OPERA UP**CLOSE**

INTIMATE IN SCALE. MIGHTY IN IMPACT.

Vaughan Williams' and JM Synge's

With a new dramatic prologue and chamber orchestration by Michael Betteridge

Programme





Welcome...

to *Riders to the Sea,* the first in our Reinventions series; three one-act 'classics' taken through the looking glass and reframed for the modern world.

Simultaneously a revival and a world premiere, the music and drama of Vaughan Williams' and JM Synge's emotive miniature is here distilled and expanded in a new chamber orchestration, alongside Michael Betteridge's and Antosh Wocjik's extraordinary prologue *The Last Bit of the Moon*, birthed from a genuinely collaborative process with partners ArtfulScribe and The Sunday Boys.

The creative journey has been both humbling and illuminating, with the new work casting a profoundly different light on the source material, reframing the narrative as a journey of memory through the specific eyes of a seemingly minor character, Bartley.

Ostensibly a very specific story of a small place in a particular time, *Riders to the Sea* holds within it huge universal themes of love, grief, home and duty that resonate somewhere with every generation. This project embodies our commitment to new writing and co-creation, with extraordinary poetic talent found right on our doorstop and community voices from locations across the UK being central to the narrative and sound world of the production.

Also this year, our jukebox opera *OperaCocktail* will tour the UK - catch this wonderfully accessible jaunt through some stunning pieces of music at arts centres and festivals this summer. And we continue to make work with and for the very young with *Flotsam,* a new opera for 2-5 years olds based on David Wiesner's stunning picture book, taking shape through co-creative holistic workshops in schools on the Isle of Wight.

Next year, the Reinventions Series continues with its production and development. *Gianni Schicchi,* playfully re-titled *Where There's A Will,* will see Hannah Kumari and Vahan Salorian's subversive new interpretation bring Puccini's enduringly popular comic gem roaring into the 21st Century, and, in a first partnership with the peerless Riot Ensemble, Strauss' disturbing masterpiece *Salome* will be reimagined to fully immerse us all in the hedonistic, warped world of both music and narrative.

We are so grateful to everyone who is enabling our work; to the Reinventions Donor Circle, our friends and patrons, Arts Council England, and several generous trusts and foundations; to the exceptional artists whose talent and dedication never cease to amaze; and, of course, to you our audience, without whom nothing would be possible.

Classics are considered such for a reason, there is something in them that has spoken to generation upon generation; but they are not relics to be venerated, they are jewels ripe to be refurbished and reset. Our programme of work is founded in the profound belief that opera is a passionate, visceral and physical experience for performers and audiences alike, able to articulate and confront the human experience with powerful immediacy.

Step into the story and be transported.

H

Flora McIntosh Director



Part 1 - The Last Bit of the Moon

A place at night.

A man, Bartley, is imprisoned by guilt and grief over the drowning of his brother Michael when they were young. He is trying to write, haunted by voices and shadows of the past.

As the Shadows become increasingly malign, Bartley experiences the pain of chaotic memories that are neither shaped nor fixed. The Moon offers him a chance to look at life directly, to return to the memory of his family, and find order and truth in the chaos of his grief.

Part 2 - Riders to the Sea

A kitchen.

Bartley is reconstructing his memories.

Nora and Cathleen, his sisters, have a parcel of clothes which may belong to their brother Michael; he is presumed to have drowned though his body has never been found. They hide it from their mother Maurya who has been in a deep depression since his death. She barely leaves the house and obsesses over stories of drowned children.

Mauyra tries to prevent Bartley from going away but he is desperate to leave, saying he will return though not exactly when. Cathleen supports him. Mauyra is convinced leaving means death.

Cathleen and Nora try to comfort their mother by sending her after Bartley with food for his trip. They look again at the parcel and see the clothes are indeed Michael's and can no longer deny his death.

Mauyra returns. Speaking in folktales and of events she can't possibly have seen, she is fixing them back to the day Michael was lost.

Bartley finally acknowledges what happened on that day. They are all released by this 'confession'. Understanding and acknowledging his mother's and sisters' love, Bartley lays the memory out with clarity, accepting and owning his story. He has made it to the morning. He is not lost, he can live.

The last bit of the moon gives way to daybreak.

