

# New play brings the true story of Durham's category 'D' villages to life

**A Way Home - The fight for a place to belong**

**Co-commissioned by Queen's Hall Arts Centre Hexham & Gala Theatre, Durham**

**Opening night: Tuesday 7 June, 7.30pm, Gala Theatre, Durham**

**Tour runs from Tuesday 7 to Sunday 26 June 2022**

**Written by Christina Castling**

**Direction by Jonluke McKie**

**Set Design by Alison Ashton**

**Composed by Roma Yagnik**

**Produced by CaroleW Productions**

In 1951 a third of the villages in County Durham were classified as 'D' - no longer deemed worthy of investment and expected to die quietly. Over the next 25 years local communities fought to save the hundred and twenty one villages that eighty five thousand people still called home.

This county-wide fight has been brought to life in *A Way Home* a new play by Christina Castling, which shines the light on the true stories and memories of the people who called those category 'D' villages home.

Audiences at theatres and community venues across the North East of England are being invited to pull up a chair at Bet's kitchen table and join her as this epic battle is condensed into a 12 month journey for one family. Told with humour, tenderness and not a small amount of grit, *A Way Home* explores what identity, loss and belonging really look like.

As playwright Christina Castling explains:

*"As someone who has spent the last 16 years living in County Durham I was shocked when I first came across the story of category 'D' villages and the huge impact this town planning decision had on the communities in a place I now call home.*

*"I spent four years researching and working with community members across County Durham: capturing their stories, inviting them into the rehearsal room and using their feedback to help shape the play. In January 2019 an early draft of the play was shared with an invited audience. The response was overwhelming. The play was originally due to take to the stage in June 2020 but our plans were thwarted by Covid-19. Nearly 2 years on we're really excited about bringing this emotive tale of what it's like to find yourself fighting to be heard when no one is listening, of holding on to the past and of finding a place to belong, something we feel is just as relevant now as it was 60 years ago."*

County Durham was the only area in the country to make such a town planning decision. Under category 'D' of the plan all capital development and building was to cease. Slowly these villages were to be demolished. In the end very few were and, over 60 years later, the ones left standing have their own stories to tell.

*A Way Home*, starring Jackie Phillips, Jackie Lye, Luke Maddison, Lawrence Neale, Jude Nelson and David Raynor will open at Gala Theatre, Durham on Tuesday 7 June at 7.30pm before touring the North East stopping off at The Witham in Barnard Castle, Arts Centre Washington, Ushaw Historic House, Chapels & Gardens in Durham, Alnwick Playhouse, Queen's Hall Arts Centre in Hexham and Live Theatre in Newcastle upon Tyne as well as at ten community venues across County Durham.

Christina added:

*"Involving local communities in the process of creating the play was key to ensure that it would be as authentic, meaningful and accurate as possible. Without their generosity A Way Home would be a very different play."*

*"We're thrilled to eventually be able to share the end result with audiences at Theatres across the North East this June but also, importantly, that we will be returning to the communities that this story belongs to."*

*A Way Home* was co-commissioned by Queen's Hall Arts Centre Hexham and Gala Theatre, Durham and has been made possible with support with public funding from Arts Council England as well as funding from Newcastle University Institute for Creative Arts Practice, Sunday for Sammy, Catherine Cookson Trust and Northern Bridge Consortium. For more information about *A Way Home* and for details on how to buy tickets visit [www.a-way-home.co.uk](http://www.a-way-home.co.uk)

### **Notes to Editors:**

### **Listings**

**A Way Home** (approx. 100 words)

**The fight for a place to belong**

**by Christina Castling**

1951. A third of County Durham's villages are classed as 'D', no longer worthy of investment. Expected to die quietly they refuse to go without a fight.

Rooted in the true stories and memories of those who called those D villages home, a county-wide fight lasting over 25 years becomes a 12-month journey at Bet's kitchen table as her family grapple with identity, loss and belonging. With humour, tenderness and not a small amount of grit, the play speaks of fighting to be heard when no one's listening and of finding a place to belong.

**A Way Home** (approx. 50 words)

**The fight for a place to belong**

**By Christina Castling**

1951. A third of County Durham's villages are classified as 'D', expected to die quietly. A county-wide fight lasting over 25 years becomes a 12-month journey at Bet's kitchen table as her family grapple with identity, loss and belonging in this tender drama.

