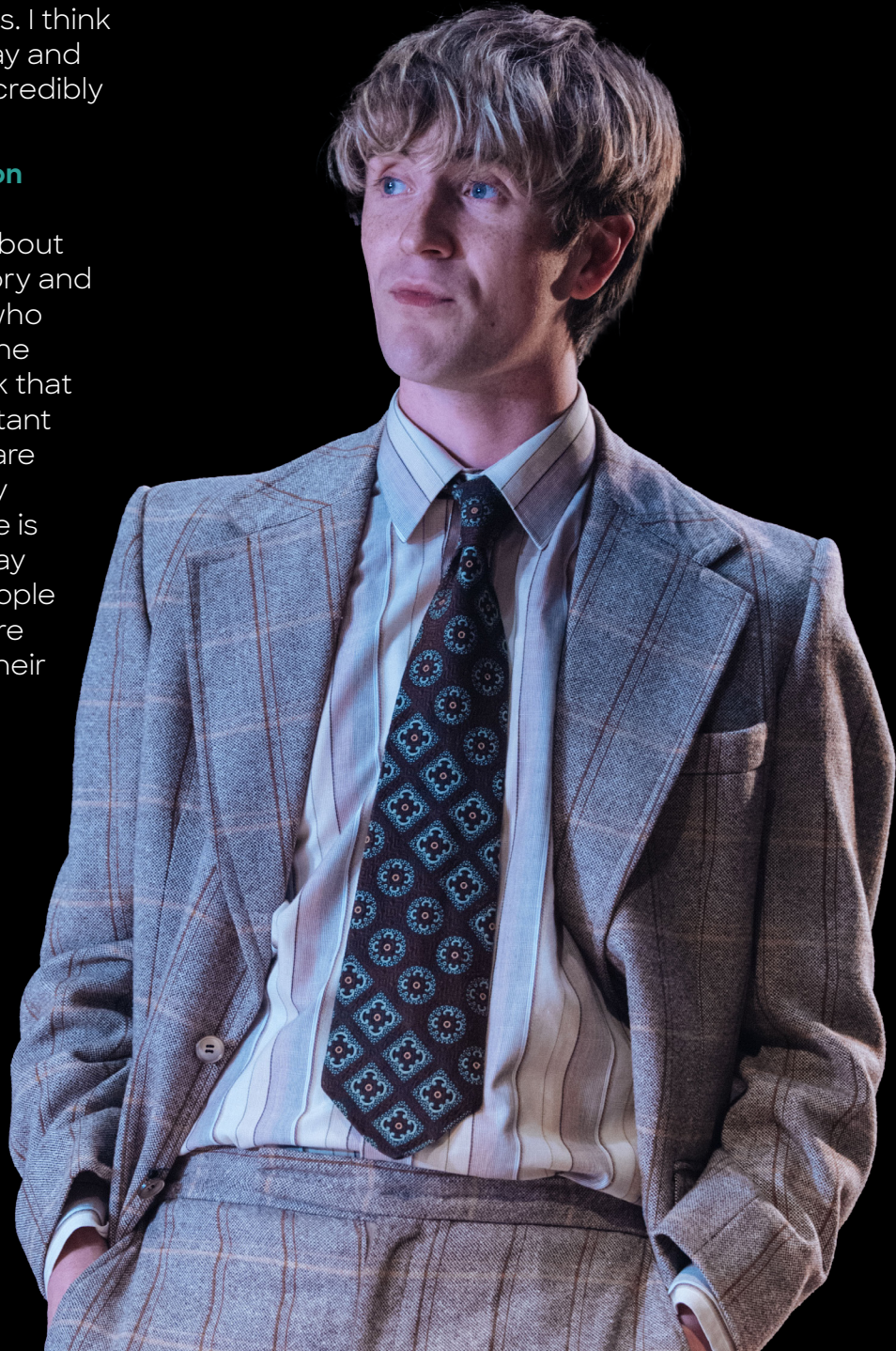
When I initially read the script, I really loved it, but it wasn't until I started to hear it out loud that I felt really connected to it. The thing I think I identified with the most is the experience of feeling a sense of duty and responsibility to your family to quote/unquote "where you come from". Growing up my family and extended family was very close and there was an expectation that we would always remain close and take care of one another and the family was placed in terms of importance before anything else in my life. I had to learn as a teenager and an adult it was ok to set boundaries with my family and that didn't mean that I loved them any less. I think *Marriage Material* is such a strong play and beautiful piece of theatre and feel incredibly privileged to have been involved.