Running time 65 minutes with no interval

The show is captioned throughout as part of the production design

Links

If any of the issues of trauma and grief in *Riders to* the Sea affect you, you can find support from the following organisations (click on titles to open):

Cruse Bereavement Support

PTSD UK

Dive Deeper into Riders to the Sea

If you are interested in learning more, check out some of the articles below! Just click on the titles to open them.

To read JM Synge's play and the text for The Last Bit of the Moon

Michael Betteridge - 15 facts

Dive into the Key Themes

Q&A with Director Flora McIntosh

Q&A with Composer Michael Betteridge



RIDERS TO THE SEA

Music Ralph Vaughan Williams and Michael Betteridge

Words JM Synge and ArtfulScribe's Community Sirens Collective led by Antosh Wojcik

Bartley Neil Balfour

Nora Susie Buckle

Moon Tom Lilburn

Cathleen Julia Mariko

Oboe/Memory Bryony Middleton

Accordion and Ensemble Lead/Memory Ilona Suoamalainen

Clarinet/Memory Emily Wilson

Maurya Lauren Young

The Shadows The Sunday Boys, Hull Freedom Chorus, Bournemouth Male Voice Choir and singers from Hull and Southampton

Voices of the Children KS2 pupils from St Monica's Primary, St Partick's Catholic School, and Weston Shore Primary

Cover Nora/Cathleen Valerie Wong

Director Flora McIntosh

Design/Lighting/Projection Cheng Keng

Musical Supervisor Robin Wallington

Costume Designer and Supervisor Robin Simon (Early Career Associate)

Caption Design Virginie Taylor

Sound Matthew Fairclough

Video Content/Film Maker Aaron West

Assistant Director Bobbie-Jean Henning (Early Career Associate)

Consultant Dramaturg Joe Austin

Production Manager Chloe Stally-Gibson

Stage Manager Ian Murphy

Video & Lighting Technician Austin Yang

Sound Technician Eliot Allison

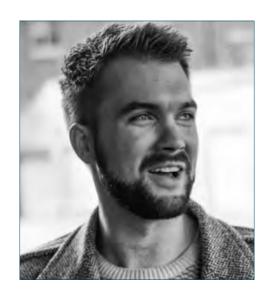
Biographies



Joe AustinConsultant Dramaturg

As Director: *Acis and Galatea, Blond Eckbert* (Potsdammer Winteroper); *Katya Kabanova* (Teatro dell'Opera di Roma); *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Nevill Holt Opera) *Siegfried, St Nicolas* (Opera North); *A Christmas Carol* (Old Vic

Theatre); Salome (Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra); Theodora (Northern Aldborough Festival); Vivienne (Linbury Studio, ROH); La Calisto (Hampstead Garden Opera); Albert Herring (Surrey Opera); The Cunning Little Vixen, Háry János, Orlando (Ryedale Festival); The Prodigal Son (Grimeborn Festival).



Michael Betteridge New Music

Described as 'bold', 'colourful' (*The Times*), and 'inventive' (*Financial Times*) British-Canadian composer and conductor Michael Betteridge has an eclectic output in which his music draws on the stories of people and places, past and present, animating

everything from concert halls and opera stages to slate mines and market squares!

His work has been performed by the likes of BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, violinist Nicola Benedetti, Opera North Youth Chorus, Psappha, and Streetwise Opera. He was a Royal Philharmonic Society Composer Programme receipient in the 2022-23 season and composed for RLPO's Ensemble 10:10. His work has been nominated for two Royal Philharmonic Society Awards in the Impact category and his 2018 Anglo-Icelandic interactive Twitter opera #echochamber was nominated for an Icelandic Music Award. He is also Artistic Director of The Sunday Boys – Manchester's low voiced and open access LGBTQ+ choir. He was made an Associate of the Royal Northern College of Music in 2023.



Neil BalfourBartley

Indian-Scottish Neil Balfour is an awardwinning British Baritone and Voiceover Artist. He started musical life as a pianist, punkrocker and conductor, before falling in love with allthings-voice to tell stories. A former Britten-

Pears, Samling, Momentum and Concordia artist, he is the first opera singer to be booked by the Glastonbury Festival in the Astrolabe Tent and the first to beatbox in an opera at Longborough Festival Opera.



