



**Resources,  
Content Warnings &  
Self Care Pack**

**Abigail's  
Party**

by Mike Leigh

**Fri 4 Apr – Sat 17 May 2025**

# Resource Pack Abigail's Party

This document has been designed to support audiences attending performances of Abigail's Party

We've created this document for those who would be comfortable with more information and to give you a little insight into the show. We hope the information and resources in this document will help audiences experiencing the show, and support planning for anyone who may be concerned about their visit.

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# Show Information

## Content Warnings

- For ages 14+
- Contains: strong language, illness, smoking, alcohol consumption, racism (including racial slurs), references to domestic violence and discrimination
- Also contains a depiction of someone having a heart attack

## Running Time

Approx 2hr 10mins,  
including a 20 minute interval

## Travel Recommendations

### Trams

If your school or college is near a tram stop you can get your students to us for just £1 each and £2 per teacher. A great way to save money on coaches and also give students the life experience of how a lot of our audiences use public transport to access our theatre. More information here:



[Fares and passes for young people | Transport for Greater Manchester \(tfgm.com\)](#)



### Coaches

For all information about coach drops offs and parking please click [here](#)

# A bit about the show

Mike Leigh's tragicomic masterpiece ABIGAIL'S PARTY has garnered cult status across the decades.

In our distinctive space, award-winning Director Natalie Abrahami draws on the unique in-the-round stage to create an intimate party that you won't want to miss.

At the height of 1970s suburbia, social class and ambition, Beverly Moss, the Hostess with the Mostess, is inviting you to her cocktail party. The latest tracks are on the record player, the drinks are flowing and there's even a bowl of olives – although it seems that only Laurence likes those. As the night moves on and the party gets thick with sexual tension, Beverly's exclusive gathering quickly descends into chaos.

See this epic modern classic at the Royal Exchange Theatre for the first time this Spring.