What are you most proud of working on this production?

I think the thing I am most proud of about this production is that it is telling a story and reaching a demographic of people who are often unrepresented in theatre, the British South Asian community. I think that representation is so incredibly important and the fact that a lot of people who are coming to the play have said that they have never been to our theatre before is exciting because it means that this play and this piece of theatre is inviting people who may not have felt welcome before and telling them that their story and their voice matters, because it does!

During the rehearsal process for this production, has there been anything that has shaped and developed your practice as a director?

During the rehearsal process one of the things I found incredibly interesting to watch was the way that Iqbal (Director) works. He is incredibly, incredibly detailed, almost forensic in the way he works through a play and a text. I sometimes feel pressured in rehearsals to make sure I have a draft of the whole play before I feel like I can get into any really deep work with the text and the stage craft, but Iqbal is someone who has faith the piece will come together working at the pace he know works for him and the level of care and detail that he takes all pays off.



What drew you to a career as a director?

What drew me to a career as a director was initially a love of stories and storytelling. When I was young I got to go to the Theatre a lot because I grew up just outside of New York City (USA) and I also used to love watching movies and many of them I watch over and over again. I became really obsessed with the idea of wanting to be a performer, but as time went on I realised there were a lot of constraints on performers that did not necessarily want to have on myself. The most prominent one being that when you are a performer you frequently have to mould yourself to other people's options. An example is that of my red hair where a teacher said to me; "you will either be the lead actor or you won't be cast at all because your red hair makes you stand out". I realised that a lot of performing meant changing yourself to fit what other people wanted you to be. What I really wanted to do with my life was to be in charge of those rooms and make decisions, I didn't want other people make decisions about my life for me.

What advice would you give to a young person wanting to become a director?

Directing is a hard career to get into, not only because it is a small industry but it is incredibly

competitive. I always say as much as actors talk about how there is a million of them and only a few roles, for every production that actors are cast in you have to remember there is only one single director. On top of that there is not always the most direct career pathway for directing. For other creative roles there are often more training opportunities, not that there aren't routes for directing, but these are fewer. Some of the training routes available are also very expensive, so not everyone can access these opportunities. Quite often people will come into directing from different areas of the industry such as performance and choreography. I have even know some set designers become directors. My advice would be to follow wherever your path takes you, as 'corny' as that may sound! You should take all opportunities to work in the creative field, the best directors are people that don't just understand this art form but many other art forms and are really interested in constantly learning and incorporating different types of work and thinking into their own. Read every thing you can, see as much theatre as you can, watch as many films as you can – literally just make it your job to consume as much art as you can and become familiar with it.



EDUCATION RESOURCES

Performance Skills Analysis

Look at the image below from the rehearsal room of *Marriage Material*.



Photography by Helen Murray

Task: Consider the image and answer the following questions:

- 1) Looking at the performers' body language and facial expressions discuss the relationship between these two characters based on your interpretation.
- 2) Using precise details describe the facial expression, gesture and body language for both characters.

Use the box below to help you:

Physical drama skills:

- Facial Expressions
- Gestures
- Posture

Space and Interaction:

- Levels
- Proxemics / distance
- Eye contact
- Touch

Live Theatre Review



Watch the video of a short scene from the rehearsal room of *Marriage Material*. It features the characters Mr Bains (Mr B) and Mrs Bains (Mrs B).

Task: This scene is a conversation between parents about the education of their daughters. After you have watched the video look at the exam style question below and consider how you might answer based on your observation of the performers in this clip.

Describe how one actor used their voice, movement, and facial expressions to portray their character in a specific scene or section of the play.

TIP: Remember to use precise details when describing and referring to specific theatrical skills. Remember to also include vocabulary that evaluates the use of skills.

Here are some examples:

- Effective
- Successful
- Valuable
- Worthwhile
- Meaningful
- Insightful
- Convincing
- Comprehensive
- Reliable
- Accurate
- Relevant

Text Analysis

Read the short extract from the text below from the script.

MRS B Sure you are okay?

MR B Yes woman. Stop fussing.

He picks up Surinder's book.

MR B Who is this... Tess of the d'Urbervilles?

MRS B It's for her exams.

MR B She reads too many books.

MRS B Girls in this country do things. School says she's intelligent, cleverest in the class. (A BEAT) Maybe we should give her a chance.