**Audience Feedback from a reading of the play in January 2019:**

*"I thoroughly enjoyed the play reading - even though I sobbed my heart out... I loved the humour and the very truthful characters and the reality of the piece, very evocative."* (Shelley O'Brien, Mad Alice Theatre Company)

*"We thoroughly enjoyed the reading it was such a powerful and emotional subject that we were transported to a different time."* (Pam Hymas, Community Member)

**A Way Home Tour Dates:**

- Tuesday 7 June, 7.30pm, Gala, Durham
- Wednesday 8 June, 7.30pm, The Witham
- Thursday 9 June, 7.30pm, Arts Centre Washington
- Friday 10 June, 7pm, Clara Vale Village Hall
- Saturday 11 June, 2pm & 7pm, Ushaw Historic House, Chapels & Gardens
- Monday 13 June, 7pm, St Mark's Church, Eldon
- Tuesday 14 June, 2.30pm & 7.30pm, Alnwick Playhouse
- Wednesday 15 June 7pm, Trimdon Grange Community Centre
- Thursday 16 June, 7.30pm, Binchester Community Centre
- Friday 17 June, 7pm, Hamsteels Community Centre
- Saturday 18 June, 3pm, St John's Hall Meadowfield
- Monday 20 June, 7pm, Toft Hill Community Centre
- Tuesday 21 June, 7pm, Hamsterley & Low Westwood Community Centre
- Wednesday 22 June, 7.30pm, Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham
- Thursday 23 June, 2.30pm & 7.30pm, Live Theatre, Newcastle Upon Tyne
- Friday 24 June, 7.30pm, Live Theatre, Newcastle
- Saturday 25 June, 7pm, Coundon & Leaholme Community Centre
- Sunday 26 June, 7pm, Witton Park Village Hall

**The Creative Team:**

**About Christina Castling**

As a writer, Christina's work has won Trinity College London's International Playwriting

Competition, been performed as far afield as New Zealand and been toured by Northumberland Theatre Company. Her writing has depth and playful honesty, often asking questions about belonging, identity and home. Christina is also the founder and company director of Off The Page Drama.

### **About Jonluke McKie**

Jonluke McKie is a director and theatre maker based in the North East of England, and a recent graduate of the National Theatre's Step Change Programme. Directing credits include Into Thin Air, co-created with Alison Davies and Precious Cargo Theatre, The Last Drop, and When She Went, by Beth Coverdale and One Small Case, by Paddy Campbell for Holocaust Memorial Day, with Curious Monkey Theatre.

As a theatre maker, Jonluke recently performed his first solo show, The Devil Danced in Our Eyes, co-written by Jonluke and Allison Davies. Jonluke also works as a freelance drama facilitator, specialising in work with children and young people, collaborating with various organisations including Live Theatre, Seven Stories, St Oswald's Children's Hospice and Northern Stage.

### **About Alison Ashton**

Alison gained a 1st class degree in theatre design and has since designed a wide range of productions for numerous theatre companies throughout the country. After learning her trade at the Birmingham Rep, RSC, Young Vic and Half Moon, London she was Associate Designer at the Royal Theatre Northampton before moving to Newcastle upon Tyne.

Since living in the North East Alison has designed several productions for Open Clasp Theatre Company and Theatre sans Frontiers and in 2019 designed A Viking Christmas for the Queens Hall, Hexham. Alison designed The Savage, Harriet Martineau Dreams of Dancing and My Romantic History all for Live Theatre in Newcastle upon Tyne as well as When the Boat Comes in at the Customs House in South Shields.

### **About Roma Yagnik**

Roma Yagnik is an award-winning UK based film composer working on films, ads, television and theatre productions. Clients included BBC, Sky, EMI, Universal Music, Tottenham Hotspur and Tate Britain as well as some of the brightest independent film talent around.

Roma loves scoring to picture for feature and short films and her music is regularly placed on all terrestrial UK channels, BBC channels as well as Sky, Discovery Channel, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, and National Geographic. Roma is currently a BAFTA Crew participant.

### **About CaroleW Productions**

CaroleW Productions philosophy is to provide people with 'a good night out' at festivals, in theatres and in life! They programme short pieces of work of exceptionally high quality across genres and across venues, by companies whose work they love and enjoy themselves. The artists they work with offer workshop packages to other artists, schools and colleges.

CaroleW Productions lead audiences to a seam of treasures, encourage them to try something different. As co-founder of Prague Fringe Festival, with contacts at festivals around the world, founder Carole Wears has a good eye for quality! CaroleW Productions also offer production and event support and work in partnership with other producers.

### **The Cast (alphabetical order):**

#### **Jackie Lye**

Jackie made her professional debut with Live Theatre in the original production of C.P.Taylor's 'And a Nightingale Sang'. She then trained at The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama and has worked extensively in theatre and TV ever since. Favourite roles include Grusha in Caucasian Chalk Circle (Oxford Stage Co), Michelle in Strippers (tour and West End) and Mam in Cooking with Elvis (Hull Truck Theatre and tour). More recent theatre includes 'Wet House' by Paddy Campbell at Live Theatre and Soho Theatre, and 'Leaving', also by Paddy, at Northern Stage and a National tour.