# Meet The Cast



**Tupele Dorgu  
as Susan**



**Graeme Hawley  
as Laurence**



**Kym Marsh  
as Beverly Moss**



**Kyle Rowe  
as Tony**



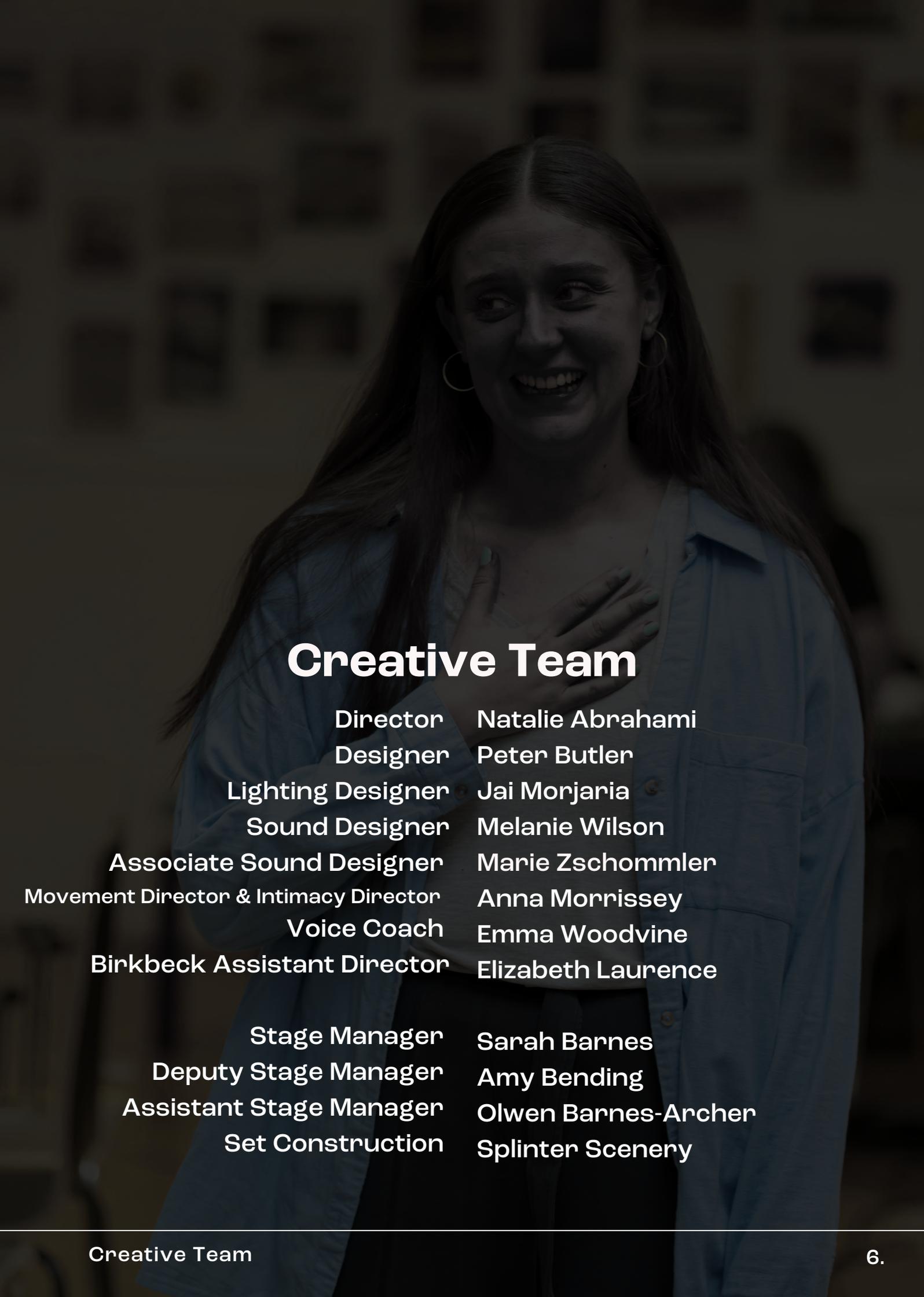
**Yasmin Taheri  
as Angela**



**Darren Jeffries  
as cover**



**Rachel Marwood  
as cover**



# Creative Team

Director	Natalie Abrahami
Designer	Peter Butler
Lighting Designer	Jai Morjaria
Sound Designer	Melanie Wilson
Associate Sound Designer	Marie Zschommler
Movement Director & Intimacy Director	Anna Morrissey
Voice Coach	Emma Woodvine
Birkbeck Assistant Director	Elizabeth Laurence
Stage Manager	Sarah Barnes
Deputy Stage Manager	Amy Bending
Assistant Stage Manager	Olwen Barnes-Archer
Set Construction	Splinter Scenery

# Director & Designer Interview

For this new production of **ABIGAIL'S PARTY**, director **Natalie Abrahami** and designer **Peter Butler** have collaborated to present a fresh take on **Mike Leigh's** acclaimed play.

**How did you come to be involved in this production?**

**Natalie Abrahami:** I've known **Selina Cartmell**, the **Royal Exchange's** Creative Director for a while, and when **Selina** was appointed, she got in contact with me about this play. I just felt so intrigued by the idea of being able to stage it in the round, and to be able to invite people into **Laurence and Beverly's** living room. It's an awkward drinks party, so being able to make the audience feel somehow implicated in that, or kind of involved, felt really, really exciting. Also, I loved the idea of setting the play in the **North West**. The idea of transposing it from the proscenium arch setting and the **Essex** location and placing it where the **Exchange** is felt like a really thrilling way to interpret it.

**Have the two of you worked together before?**

**Natalie:** No, it's a new collaboration. We did lots of research in different places, looking at what the actual cul-de-sac that **Beverly and Laurence** might have lived in would be like, and spent some time

immersing ourselves both in the naturalistic and abstract context.

**Were you very much on the same page regarding your approach?**

**Peter Butler:** Yes, it's always a case of trying to understand what the play needs in terms of the space versus what's in the text, and also what we're trying to say, laying those elements on top of each other. I suppose for me, the desire was not to be literal.

We're presenting something that is trying to skew and underscore what happens in the play, in terms of the characters' experience and the alcohol that they're consuming. We did a good amount of questioning when we were designing the play, in terms of making sure that it felt alive, creating a set that feels like it is another character in itself.

**Natalie:** We found a marriage of paring it back, to only the items used in the action while also providing a psychological undertow as well.

Peter: We landed on the thought that we couldn't be too gestural or abstract, as much as we tried, purely because of how the play is written. I hope it will be visually interesting, and audiences will be surprised by what they're greeted with when they arrive at the theatre

Unusually for a play, many people will be familiar with the TV version of ABIGAIL'S PARTY and they'll be able to picture that design, that specific set. How do you respond to that? Do you lean into it or head as far as you can in a different direction?

Peter: Well, I suppose when we were looking at the design, we could have gone down the avenue of being very typically Seventies. And that's not to say that there aren't Seventies things that are present in our design, but we were looking to strip away as much as possible to deliver what's needed from the text. It felt important to make sure that there was enough breathing space for the audience to understand what was going on in the play.

The Royal Exchange is a unique space, and with audiences on all sides I feel you can lean into what people are wearing, so that the costume can do quite a bit of the heavy lifting in terms of period. And extract more of the physical elements you might expect within a design like this.

Natalie: We were really conscious that as soon as you put that living room in the round, and you take away the walls and the wallpaper and the shelves and all the items on it, you really focus on the people, and that felt very compelling.

For you, what is the play actually about?

Natalie: I feel like the play is about really lonely people. So much of it is also about aspiration and dreams of how you might like to live your life, or what you expect of your life. There seems to be such loneliness and longing in the piece

I guess I'm curious about the idea that the characters seem to have everything, on the surface, from a materialist perspective, but it's not satisfying. I imagine these people who were brought up during rationing, and then suddenly, they're in that baby boomer generation where they can have anything they want, so they do. There is that conspicuous consumption and consumerism that really is the start of the last 50 years, until where we are now, being able to have everything instantaneously. But actually, that dopamine fix from consumerism maybe doesn't give you what you're searching for.

The power of the piece might be that the invitation is to a drinks party, but so much more happens in it than you expect. There is a lot of humour, and there's a lot of music, and it's really, really enjoyable, but also – just thinking about the title of Mike

Leigh's most recent film (HARD TRUTHS) there are some hard truths in it.

You're transposing the setting from the suburbs of Essex to Manchester – Mike Leigh territory, very roughly. Do you feel that's important? Is there more Northernness in the play than we might think?

Natalie: I think so. I mean, Mike Leigh left to go to London before the Royal Exchange existed, but I think you take who you are with you. It feels very helpful to bring the play home in some sort of way, even though it wasn't written for here.

I know from talking to Mike that the idea was that it was meant to be set in suburbia, and those suburbs were meant to not be specific. You could imagine they were from whichever suburb you were in, so that everyone would know these couples and their relationships and those dynamics.

In changing the setting to Manchester, that feels exactly what we're trying to convey as well. We're not saying specifically where it is, and hopefully the audience can

I go 'oh, well, I recognise that'. I think that is the magic of how it's been written.

Besides transposing the setting to Manchester, was there ever a temptation to take it out of the Seventies entirely, or would that not just not work?

Natalie: We really wanted to transpose it geographically, but didn't feel that we wanted to transpose it temporally. There is so much in the DNA of how it's written, that it feels like you would break it to try and shift it in that sense, it's so specific to that era.

But thematically, what I love about it is that you can look back to look forward. It was created in 1977, but so many things and the themes in it, in terms of relationships and how we treat each other, and society speak to now.

If you were to meet Beverly in real life, what would you do or say?

Natalie: Oh, I'd be so intimidated if I met Beverly. I think I'd just be in awe. I'd just want to kind of be in her aura for a bit. To sit quietly on the sofa and watch her do her thing.

Peter: Yeah, I agree. I would love to kind of look through her window, as it were, and just see what she's up to, prepping for the party.

Natalie: In the play, Angela works, but Susan and Beverly don't. And I think there is so much intelligence and so much energy in Beverly and her only outlet for it is this party.

Maureen: Ever since I played Mrs. Loman for her in DEATH OF A SALESMAN I've been like 'please, please, please ask me again!'. When this came in, I was just completely thrilled.

