

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Press Release

Date: Tuesday 4 July 2023

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Southbank Centre Announces London Literature Festival Line-up with a Celebration of Spoken Word

With George the Poet, Yu Miri, Teju Cole, Sir Patrick Stewart, Jada Pinkett Smith, Kerry Washington, Jacqueline Wilson and more



L-R: Jada Pinkett Smith, © Matthew Brookes; George the Poet, © Feruza Afewerki, Yu Miri, © Katsumi Omori.

Wednesday 18 – Sunday 29 October 2023

- **George the Poet** guest curates the opening night, as the festival celebrates the strength and vitality of London's spoken word scene
- New memoirs from **Sir Patrick Stewart**, **Kerry Washington**, **Nick Frost**, **Simon Pegg** and a UK exclusive with **Jada Pinkett Smith**
- Internationally-acclaimed writers, including **Yu Miri**, **Teju Cole**, **Bryan Washington**, **Oliver Jeffers** and **Helen Oyeyemi** present anticipated new work
- **Black British Book Festival** partners with the Southbank Centre for the first time, bringing a memoir launch from **Leigh-Anne Pinnock** and a day-long festival
- Family events running over October half term, with new books from **Jacqueline Wilson** and **Jeffrey Boakye** and a London premiere from **Zeb Soanes** with the Ophreus Sinfonia
- Free events for all ages across the twelve day festival, including a live recording of BBC Radio 4's *Open Book*, free family events and performances in The National Poetry Library

The Southbank Centre today announces London Literature Festival 2023, showcasing the explosive popularity of spoken word poetry alongside new partnerships with literary lovers from across the UK. Running from 18 – 29 October 2023, London Literature Festival is the longest running celebration of the written and spoken word of its kind in the capital, and this year marks its 16th edition. Every year, the festival brings together readers of every age to celebrate the power of the written and spoken word, featuring prestigious literary names alongside rising stars.

For the first time, the opening night is guest-curated by **George the Poet**, a London-born spoken word performer of Ugandan heritage critically-acclaimed for his multi-award winning podcast, *Have You Heard George's Podcast?* Drawing on his innovative brand of musical poetry and unique artistic sensibilities, audiences can enjoy lively events by the artists making waves in the spoken word scene, working at the intersections of poetry, music, hip-hop, performance and powerful cultural commentary.

The **Black British Book Festival** takes place outside Birmingham for the first time, partnering with the Southbank Centre. Kicking off with an anticipated memoir launch by **Leigh-Anne Pinnock**, the Black British Book Festival then brings its vibrant annual day-long festival to London Literature Festival, celebrating Black British authors across all genres.

Across its twelve-day programme, London Literature Festival showcases the diversity of British culture around the UK. The festival also honours the local literary communities of London, both championing London's emerging talent and reflecting on the experience of living in the city. The Southbank Centre attracts major international names who bring exciting cultural events, delivered alongside free events and activities.

Ted Hodgkinson, Head of Literature & Spoken Word at the Southbank Centre, says: *"London Literature Festival this year celebrates the explosive talent, energy and creativity of the city's spoken word community. We're excited to have George the Poet open the first weekend with a night dedicated to the artists he believes are driving the future of the artform. Throughout the festival, we celebrate the emerging talents and pioneers of spoken word and its unmediated power to connect and captivate us, with events from the Poet Laureate for Lambeth, our own New Poets Collective and the Southbank Centre's resident poetry and live music night, Out-Spoken."*

"There are a range of collaborations across the twelve-day festival and I'm thrilled to welcome a fantastic programme curated by the Black British Book Festival, to further the Southbank Centre's commitment to support and champion Black British talent. London Literature Festival is a celebratory event for everyone to see shining new talent, hear from their favourite authors and enjoy our spaces with the free events on offer across the site."

George the Poet, guest-curator of London Literature Festival's opening night, says: *"I'm honoured to be a guest-curator for London Literature Festival this year, kicking off the festival with a night that brings together some of my favourite music and spoken word artists from London and beyond. The environment of London has been my teacher and inspiration, so I'm looking forward to celebrating the culture, sounds and poetry of the city in what promises to be a night to remember."*

Event listings are available [HERE](#).