Susie Buckle Nora

Susie's work as a singer traverses many genres, from opera to musical theatre. They have sung roles with companies including Opera North, Opera Holland Park, Charles Court Opera, Vache Baroque, Mahogany

Opera Group and British Youth Opera. Susie looks forward to joining If Opera as Cupid in Orpheus in the Underworld, later this season.

Susie has a keen interest in new writing and has enjoyed working on projects with Second Movement, Ignite Music and Co Align (in association with ENO). Outside of music, Susie is a fan of contemporary art and enjoys visiting London's galleries.



Matthew Fairclough Sound

Matthew Fairclough is a composer and sound designer based in the Northwest of England. He is Professor of Music at The University of Liverpool where he is the director of the Music and Technology degree programme. As a

sound designer, Matthew has enjoyed collaborations with a diverse range of composers and instrumentalists. For many years, he has performed regularly with the pianist Joanna MacGregor, the percussionist Joby Burgess and more recently in many compositions of Laura Bowler. As a composer, Matthew specialises in music for acoustic instruments with live-electronics and multimedia. His compositions have been performed by Powerplant, Smith Quartet, Ensemble 10/10, Berg Orchestra, and the Ural Philharmonic Orchestra.



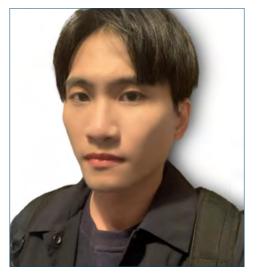
Bobbie-Jean HenningAssistant Director (Early Career Associate)

Bobbie-Jean Henning is a creative who works across stage and screen. Most recently she was associate director on the UK tour of *Carmen Reimagined.* She's directed shows for Edinburgh, Adelaide and Sydney Fringe Festival, and was the 2022 recipient of

WAAPA's Professional Mentorship for Directing. She also directed the short film, You, Me & Him which has been shown at film festivals internationally.

As a writer, her solo shows have toured nationally, her online comedy series *The Power of The Dream* was nominated for an AWGIE and she was a recipient of *ABC's Fresh Start Fund.*

Bobbie-Jean is particularly passionate about new work that speaks to our current social landscape and provides a sense of hope.

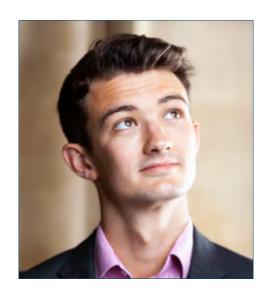


Cheng KengDesign/Lighting/Projection

Cheng Keng is a scenographer, lighting and video designer based in London. He trained at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, completing an MFA in Scenography.

Theatre credits include: The Light Princess (The ARC); Going for Gold (Park Theatre); The Lonesome Death of Eng Bunker (Omnibus); Frankenstein and Rain Weaver (Both Cockpit); Grud (Hampstead Theatre); Grills (CPT); Project Atom Boi and So That You May Go Beyond The Sea (All CPT); 1884 (Shoreditch Town Hall); The Littlest Yak (Marlowe studio); Chriskirkpatrickmas (Seven Dials Playhouse); Tiger (Omnibus); 555: Verlaine En Prison; Double Bill At the statue of Venus and La Voix Humaine (Arcola); 1984 (The Cockpit); Let Your Hands Sing In The Silence (Marlowe Theatre); These Words That'll Linger Like Ghosts Till The Day I Drop Down Dead (The Pleasance); The Retreat and Pennyroyal (Both Finborough); The Zone (Taoyuan art centre);

Sankofa: Before the whitewash (Roundhouse); Beauty and the 7 Beasts (Brixton Jamm); Borders (Drayton Arms Theatre); Blue Island 99 (International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival) and Hello World (National Taichung Theatre, Taiwan).



Tom Lilburn
Moon

Tom Lilburn is an English countertenor based in Windsor. He is currently working with Opera Settecento, singing Arsete on in a reconstructed version of Handel's *Titus L'empereur*. He is also a Lay Clerk at St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, and in April

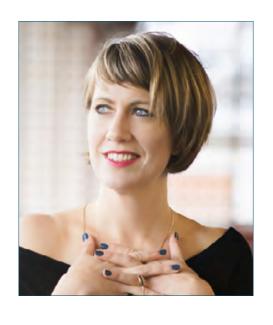
2021 he was one of four singers at the funeral of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh.