MR B No more school.

MRS B It's only two more years.

MR B Enough time for her to become someone who is not like us.

MRS B Why not give her a few more months of a life?

MR B A woman like you can't make a decision about my child.

MRS B Surinder has a quick brain and a spirit of iron. She can do better for herself.

Task: Have a go answering the exam style question below:

If you were playing the role of Mr B, how would you use both vocal and physical theatrical skills to deliver the highlighted line from the text?

“Enough time for her to become someone who is not like us”?

Below is an example response:

If I were playing the role of Mr B, I would use both vocal and physical theatrical skills to reflect his frustration, fear, and sadness about his daughter changing and growing distant from the life he knows. The line “Enough time for her to become someone who is not like us” shows that he feels threatened by the idea of his daughter becoming different, perhaps more educated or ambitious than her parents, and this should be shown clearly in my performance.

Vocally, I would use a low, strained tone to express the emotional weight behind the line.

I would slightly slow down the pace when saying “someone who is not like us,” to show how painful and significant those words are to him. I might also put slight emphasis on “not like us”, possibly pausing slightly before saying it, to highlight the distance he feels growing between him and his daughter.

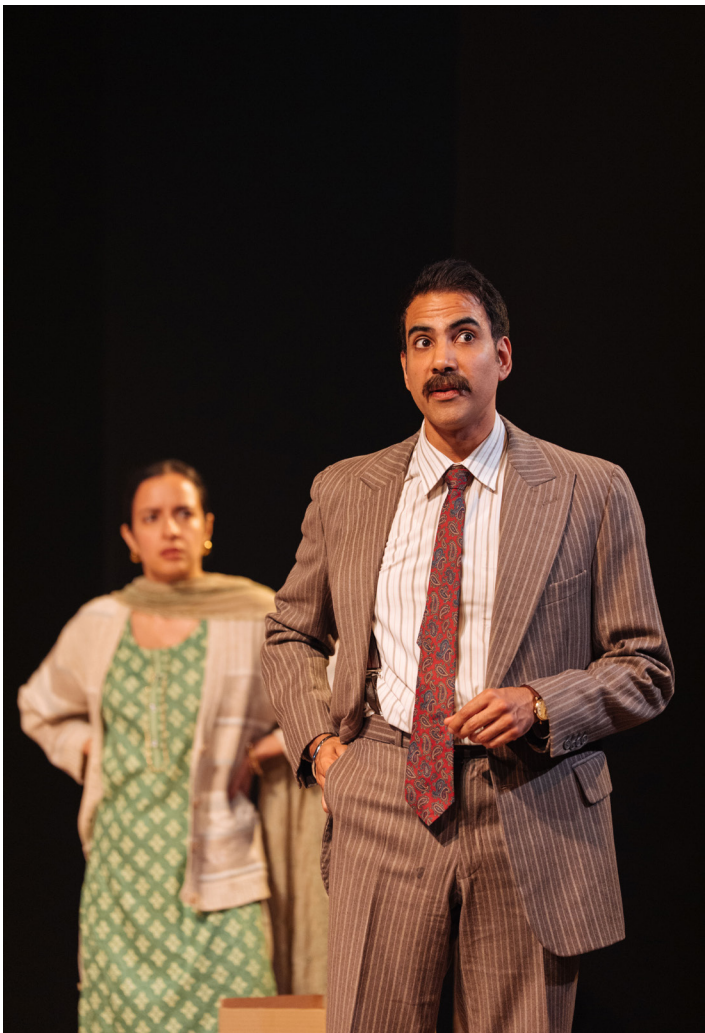
Physically, I would use closed body language to show Mr B's discomfort and vulnerability. For example, I could fold my arms tightly or clench my fists, showing how tense he is. I might also turn slightly away from Mrs B as I deliver the line, as if he's ashamed or scared to admit how he really feels. A slight shake of the head and downcast eyes could show his disappointment and sadness.

Together, these vocal and physical choices would help the audience understand that Mr B is not just angry – he is also deeply hurt and afraid of losing his connection to his daughter. These skills help show the emotional depth of the character and the conflict he is facing.

Production Gallery

Here is a selection of photographs to help remind you about key moments from the performance, but also as a resource to analyse aspects of the production including set, lighting and costume design. All photography by Helen Murray.







GLOSSARY

Marriage Material explores the lives of Punjabi Britons. This page provides translations of Punjabi words and phrases, along with explanations of cultural references that appear throughout the play.