Television credits include The Bill, Doctors, London's Burning, Harry's Mad, Casualty and most recently, Vera and Emmerdale and a CBBC series Danny and Mick- but she is still best remembered for playing Sandra in the popular BBC sitcom Brush Strokes.

She is currently enjoying annoying listeners as Joy Horville in Radio 4's The Archers!

### **Luke Maddison**

From the North East of England Luke began his career at the Customs House in South Shields at the age of 18 before going on to gain many roles in stage and screen as well as radio and Opera across the UK. He made his first television appearance in an episode of Inspector George Gently (BBC) working alongside Jim Moir and Martin Shaw. In 2018 Luke played the role of Boots in the Northern stage in house production of The War of the Worlds which rose to critical acclaim and was nominated for Performance of the Year at last years Journal Culture Awards.

Most recently Luke was very proud to be a part of the world premier stage adaptation of When the Boat Comes In - The Hungry Years playing the role of Sydney Poskett at the Customs House.

### **Lawrence Neale**

A graduate of Performance at Northumbria University, Lawrence has many years experience as an actor, musician and street performer, singing with his Barbershop Quartet Tyne Signature and performing with World Beaters Music and their internationally acclaimed show Spark!. He is also a founding member of puppet theatre company Life and Limb Puppets, specialising in applied puppetry in education. Lately, Lawrence has discovered an outlet for his passion for historical arms and armour, curating a theatrical armoury for Theatre Space North East in Sunderland.

His theatre and television credits include: The Pitmen Painters (BKL); Heaven Eyes (TSF); Beyond the End of the Road (November Club); A Christmas Carol (Life and Limb Puppets and TSNE); Vera (ITV); Inspector George Gently and The Dumping Ground (BBC).

### **Jude Nelson**

Jude is an actor, singer and facilitator from County Durham. Jude trained with The National Youth Theatre in 2016 and Project A, an actor training program at Newcastle Theatre Royal in 2017. Her credits include Remarkable Robin's Extraordinary Christmas Adventure (Queen's Hall, Hexham), Isolation (The Customs House/Alphabetti Theatre), Rocket Girl (Alphabetti Theatre/The Worriers), Sheltered (10 minutes to... at Live Theatre), Christmas with the Hobs audioplay (Queen's Hall, Hexham/CaroleW Productions). She has also been involved in rehearsed readings at Northern Stage and Newcastle Theatre Royal.

### **Jacqueline Phillips**

Jacqueline grew up in Peterlee in County Durham and became a member of the National Youth Theatre when she was 14 years old. She studied Psychology at Goldsmith's university in London and went on to train at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

Theatre credits include: Food and Feuds (November Club); Floorboards (Alphabetti Theatre, Newcastle); Shakespeare's Globe International Summer Tour 2018 with Twelfth Night, Merchant of Venice and Taming of the Shrew; Butterfly - one woman show national tour (Little Cog and Arc, Stockton) The Man and his Donkey, Green Beans (Customs House, South Shields); After Darwin (Vivid Theatre Co.); First Draft (Live Theatre, Newcastle); Double Act (York Theatre Royal); Light in Westgate Street, Peer Gynt, Aristophanes' The Birds, Young Ibsen (ThreeOverEden); Macbeth, Richard III (Third Party National and European Tour); They Shoot Horses Don't They, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast (Northern Stage); An Ideal Husband, Candida, Dangerous Corner, How the Other Half Loves, Slicing Edge (Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich); Kafka's Dick (Harrogate theatre); Oleanna, Strippers (Palace Theatre, Westcliff-on-Sea).

Film credits includes: Verity's Summer, The Gathering, Bridget Jones' Diary, The Man Who Knew Too Little. Television credits includes: Inspector George Gently, Vera, The Dumping Ground, Joe Maddison's War, Emmerdale, Byker Grove, The Night Detective, Casualty, Picking up the Pieces, Sharman. Radio credits include: Home Front, Fearless.

**David Raynor**

David recently returned to acting after several years teaching, writing, directing and recently graduating from the MA Creative Writing course at Newcastle University (which he passed with distinction). His most recent performances have been in Pod by Arabella Arnott at Alphabetti Theatre, directed by Matt Jamie for Coracle Theatre Company and Live Theatre's 5 Plays of Christmas in Those Yet to Come by Ellen McNally, directed by Becky Morris. Over the years David has worked for many companies such as Live Theatre, Bolton Octagon, BBC and the RSC. As a playwright David was named best newcomer 2018 by British Theatre Guide for his play Trolley Boy.

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