Julia MarikoCathleen

English Japanese soprano Julia Mariko was born in the North East of England and is now based in London. In 2023 she recorded Musetta in a new feature of Robin Norton-Hale's Olivier award-winning production of *La bohème* and performed Virtue, covering

Poppea/Drusilla, *The Coronation of Poppea* (English Touring Opera) and Shirley and Stella, covering Vera, *The Land of Might Have Been* (Buxton International Festival). In 2024 she covered Anne Truelove *The Rake's Progress* and performed Lamplighter *Manon Lescaut* for ETO, alongside Learning and Participation projects for ETO, ENO and Opera North.



Flora McIntosh
Director

Flora is a singer and storyteller with a reputation for powerfully sung and vividly characterised performances. She was appointed Artistic Director of OperaUpClose in 2022, motivated by a passion for the power and currency of the artform.

Notable and critically acclaimed performances include Dryade *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Longborough Festival Opera), title roles in

Carmen and Mary Stuart (OperaUpClose), Das Lied von der Erde (English National Ballet), Romeo I Capuleti e i Montecchi (Grimeborn/BBC) and, most recently, Bertha in ETO's lauded production of Blond Eckbert by Judith Wier.

For OperaUpClose, Flora curated *We Two Were Lovers,* a poetry and song companion piece to *The Flying Dutchman* and reworked the 'jukebox' opera *OperaCocktail* for a UK and international tour. *Riders to the Sea* is Flora's mainstage directorial debut.



Bryony MiddletonOboe/Memory

Bryony Middleton is a professional oboist, pianist and teacher, based on the South coast. She freelances on the oboe and cor anglais with some of the best orchestras in the country, appearing most regularly with her local; the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

She held a full-time job as an oboist and cor anglais player in Lisbon for 5 years, returning home to trials with two BBC orchestras, the English National Ballet and Scottish Opera. She has also played in pop music festivals, recorded CDs, DVDs and livestreams, appeared as the soloist in concertos and in the Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. She also performs as a pianist and accompanist, and is an experienced chamber musician in both piano and oboe.



Robin SimonCostume Design and Supervisor (Early Career Associate)

Robin is a costume designer and maker based in London. Originally from Germany, he trained as an intern in the costume department of Schauspielhaus Bochum before moving to the UK to study on the BA

Costume for Performance course at London College of Fashion, graduating with First Class Honours. His work spans across theatre, film, dance, and wearable art, and is concerned with exploring the bodily and socio-cultural human experience. He is looking to push boundaries on contemporary aesthetics within performance design, and question established traditions and expectations.



Ilona Suomalainen

Accordion and Ensemble Lead/Memory

Ilona performs as a freelance accordionist across the UK. She has worked with orchestras including the Philharmonia, Aurora Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and

London Sinfonietta. A diverse performer, Ilona recently played in the West End production of *Fiddler on the Roof, Much Ado About Nothing* at the Shakespeare's Globe, and featured in a UK tour with singer 'Irit' supporting Lisa Stansfield. Originally from Finland, Ilona studied at the Sibelius-Academy in Helsinki, before moving to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music.



Virginie Taylor Caption Design

Virginie Taylor is a London based theatre video and creative captions designer, with a background in lighting design and fine art.

Video and lighting design credits include: Pajoma Collective (Bernie Grant Arts Centre),

Vagina Rex and the Gas Oven (London Performance Studios) and Hummingbird (Vaults Festival).

Video design: *Bright Places* (The Rep Birmingham), *Windrush the Journey, Roman Fever* and *The Human Voice* (Pegasus Opera), *The Odyssey* (Unicorn Theatre), *Wendy: A Peter Pan Story* (The Egg, creative captions only), *Press* (Park Theatre), *Charlie Russell Aims To Please* (EdFringe/The Other Palace) and *No Place Like Home* (EdFringe/Camden People's Theatre).



Robin Wallington Musical Supervisor

Robin is a versatile young English conductor/ composer with a reputation for dynamic performances across a wide range of contemporary and established repertoire.