ACHA (uh-chah) / CHULL (chuhl): Right (as in ‘well then’, ‘okay’).

APNEH (uhp-neh): One of our own.

BANDAR (bun-dur): Monkey / twit.

BARFI (bur-fee): Indian sweet made from condensed milk and sugar, often flavoured with cardamom or pistachio.

BAISAKHI (va-saa-khee): Spring harvest celebration that primarily occurs in Punjab and Northern India. While widely celebrated as a harvest festival, Baisakhi is also the date of the Indian Solar New Year and an important day in Sikh history.

BEJI (bay-jee): Mother.

BETA (bay-tah): Child / Dear.

BIBI (bee-bee): Grandmother or older woman.

BHANJI (bhan-jee): Sister.

BHINDI (bhin-dee): Okra, a vegetable used in many cuisines across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and the American South.

BIRJI (bir-jee): Brother.

BHUAS (bhoo-uhz): Father’s sisters; paternal aunts.

CHACHAS (cha-chahs): Father’s younger brothers.

CHAH (chaah): Tea.

CHOLI (cho-lee): Blouse.

CHOOG (choog): Sift.

CHUNNI (choon-nee): Head covering.

DES (dayss): Country.

DHAL (dahl): Dried, split pulses (e.g. lentils, peas, and beans). India is the largest producer of pulses in the world. The term is also used for various soups prepared from these pulses.

DUPATTA (doo-put-tah): Shawl / scarf.

GIANI (gyaa-nee): Sikh cleric.

GORA (go-rah): White man.

GORI (go-ree): White woman.

GOREH (go-reh): White people (plural).

GOON THE ATTA (goon the ut-tah): Knead the dough.

GRANTH SAHIB (granth saa-hib): The central holy religious scripture of Sikhism, regarded by Sikhs as the final, sovereign and eternal Guru following the lineage of the ten human gurus of the religion.

GURDWARA (gur-dwaa-rah): Door of the guru. place of assembly and worship in Sikhism, but its normal meaning is ‘place of guru’ or ‘home of guru.’ Sikhs also refer to gurdwaras as Gurdwara Sahib. Social centre in the community.

HAANJI (haan-jee): Yes (respect).

IZZAT (iz-zut): Honour / soul.

JAT (jaat): An ethnoreligious group, originating from the Indian subcontinent. They are one of the dominant communities in Punjab, India, owing to their large land holdings.

JI (jee): Suffix of respect or formality.

KAMEEZ (ka-meez): A long tunic worn by many people from the Indian subcontinent.

KEE (kee): What.

KHANDAN (khaan-daan): Family legacy / dynasty.

KIDDHA (kid-dah): What’s up? / How are you?

KURREYOH (koo-ree-yeh): Girls.

LEHENGA (lay-hen-gaa): A three-piece outfit consisting of a long skirt, a choli (blouse), and a dupatta (shawl / scarf).

MALASH (ma-lush): Massage.

MASI (maa-see): Maternal aunt.

MASUR (ma-soor): Maternal uncle.

MILNI (*mil-nee*): A meeting ceremony that takes place during a Sikh wedding, usually when the groom's family arrives at the wedding venue. It involves formal introductions between key members of both families, often marked by the exchange of garlands, hugs and gifts. Milni symbolises unity, respect, and the coming together of two families.

MOOLIS (*moo-lis*): Horseradish.

PANDEH (*pun-deh*): Dishes.

PARATHEH (*pa-raa-tay*): Flatbread.

PIND (*pind*): Village.

PINDOO (*pin-doo*): Villager.

PRAHJI (*praah-jee*): Elder brother.

RANI (*raa-nee*): Queen.

SABJI (*sub-jee*): Vegetables.

SARDAR (*sar-daar*): The term Sardar is today used to refer to adult male followers of the religion of Sikhism, as a disproportionate number of Sikhs have honorably served in many high-ranking positions within the Indian Army.

SHARAM (*sha-rum*): Shame.

SHARAB (*sha-raab*): Alcohol.

SAT SRI AKAL (*sut sree akaal*): A Sikh greeting in Punjabi (Sat = truth, Sri = great, Akal = Timeless Being, i.e. God). Complete usage is 'Jo Bole So Nihaal, Sat Sri Akal.' It means roughly, 'Blessed is the person who says "God is Truth."' It is often abbreviated to 'SSA' in modern communications (e.g. instant messaging, email, SMS, etc). It is so widely used in Punjab that Hindus and even many members of the Muslim community use it as a greeting.