ESCAPED ALONE is a relatively short piece and WHAT IF IF ONLY is even shorter. We're used to thinking that significant, weighty pieces of art are long, though, aren't we? Do these plays work against that

Maureen: Absolutely. This is desiccated. It's like a sponge that you buy and it's very, very small and dry and thin, like cardboard, and when you put in water, and it goes [mimes whooshy expansion]. But it travels light, it travels small. It's so concentrated and specific. I think it's like a jewel.

Margot: It reminds me of Sam Beckett, does it you? That 'cutting back to the bone' sort of thing. And also there's no punctuation in it, really. That way, you've got to make your own space – or air, as Sarah [Frankcom] calls it - around it. You've got to inhabit it. I find I'm kind of wriggling into it, as though it's putting on this garment, this coat, to get comfy so it can come through me. At the moment, it's strange and mysterious stuff

Maureen: Caryl Churchill came to visit us [during an initial stage of rehearsals in London]. She's just

amazing. We all kind of went [mimes slack-jawed worship], of course, but she was absolutely lovely, as always.

One of the questions we asked was about the timelines in the piece. And she was very specific: 'Do not try to reconcile the times. Don't try to go 'well, this happened and then that happened, and then five minutes later that happened'. Mrs. Jarrett's not in that real time. She's actually somewhere else in that time. But don't try to make it into anything that's remotely rational. Play each moment for what each moment is, and the whole thing will hang together.'

She doesn't feel the need to go 'once upon a time, in a garden in England..'

Margot: I tell you who Caryl Churchill reminds me of, who I've been reading a lot: Arundhati Roy.

Maureen: Oh! Yes!

Margot: I've just realised as we've talked. She's got this lovely phrase [from Roy's 2003 essay collection WAR TALK] that keeps coming into my head in relation to this: 'Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.'

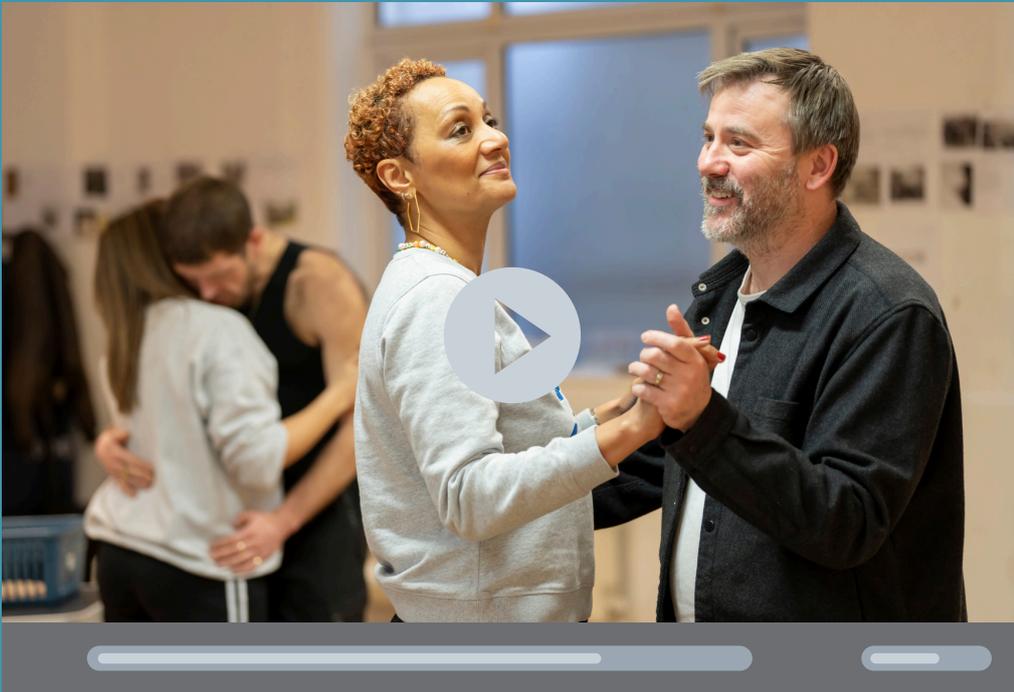
Andy Murray

# Rehearsal Snaps



All rehearsal photos by Johan Persson

# Trailer & Teaser Time



# Meet The Cast



# Chatting To Kym

Born on Merseyside in 1976, Kym Marsh hails from the same era as ABIGAIL'S PARTY, which debuted a year later. As part of a stellar career in music, theatre and television, she's now taking on the role of the formidable Beverly Moss. During rehearsals, Kym shared her thoughts on the character of Beverly and her experience of being involved in the production.

How did you come to land the role of Beverly?

Kym Marsh: Well, the first I heard was that my agent said I had an exciting opportunity to go and read for the part of Beverly in ABIGAIL'S PARTY at the Royal Exchange, which was huge for me. And I was delighted, because the Royal Exchange has always been on my bucket list. I've done a lot of theatre, and I really enjoy it, but there's something about the Royal Exchange that makes it very special. It was just a stage I wanted to be on. So I was very keen, because both the play and the theatre were very enticing.

How well did you know ABIGAIL'S PARTY before you were cast?

Kym: I mean, it's a classic, isn't it? I just love it. Actually I saw it on TV not that long ago, strangely, I found it by accident, on Amazon, and I re-watched it. I must have watched it when I was younger because I was aware of it, but I re-watched it before I even got asked to come and read for this

'As a performer, you must need to be able to get inside the head of any character you play. So how is it playing Beverly, who's quite a monster? Or maybe you don't think she is...

Kym: Yeah, I don't know. She's a curtain twitcher, that's what I think she is. She's the woman who gossips over the fence with next door. She's the one who thinks she knows everything that's going on in the street. Nothing gets past Beverly about anyone in the street, because she knows all about it, before that person even knows

She would probably like to say that she wasn't judgemental, but I do think she is. And I think she's a good wife, in that she wants to be there to look after Laurence. I get the sense that she's quite bored. She's quite lonely. She's someone who's this bored housewife who doesn't really have an awful lot going on in her life, and I think the street and everybody in it, and everyone outside of that, is definitely what keeps her going.

Have you met many Beverlys in your time?

Kym: Yeah, a couple..! We're playing Northern, which is not normal for this part – it's usually very Essex, but it's funny, because I'm able to draw on people that were in my life as a child. I'm able to pinpoint people that make me think about her. I mean, even listening to my mum on the phone with my aunties, she'll go, 'Oh yeah, yeah... well, this is it...', and you just go, 'That's Bev! That's the way she responds to things!'.

Is Beverly a character that clings? Is she a character that you find yourself taking home with you

Kym: Yes, I do. It's really hard. Some of the cast were talking before and I went [very Beverly]: 'Oh, that's fantaaastic'. Everyone's doing it: 'oh God, what's happening?'. Everyone's kind of slipping into it a little bit.

Obviously, I'm from the North, and I've got a very general Northern accent, but while I'm playing this part, I feel like I've become much more Northern. I'm really exaggerating the way I'm saying things, and that is then bleeding into real life. I spoke to my mum before, and she went 'flipping heck, you sound really Northern today!'. And I just do, you can't help it. You just kind of slip in. But that's fine, because it will all help.

Over the years, millions of people will have seen Alison Steadman's performance as Beverly in the 1977 TV version of the play. Do you have to just put that out your head?

Kym: I mean, I haven't gone back and rewatched it, because how you interpret things is very important. That's what's been great in the rehearsal room. Natalie [Abrahami, director] has been wonderful in giving us the opportunity to discuss 'what's the reasoning behind this? Why do you think Beverly is responding in this way? What do you think it is about Beverly that makes her the way she is?'. That's brilliant for us as actors.

Obviously everybody else is interpreting their characters differently as well, so the way Laurence is here may be different to the way anybody else has played it. The dynamic on stage very much comes from between the five of us, so the way you play your character also comes from the other four, I think.

As director, what is Natalie bringing to this?

Kym: Natalie's brilliant. She does encourage us very much to put our own stamp on the characters, to discuss what we believe are the right choices, and to discuss how we perceive those parts. She's very, very supportive.

I think she's got a great vision as to how she wants this to be, but at the same time, she's allowing us to have i

input and not restricting us to anything in particular. That's really great, because I think that's how you get the best out of it. She's very calm. She doesn't panic. I say that, she might be panicking, I don't know, but she doesn't show it if she is! Yeah, she's great. I'm really enjoying working with her.

In terms of the design and the costumes, that Seventies aesthetic must be great fun.

Kym: Oh, yeah, definitely. I mean, Beverly's costume is going to be a sight to behold, for sure. She's got the most amazing outfit, and, yeah, and the set is fantastic. See, I sound a bit like Bev there, don't I? 'It's fantaaastic...'. But yeah, the set is amazing!

I'll tell you what else. We have been writing down how many times that Beverly fills up everyone's glass and we worked out that Beverly has something like 14 drinks. I'm like, I'm so going to need the toilet in the interval...

You've had plenty of experience in acting on TV and stage, but this role is particularly intense, isn't it? It's a small cast, performing in the round with no hiding place. Is that a challenge?

Kym: Yes it's a challenge and yes, it does unnerve me –

a, thank you very much! I have to say, I don't think I've ever had to learn so much dialogue in my entire life. I mean, I'm having the best time. It's just great to be given such a wonderful opportunity. But yeah, it is a huge role. There's a lot of dialogue, and there's a lot of business throughout. It's not like I just deliver it in one place. Once we're on stage, we're on stage, and there's no escape really. It's probably my biggest challenge on stage to date, for sure... and yes, I'm nervous about it!

As well as acting, you've had plenty of experience in the world of music and musical theatre. Curiously, the one thing that Beverly doesn't do – she even likes a dance – is sing.

Kym: She doesn't... but maybe I might try and bring a little bit of that in, you never know. I might put my own stamp on that as well. I mean, there's certainly room for her to attempt it throughout listening to all her favourite Demis Roussos and José Feliciano songs. So yeah, who knows? Wait and see.

Finally, if you were to meet Beverly in real life, how would you react? What would you say, what would you do?

Kym [pauses, laughs]: I think I'd like her..!

Is that, because you're so immersed in the character?

now & forever  
est. 1788

Kym: I don't know! I think it's because I've delved down. I kind of go 'oh, that's why she's like that'. Maybe on the face of it, you'd be a bit like, 'oh no, she's invited us to her party, can we make an excuse?'. She is the nosy neighbour who thinks she knows everything. But I think because I have delved down and gone 'but why is she that way?', I kind of quite like her. I think her heart's in the right place a lot of the time... but yeah, she goes about everything the wrong way.

I think she is also quite a lonely individual, and all she has is the street to gossip about. You get the sense that her and Laurence don't really have an awful lot of intimacy, so she's probably feeling a bit neglected. And she wants nice things, and I think ultimately, that's probably why her and Laurence are still together. That's what they've got in common. They both want nice things. They both want a nice house.

But, yeah, I don't know. I think I'd quite like her. But then again, maybe not. If I saw her, perhaps I'd cross the road to avoid her.

Andy Murray

# The party prep is well and truly underway!



The actors talk about what their favourite line is.



What's The actors favourite party snack?

# Let's Set The Scene

Let's travel back to the 1970s and a time of cheese and pineapple on sticks, paisley prints, and Dennis Rousseau. This evening, suburban socialite Beverly and her husband Laurence are hosting a drinks party, despite Laurence arriving home late from work. They have invited their new neighbors, married couple Tony and Angela, along with their recently divorced, next door neighbor Susan, who has been banished from her home as her teenage daughter Abigail is throwing her first party. As the drinks flow, tensions rise. Beverly flirts with Tony, while Laurence sulks on the sofa. Sniping, bickering, and drunken dancing ensue, until the evening comes to a sudden close when Laurence suffers a fatal heart attack.

Originally developed through lengthy improvisations, Abigail's Party is a biting satire of British middle-class aspirations in the 1970s



# Self-Care Guide: Abigails Party

## Racism

Abigail's Party explores themes of racism including racial slurs. Here are a few organisations to help if you need support or are affected by anything in the show.

-  • [Kids of Colour](#) is an anti-racist youth work organisation, committed to racial justice for young people of colour in Greater Manchester.
-  • [Creating Anti-Racism Culture](#) has been developed by Contact in partnership with writer and artist Keisha Thompson, this programme is designed to help organisations make a proactive step-change towards a meaningful and enduring anti-racism culture.
-  • [#WeStandTogether](#) was established in the wake of the Paris attacks in 2015 and became a registered charity following the Manchester Arena attack in May 2017. The idea behind it was to highlight and tackle issues surrounding social division at all levels.

## Domestic Violence

**Abigail's Party has themes of domestic violence. Here are a few organisations to help if you need support or affected by anything in the show.**

-  • [Children and Young People's Service](#) - Offer therapeutic play, heuristic play and other groupwork for the children in our domestic abuse services at Manchester Women's Aid.
-  • [Assist-](#) are a Domestic Abuse service who work with Children and Young People in Greater Manchester age 5 to 18 years old who have experience Domestic Abuse.
-  • [End The Fear](#) - Manchester Women's Aid provides services so that domestic abuse survivors can live a life free from the fear of domestic violence and abuse

# Self Care Suggestions

If you're concerned about attending the show, there are a few things we'd suggest that might help.

## Before the show

Read the content warnings before deciding to see the show.

## Sit with a friend

The show can tackle some tough themes so maybe sit with a friend or someone you trust.

## After the performance

If you've found something in the show triggering we'd suggest talk to someone you trust or one of the organisations we've listed above. You can also talk to a member of our staff who will be able to signpost you organisations around the area.



# Get Involved

Thank you so much for reading and we hope the resources were useful. Here is what we have as part of our programme that you can get involved in.

## Partnerships

Showcasing careers, supporting learning, enhancing wellbeing & access to the North West's full-time producing theatre. We have launched a year-long partnership programme for schools and colleges across Greater Manchester. Each partnership will be bespoke to each school or college, designed with the partner, to ensure maximum impact for students needs. We will draw on our access to exciting, experienced practitioners and artists working professionally in the industry to lead on workshops and projects.

## Tours

We are excited to be launching brand new tours of our unique space, exclusive to Schools and Colleges. You will explore our wardrobe, wigs, hair and make-up departments, where you will see costumes and prosthetics. You will hear incredible facts about the rich history of not only the theatre, but also learn about the life of the building before us. You may meet some interesting characters during the tour, including our mascot Boris the bear.

## Careers and Shakespeare Workshops

This workshop will explore Shakespeare, language and drama in a fun and practical way. This is ideal for schools wanting to grow their students' confidence in speech and language, or simply looking for some. This interactive session is designed to assist in building self-confidence and unlocking creative and artistic abilities by using tools like sonnet-writing and performing and creating their own original poetic and lyrical based on Shakespearean raps. We will work on pronunciation and diction but also work on young peoples' natural instincts to play, explore and have fun. Also in our careers workshop we'll explain the different departments within theatre and tackle the 147 jobs and roles of the people who work there. Using practical exercises and tasks, students will work together to learn about the different career paths and form mini theatre companies to take on the various responsibilities of these roles.

## Young Company

Young Company is for young people who are looking for a welcoming space to be creative and connect with others, as well as those with a curiosity about theatre who want to develop skills within the North West's largest text-based producing theatre.

Contact [tom.stocks@royalexchange.co.uk](mailto:tom.stocks@royalexchange.co.uk) for any enquiries

# Coming Up!

## The Den - Tameside

Step inside the Stalybridge Civic Hall to get a taste of the events and activities which will take place over the next month, which have been chosen especially for you by the incredible Ambassadors & Champions of Tameside.



## Liberation

How does a revolution begin and who keeps it going?

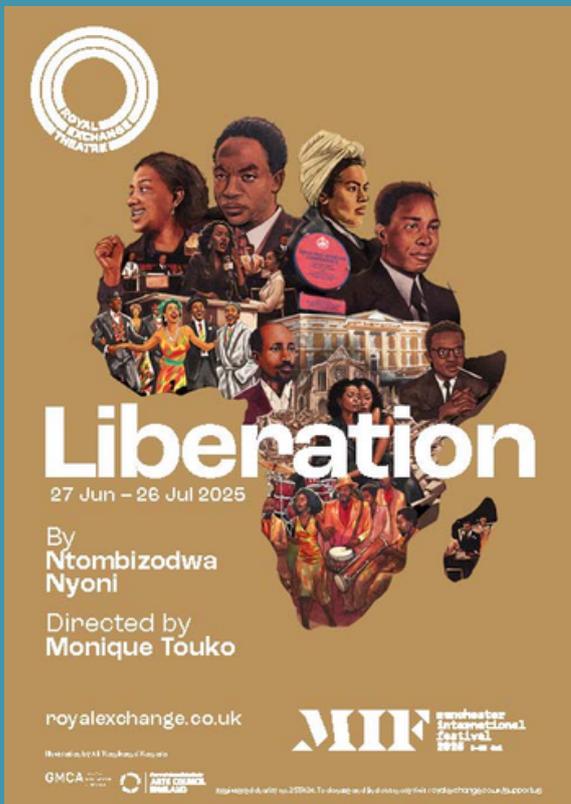
Inspired by true events in Black British history, LIBERATION is a powerful new play from writer Ntombizodwa Nyoni and director Monique Touko tracing the private lives of activists who fought to liberate Africa.

It's 15 October 1945, Manchester. Africa's freedom and future is in the hands of her descendants at the Fifth Pan-African Congress at Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall.

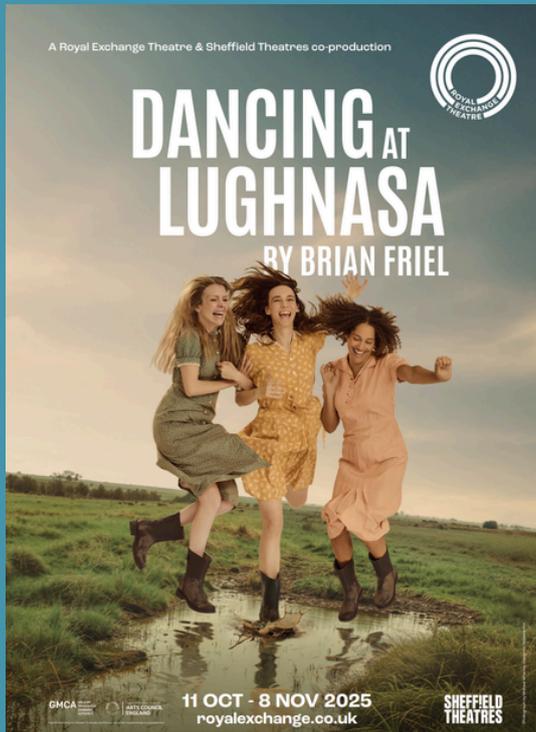
A story of hope, friendship and the consequences of a long-denied awakening unravels in the conference halls and bars of Chorlton, but at what cost?

With decades of championing change under their belts, emerging African & Caribbean activists and scholars offer new radical ideas of liberation. However, the organiser, Trinidadian activist George Padmore is unsure who to pass the baton to. Kwame Nkrumah is fuelled by an idealistic desire to become the first Black president of the Gold Coast. Young, resourceful Jamaican social worker Alma La Badie is grappling with the truth behind who must be sacrificed for the cause. And what of the revered Amy Ashwood-Garvey how does she ensure the voices of Black women are heard?

A story of hope, friendship and the consequences of a long-denied awakening unravels in the conference halls and bars of Chorlton, but at what cost?



# Dancing At Lughnasa



“I want to dance, Kate. It’s the festival of Lughnasa. I’m only thirty-five. I want to dance.”

Driven by an overwhelming desire, the five Mundy sisters dance. Together they twirl and spin, it is wild, passionate, reckless, and for the briefest of moments they abandon the restraints of life.

When influences from a wider, more modern world creep into their Donegal home, the sisters are swept along in a sea of change and suddenly the life they know, on the outskirts of Bellybeg, is gone for good. Brian Friel’s rich, multi-award-winning drama, won both the Olivier and Tony award for best play. This beautifully crafted family portrait is an exploration of memory and how the future will arrive no matter how much we resist.

# Tag us

@rxtheatre    

# Stay in touch

 visit [royalexchange.co.uk](https://royalexchange.co.uk)

 call 0161 833 9833

 email [comments@royalexchange.co.uk](mailto:comments@royalexchange.co.uk)