Following tours as Assistant Conductor for

English Touring Opera's critically acclaimed Spring Tour (March-July '23), and Associate Music Director for OperaUpClose's *The Flying Dutchman* (July '23), in September 2023 Robin began a

three-year tenure as Chief Conductor of the Liverpool Mozart Orchestra, an orchestra with whom he has already built a fruitful relationship.

Equally at home in front of a full symphony orchestra, period instrument ensemble or contemporary music specialist ensemble, Robin brings a driving energy and detailed eye to his wide repertoire. He has worked with ensembles such as the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, Psappha, The Old Street Band, and Northern Ballet Sinfonia. He has assisted conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Mark Elder, Vasily Petrenko, Vassily Sinaisky, John Storgårds, Dalia Stasevska, Ben Gernon, Gerry Cornelius and others. He recently held the position of Mills Williams Junior Fellow in Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music, relinquishing the post in September 2022.



Aaron WestVideo Content/Film Maker

Aaron John West is a writer and filmmaker exploring deep psychological themes through visual storytelling. With a background in film, photography, and production, he pushes creative boundaries across various media. As Head of Production at City Eye, he fosters the

growth of filmmaking, supporting emerging and established talent to achieve their filmmaking goals.



Emily Wilson
Clarinet/Memory

Emily graduated from the Royal Northern College of Music with Distinction in 2016. During her studies Emily won the RNCM Gilbert-Fell prize for contemporary solo performance, a music at Beaulieu award and third prize in the Virovitica international

clarinet competition. She has played principal clarinet for contemporary music group Divertimento Ensemble in Milan, and in a contemporary Britten-Pears ensemble led by Jessica Cottis, creating new music with young composers for the 2022 Aldeburgh Festival.



ArtfulScribe's Community Sirens Collective led by Antosh Wojcik

New Words

Antosh Wojcik is a writer, drummer, sound designer and facilitator. He is co-founder of Sleepwalker Studios, a Dorset-based

production company and has received film commissions from BFI Network, The Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts and Culture University of Exeter and Natural England. His debut poetry collection, Suburban Locust, is forthcoming from Bad Betty Press in Autumn 2025.

The Community Sirens are a group of writers/poets from the Solent Region. Led by Antosh Wojcik and including Ri Baroche, Harley Truslove, Carlene Metcalfe, Carrie Myshkin and, Eve Wright, the Community Sirens use their writing to address environmental issues and the climate emergency and act as sirens to encourage behavioural change.



Lauren Young Maurya

Scottish mezzo-soprano and former music teacher, Lauren Young studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Mascarade Opera Studio in Florence. She is a former Britten Pears Young Artist, Independent Opera Scholar and Fellow, and was a semi-

finalist in the 42nd Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition. Recent highlights include Tisbe La Cenerentola and Baba the Turk *The Rake's Progress* (English Touring Opera); Daughter 6 *Akhnaten* (English National Opera); and an ensemble cast member in Ted Huffman and Philip Venables' *The F*ggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (Ruhrtriennale). Later this season she performs Rosina *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Longborough Festival Opera).



Our Partners

Mayflower Studios

MAST Mayflower Studios Mayflower is committed to providing exceptional theatre and arts experiences for everyone, both in Southampton and beyond. Our main hubs of performing excellence are our two venues, Mayflower Theatre and MAST Mayflower Studios. Mayflower Theatre is a Grade II listed building and MAST Mayflower Studios is a creative producing theatre which opened in 2021 and is open to all even if it's just for coffee or to meet in the city centre location. Both venues have a shared vision for their place in Southampton and work together under the Mayflower brand to support each other to reach their goals of providing inspiring experiences for all.



ArtfulScribe is a not-for-profit writer development agency based in Southampton, supporting emerging and continuing writers to create new work and develop skills through writing workshops, live events and career-development opportunities.



City Eye are documentary makers, story tellers, animators, artists. For over thirty five years they have championed and encouraged those working, playing and experimenting with film in Southampton and its surrounding region, offering professional development, support, training, screening events and networking opportunities to people working in the industry and those that aspire to.