TAMASHA (*ta-maa-sha*): Fun / joy / celebration.



Cast



Jim / Bill / Tommy
Tommy Belshaw



Surinder
Anoushka Deshmukh



Mr Bains / Arjan
Jaz Singh Deol



Claire / Miss
Flanagan / Reporter
Celeste Dodwell



Mrs Bains
Avita Jay



Kamaljit
Kiran Landa



Ranjit / Tanvir
Omar Malik



Dhanda
Irfan Shamji

Creative Team

Written by

Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti

Adapted from the book by

Sathnam Sanghera

Directed by

Iqbal Khan

Set & Costume Design by

Good Teeth

Lighting Design by

Simeon Miller

Composition & Sound Design

by

Holly Khan

Movement Direction by

Anjali Mehra

Casting by

Jatinder Chera

Associate Sound Design by

Anna Wood

Associate Movement Direction
by

Rakhee Sharma

Voice & Dialect Coach

Gurkiran Kaur

Fight & Intimacy Direction by

Dani Mac

Assistant Director

Harper K Hefferon

Company Stage Manager

Claire Bryan

Deputy Stage Manager

Georgia Rose

Assistant Stage Manager

Sarah Back

Production Manager

Lil Dickson

Wigs, Hair and Makeup
Supervisor

Sophia Khan

Wigs, Hair and Makeup Head
of Department **Christina**

Semertzaki

Lighting Programmer

Dan Miller

Lighting Operator

Alistair Warr

Sound Operator

Scott Bradley / Dan Ronayne

Fly person

Tom McCreadie / Will Collins

Stage Crew

Charlotte Gregory

Wardrobe Assistant

Lola Kezunovic

Costume Consultant

Meghana Shah

ABOUT THE LYRIC HAMMERSMITH THEATRE

The Lyric Hammersmith Theatre produces bold and relevant world-class theatre from the heart of Hammersmith, the theatre's home for 130 years. Under the leadership of its co-CEOs, Artistic Director Rachel O'Riordan and Executive Director Amy Belson, it is committed to being vital to, and representative of, the local community. A major force in London and UK theatre, the Lyric produces adventurous and acclaimed theatrical work that tells the stories that matter. The Lyric Hammersmith Theatre has a national reputation for ground breaking work to develop and nurture the next generation of talent, providing opportunities for young people to discover the power of creativity and to experience the life changing impact of theatre. We are the creative heart of Hammersmith, proud of our history and ambitious for our future.

the Rep

Birmingham Rep has been at the forefront of theatre in the UK for over 100 years. The Rep has an unparalleled pioneering history and is the only producing theatre in the UK's second city. It is the oldest building-based theatre company in the UK, and the forerunner of both the RSC and the National Theatre.

The Rep's mission is to create artistically ambitious, world-class theatre for everyone. The commissioning and production of new work lies at the core of The Rep's programme, and over the last fifteen years the company has produced more than 130 new plays.

The Rep's acclaimed learning and outreach programme is one of the largest and most diverse of any arts organisation in the country. The Rep has nurtured new talent throughout its history – from Laurence Olivier and Peter Brook to its modern-day youth theatre, and the ground-breaking Rep Foundry theatre-makers' programme, it has offered opportunity and training for thousands of early career writers, directors and artists.

2025 Rep highlights include a sold-out new production of Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* co-produced with Leeds Playhouse and Nottingham Playhouse; Sathnam Sanghera's *Marriage Material* adapted for stage by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti co-produced with Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and the world premiere of *Sherlock Holmes and the 12 Days of Christmas* written by Humphrey Ker and David Reed with original songs by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Many of The Rep's productions go on to have lives beyond Birmingham. The theatre's long-running production of *The Snowman* celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, alongside its forthcoming twenty-seventh consecutive season at London's Peacock Theatre. Since 2021, other Rep tours and transfers have included *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *Community*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Idiots Assemble: Spitting Image the Musical*, *The Way Old Friends Do*, *The Play What I Wrote*, *Animal Farm* and *East is East*.

Joe Murphy became Artistic Director of The Rep in March 2025; his inaugural season will be announced in September 2025.



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the Rep

Lyric

Further resources



For more information on our education work and to download, other education resources please visit lyric.co.uk/young-lyric/education

Take a look at some of our previous Education Resources:

