

31 March 2020

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## Oldham Coliseum goes online

Oldham Coliseum Theatre is taking its artistic and engagement activity online amidst the Coronavirus crisis, bringing the theatre and its creative opportunities into people's homes.

Since its closure to help slow the spread of the virus on Monday 16 March, and the subsequent lockdown announced by the Government on 23 March, the theatre has launched a new **Mini-Podcast Series** for audiences and is preparing to launch a **Monologue Challenge** for students of its partner schools and colleges.

The first episode of the theatre's Mini-Podcast Series **100 Word Plays (about Oldham)** was released on World Theatre Day (Friday 27 March) and is available to listen to on the Coliseum's website and Soundcloud.

In 2019 the Coliseum invited writers of all ages and levels of experience to submit short plays inspired by Oldham and consisting of 100 words or less. Throughout September the submitted plays were displayed around the theatre in crafty forms and creative places for audiences to discover and enjoy. The Mini-Podcast episode **100 Word Plays (about Oldham)** features 17 of the submitted 100 word plays, written by well-known writers including **Julie Hesmondhalgh** (*Coronation Street*, *Broadchurch* and currently appearing in *The Trouble with Maggie Cole* alongside Dawn French), writers of previous Coliseum hits: **Ian Kershaw** (*Bread & Roses*, *The Mist in the Mirror* and *Star-Cross'd*) and **Lindsey Williams** (*Meat Pie*, *Sausage Roll* and *Dreamers*) and local emerging writers.

The **100 Word Plays (about Oldham)** were recorded remotely by a cast of Greater Manchester actors including: **John Askew** (Netflix's *The English Game*), **Natalie Gavin** (also Netflix's *The English Game*, plus Alma Capstick in ITV's *Jericho*), star of last year's pantomime *Jack and the Beanstalk* **Sam Glen** (also the Coliseum's productions of *The Kitchen Sink* and *Star-Cross'd* and BBC's *Let it Shine* with Gary Barlow), **Darren Jeffries**, **Jack Radcliffe** and Coliseum Associate and Supported Artists: **Hafsah Aneela Bashir**, RedBobble Arts (**Kelly Munro-Fawcett**, **Louisa May Parker** and **Martha Simon**), Fine Comb Theatre (**Rachel McMurray** and **Catherine Morefield**) and **Sorcha McCaffrey**.

**Coliseum Artistic Director Chris Lawson commented:** *"Using great art to enrich people's lives is why the Coliseum exists as a theatre, so it's vital that we continue to serve our audiences and communities whilst our building is closed. It was always our intention to record some of the 100 Word Plays as part of a podcast, but the situation we currently find ourselves in has meant that we can use these wonderful short plays to not only bring art that celebrates our town into people's homes, but to also provide opportunities for twelve brilliant actors from our region. We have plans in place for the next Mini-Podcast episodes, so keep an eye on our Social Media channels for the next instalment. We're also making plans with other organisations in Oldham, the North West and nationally, more details of which will be announced soon."*

The **'Off Out' Monologue Challenge** is being launched by the theatre's Learning and Engagement team to help keep creative spirits alive during the lockdown. The Coliseum regularly works with over 15 local schools and colleges from across Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside. Taking inspiration from lockdown, students from the Coliseum's partner schools and colleges are invited to write monologues about a character's once-daily trip out of the house for exercise or essential shopping, focusing on characterisation, creativity and how our relationship to the 'outside' has changed.

**Chris continued:** *"The Coliseum works with over 500 students from local schools and colleges, using drama as a tool for learning as well as teaching theatre practice. Like most forms of education, the methods in which we're delivering our service has changed, but we're quickly putting new plans into action to continue engaging with these students. Importantly, there are many people aged over 70 that have a long-standing relationship with the theatre, and we're making sure we keep in touch with them to help prevent loneliness".*

Oldham Coliseum Theatre's building on Fairbottom Street in Oldham town centre is temporarily closed to help slow the spread of Coronavirus. The theatre closed to the public with immediate effect on Monday 16 March, following UK Government advice that people should avoid public buildings including theatres. The Coliseum's teams are working remotely from home during lockdown to create art and opportunities which can be shared online so that audiences and participants can access them from home. Coliseum staff are making regular phone calls with the theatre's most vulnerable older participants in place of the theatre's regular social activities.

The theatre's team is also working to reschedule events which have unavoidably been cancelled due to the Coronavirus crisis. All ticket holders are being contacted in event-chronological order via email and the theatre thanks audiences for their patience as its small but dedicated team is working as quickly as possible.

Oldham Coliseum Theatre has only closed once before in its 135-year history. If you are able and would like to support the Coliseum at this difficult time the theatre asks that audiences consider donating all or part of their ticket costs for cancelled events, or donating online at [coliseum.org.uk/your-coliseum-needs-you](http://coliseum.org.uk/your-coliseum-needs-you) . Oldham Coliseum Theatre is a Registered Charity (no. 508829)

The Coliseum's first Mini-Podcast Series episode **100 Word Plays (about Oldham)** is available to listen to at [coliseum.org.uk/minipodcast-e01](http://coliseum.org.uk/minipodcast-e01) or on Soundcloud at [soundcloud.com/oldhamcoliseum/minipodcast-e01](https://soundcloud.com/oldhamcoliseum/minipodcast-e01)

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#### **Notes to Editor:**

For further press information, please contact Shelly Ramsdale via email at [shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk](mailto:shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk) (please note I am currently working from home)

**Oldham Coliseum Theatre** is a cultural and educational charity that works with over 150,000 individuals per year.

The Coliseum has a rich history in Greater Manchester dating back to 1885. It provides a wide variety of distinctive theatre performances and participatory activities for people from all communities in Oldham, Greater Manchester and beyond. It creates original productions each year which are presented at the Coliseum and on tour. Intrinsic to the town's on-going regeneration, the theatre works with its local communities and young people to develop creative programmes to facilitate learning, engagement and community cohesion.

[www.coliseum.org.uk](http://www.coliseum.org.uk)

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