The Sunday Boys was formed by Michael Betteridge in January 2016 to give Manchester an inclusive LGBTQ+ choir for low voice singers in the city to learn to sing great music, perform and make friends. The Sunday Boys is open to anyone who sings with a low voice and wants to sing in an inclusive and friendly environment. They take great pride in supporting artists and regularly commissioning new work.



Southampton & Isle of Wight Music

is delivering life-changing music for every child. Founded in 2012, Southampton & Isle of Wight Music is a growing partnership of local, regional and national organisations, working together to build an inspiring and inclusive programme of music making that reflects the cultural diversity of our regions. Together we are dedicated to delivering life-changing music experiences that enrich the life, health and well-being of our children and our communities.



Who We Are

OperaUpClose is an award-winning national touring opera company with storytelling, innovation and partnership at its heart. Intimate in scale, mighty in impact, the scale of our work is always an active artistic choice, giving all performers equal agency as storytellers, challenging audience expectations and making a vital contribution to the sustainability and evolution of the sector across the UK.

Proudly female-led, we are committed to diversifying both those who make opera and those who watch it. Working from Southampton's dynamic cultural hub MAST Mayflower Studios, we continue to extend the relevance and reach of the artform, commissioning re-interpretations of known work alongside multi-disciplinary, co-created companion pieces, that distil the essence of classic operas into new, contemporary chamber works with their own artistic integrity and excellence.

Artistic Director
Executive Producer
Executive Associate
Development Manager
Creative Campaigns Producer
Company Administrator
Trainee Producer Apprentice

Flora McIntosh
Ally Rosser
Bridget Floyer
Emily Jundi
Danny Humby
Enya Angell
Abigail Bratcher

Trustees

John Andrews, Amanda Arriss OBE, Charith Cabraal, Matthew Lyons, Joe McFadden, Hazel Province (Chair), Carolyn Ward, Clare Williams



Join the OperaUpClose Family!

Support us and become part of the story.

In supporting OperaUpClose you will make a vital and direct contribution to our commissions and productions, securing the availability, impact and reach of this extraordinary artform both for today and for the future.

Become a Friend

Get even closer to our work and support the evolution of this magical artform by joining the OperaUpClose family.

As well as the knowledge that you are supporting the next generation of opera makers, performers and audiences, all Friends receive opportunities for priority booking, invitations to pre-show talks, and exclusive updates through our quarterly Friends newsletter.

A regular donation, from £5/month, will make a crucial contribution to the day to running of the organisation and enable even more people to get up close and immersed in the power and wonder of opera.

To find out how to become a Friend or the other ways that you can support OperaUpClose head to our website.

Become a Supporter

Keep up-to-date and stay in touch by joining our mailing list here



Our Supporters

Riders to the Sea is generously supported by the Big Give, The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, Finzi Trust, Hinrichsen Foundation, Garrick Charitable Trust, The Golsoncott Foundation, The Marchus Trust, Reed Foundation and Vaughan Williams Foundation.



















The Reinventions Donor Circle

Julia P Ellis, David Macfarlane, Genista McIntosh, John Ward, Carolyn Ward, and those who wish to remain anonymous.

Friends Of OperaUpClose

Amanda Ariss, Jane Earl, Melvin Claridge, Richard Hale, William and Felicity Mather, Liz Meek, Martin Parrott, Gideon Stanley, Jeffrey Tobias, Janet Whitaker, and those who wish to remain anonymous.

OperaUpClose in association with MAST Mayflower Studios present Riders to the Sea by Ralph Vaughan Williams and JM Synge in a new orchestration by Michael Betteridge. With a new dramatic prologue, The Last Bit of the Moon, composed by Michael Betteridge, and written by ArtfulScribe's Community Sirens Collective led by Antosh Wojcik.

'Riders to the Sea' by Ralph Vaughan Williams, text adapted from J M Synge (1871-1909) ©

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RIDERS TO THE SEA 2025

30 January - 1 February MAST Mayflower Studios, Southampton

5 February Northcott, Exeter

7 - 8 February The Drum, Theatre Royal Plymouth

11 February Minerva Theatre, Chichester Festival Theatre

18 February Artsdepot, London

21 - 22 February Godber Studio, Hull Truck Theatre

25 - 26 February The North Wall Arts Centre, Oxford

3 March Blackpool Grand Theatre

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John Ellerman Foundation

BackstageTrust





