

23 October 2020

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## Socially Distanced Season on sale at Oldham Coliseum

Oldham Coliseum Theatre is reopening to socially distanced audiences from November with a programme of Covid-Secure events including hard-hitting drama, virtual reality theatre, household names and a new, socially distanced promenade festive offer.

**Artistic Director Chris Lawson said:** *“Despite all the many difficulties of this year, we’re really excited to be opening our doors to audiences once again and proud to present this micro-season of innovative, inspiring and relevant events, with something to suit everyone. We know that our audiences have been missing their theatre and we have been working for many months on our thorough Covid-Secure measures and procedures to ensure that the Coliseum is a safe space to welcome them back.”*

Oldham’s historic theatre is still able to open under Greater Manchester’s current Tier 3 restrictions and will welcome audiences for the first time since March on Thursday 12 November for a sold-out performance of Dare to Know Theatre’s ***Drowning***. The Oldham-based company’s debut play had originally been scheduled for the Coliseum’s 50-capacity Studio space and will now be presented socially-distanced in the theatre’s 525-capacity Main Auditorium.

A second debut play follows on Saturday 5 December with ***My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored*** written by Coliseum Supported Artist Nana-Kofi Kufuor and directed by Dermot Daly. Presented by Red Ladder in association with Oldham Coliseum Theatre, ***My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored*** interrogates Black identity and poses a big question: if you see something you don’t agree with, do you intervene?

15 year-old Reece is roughly accosted by the police outside M&S. His young, Black teacher Gillian witnesses it all - but she doesn’t question or intervene. The consequences of her lack of action erupt the following day when Gillian finds herself locked in a classroom with Reece, who wants her to feel the irreversible breakdown of trust he felt the night before.

On Monday 21 December the Coliseum presents ***Julie Likes To Draw Squirrels***, the tale of a Lancashire childhood and adolescence written and performed by Julie Hesmondhalgh and directed by Sameena Hussain.

***Julie Likes to Draw Squirrels*** is a fundraiser for Oldham Coliseum Theatre and The Edge Chorlton and will tour to both venues.

**Julie said:** “I wanted to do something to support some of the theatres I love best in the North West and thought that this little show - about growing up in our part of the world - might be something that audiences might like: a bit of a diversion from the madness of the world during the festive season. It's a very personal show about my childhood and family, about the importance of words and nature, about the healing power of daftness. And, of course, about what it felt like to finally get a part in the world's longest running soap after years of being asked "So. When will we see you on Corrie?!"

Julie Hesmondhalgh rose to fame as Hayley Cropper in *Coronation Street*, going on to star in television shows including *Happy Valley*, *Broadchurch* and *The A Word*. Her stage career includes ground-breaking and award-winning roles including most recently: *The Greatest Play in the History of the World* at Trafalgar Studios London, *There Are No Beginnings* at Leeds Playhouse and *Mother Courage and Her Children* at Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester.

She is a patron and supporter of multiple charities and social causes including: The Sophie Lancaster Foundation, Trans Media Watch and City of Trees; the founder of 500 Acts of Kindness and co-founder of Take Back Theatre, a collective dedicated to making script in hand rapid responses to social and political events

From Friday 11 December – Saturday 2 January Oldham Coliseum and Front Room Productions present a magical, socially distanced promenade production of ***A Christmas Carol*** for all the family.

In this thrilling re-telling of the famous Christmas classic, you will - quite literally - join Scrooge on his path to redemption. Prepare to embark on an enchanting journey through the unseen nooks and crannies of the Coliseum and immerse yourself in a festive Dickensian wonderland. Featuring joyful live music and your favourite Christmas carols, this heart-warming production has social distancing carefully integrated into the performance and promises to leave you with a smile on your face, full of festive cheer.

Previously announced, Manchester's award-winning ThickSkin bring innovative Virtual Reality theatre ***Petrichor*** to the Coliseum on Friday 20 & Saturday 21 November. The production will be viewed on VR headsets which will be made medical-grade safe before each use.

***Petrichor*** is a story set in a parallel universe, exploring escape and connection; featuring two performers, an original soundtrack and projected animation. Step into a new world. A world where every single day is exactly the same and every moment is muted, managed and monochrome. Nothing bad ever happens, but nothing good does either. A chance meeting brings two unlikely individuals together and offers a small glimpse of what life could be.

Oldham Coliseum Theatre will look a little different when audiences return, with the theatre's Covid-Secure measures in place. Measures include: advanced bookings only, face masks mandatory (with the exception of those unable to wear a face covering due to a mental, physical or hidden disability, the theatre supports the Sunflower Lanyard Scheme), hand sanitising stations, Social Distancing, reduced capacities, additional

regular cleaning, timed entries for audiences, contactless tickets, one in – one out toilets and the option to pre-order refreshments.

The Coliseum is also producing a bespoke Covid-Secure festive offer for schools to help keep some of the theatre's iconic pantomime magic alive for Oldham's young people despite the unavoidable cancellation of this year's production due to the coronavirus crisis. Each year 17,000 children come to see the Coliseum pantomime with their school; for 2020 two of the Coliseum's pantomime stars – Dame Dotty Trott (Richard J Fletcher) and Cinderella (Shorelle Hepkin) will be heading out into local schools for **Panto Storytelling**, telling the stories of *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Cinderella* as they've never been heard before.

Oldham Coliseum closed its doors to the public with immediate effect following the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday 16 March, less than two hours before the scheduled performance of *The Last Quiz Night on Earth* at Oldham's Bank Top Tavern, and a week before the start of the UK national lockdown. Since its closure the theatre's teams have been working remotely to create and share great art and opportunities to be creative, and making regular phone calls to participants at risk of experiencing loneliness due to lockdown. The theatre's work in lockdown includes: the Coliseum's Mini-Podcast series, the Poetry Health Service – a Homemakers commission in partnership with HOME, Manchester, the streaming of last year's hit musical *The Hired Man* and Coliseum Creates – a resource pack of fun activities for families and children of all ages.

Oldham Coliseum Theatre has only closed once before in its 135-year history. The theatre is currently running a Crowdfunder **#GetBehindUs** to raise money to secure its future and keep the magic of theatre alive in Oldham for generations to come. Donations can be made online at [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/get-behind-us](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/get-behind-us)

- Ends -----

#### 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)

#### Socially distanced events at Oldham Coliseum Theatre:

<b><i>Drowning</i></b> Dare to Know Theatre	-- <b>SOLD OUT</b> -- Thursday 12 November
<b><i>Petrichor</i></b> Virtual Reality theatre from ThickSkin	Friday 20 & Saturday 21 November
<b><i>My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored</i></b>	Saturday 5 December

A Red Ladder production in association with Oldham Coliseum Theatre	
<b><i>A Christmas Carol</i></b> Oldham Coliseum Theatre and Front Room Productions	Friday 11 December – Saturday 2 January
<b><i>Julie Likes to Draw Squirrels</i></b> with Julie Hesmondhalgh	Monday 21 December

Images are available to download from Dropbox via:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3lt4y0fvbjezeky/AADDAEQlaOgR0745nqXD\\_ZuMa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3lt4y0fvbjezeky/AADDAEQlaOgR0745nqXD_ZuMa?dl=0)

### **Oldham Coliseum Theatre**

The Coliseum 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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