CELEBRATING SPOKEN WORD

Guest-curator **George the Poet** brings the fire of spoken word performance on the opening night. Joined by musicians and artists making waves in London's spoken-word scene, he brings to life his anthology *Part of a Story That Started Before Me*, a thought-provoking poetical journey through Black British history. TS Eliot prize-winner **Joelle Taylor** hosts a vibrant evening with **Out-Spoken**, the Southbank Centre's resident poetry and live music collective, joining spoken word artists with world-class musicians, reggae, soul and R&B. The Lambeth Poet Laureate **Abstract Benna**, inaugurated at last year's London Literature Festival, reflects on his year serving the borough with a performance that highlights identity, culture and readaptation. **The National Poetry Library** – the largest public collection of modern poetry in the world – hosts a gala day of spoken word performances and displays with BBC Radio 4 broadcaster **Roger McGough CBE**, acclaimed poet **Brian Patten** and the next generation of poets, bringing the library's renowned collection to the stage.

NEW BOOKS

As an exclusive London event, trailblazing actor, director, producer and activist **Kerry Washington** discusses her revealing new memoir, *Thicker Than Water*. The venerated stage and screen actor **Sir Patrick Stewart** presents his long-awaited memoir, *Making It So* and esteemed actor **Jada Pinkett Smith** intimately recounts her story in her unconventional new memoir, *Worthy*. Korean author and winner of Japan's most prestigious literary prize, the Akutagawa writing in Japanese, **Yu Miri** brings her latest novel to be translated into English, *The End of August*. Photographer, critic and celebrated novelist **Teju Cole** introduces his latest novel *Tremor*, while the bestselling, Dylan Thomas Prize-winning author **Brian Washington** presents his new novel *Family Meal*. Renowned artist and author **Oliver Jeffers** introduces his new picture book for adults, *Begin Again: The Story of How We Got Here and Where We Might Go*, and actor and writer **Nick Frost** discusses *A Slice of Fried Gold*, his new memoir of friends, food and films, with his long-time collaborator **Simon Pegg**.

BLACK BRITISH BOOK FESTIVAL

The Black British Book Festival programme kicks off with the first public reading by *Little Mix* member **Leigh-Anne Pinnoch** of her deeply personal memoir, *Believe*. The next day sees powerful voices and diverse stories across the Southbank Centre's site with a day of unmissable events. The recently announced programme includes talks exploring the achievements of Black leaders in the media industry with **Dawn Butler**, **Clive Myrie** and **Gary Younge** at *Unmasking Brilliance: Black British Voices in Media*, while the voices behind the non-fiction series **A Quick Ting On** discuss rewriting the narrative of Black British culture. Interactive events range from workshops, like *A #BlackBookTok Masterclass* by social media star and author **Fats Timbo**, to an interactive celebration by *Strictly Come Dancing* champion and CBeebies *Boogie Beebies* host **Oti Mabuse** to mark her new book.

FOSTERING NEW TALENT

London Literature Festival once again opens with **Debut London Literature**, platforming debut titles from some of the city's most exciting new writers, including Hong Kong author **Nicola Dinan**, Dublin-born **Bryan Moriarty** and London-born author **Wiz Wharton** of Chinese-European heritage. London Literature Festival partners with **Creative Future Writers**, an arts organisation empowering some of the UK's most talented underrepresented artists. The **Creative Future Writers' Award Showcase** celebrates its 10th anniversary with readings by this year's winning writers, while **Creative Future Writers Day** welcomes insider knowledge from leading literary professionals, advising underrepresented writers. The **New Poets Collective Showcase** reveals the work made over the

Southbank Centre's year-long poetry development programme, while **Schools Day** connects school children with engaging children's writing. Supporting grassroots talent, demystifying the publishing world and sparking children's interest, London Literature Festival fosters the next generation of readers and writers.

FAMILY EVENTS

Events for the family run over October half-term to spark interest in books for young audiences. Children's author and former children's laureate **Jacqueline Wilson** presents the sequel to her top-selling title *Sleepovers* after 22 years, *The Best Sleepover in the World*. A London premiere, Classic FM presenter and bestselling author **Zeb Soanes** narrates his magical story for children, *Fred and the Fantastic Tub Tub*, with live music by the Orpheus Sinfonia. **Jeffrey Boakye**, broadcaster, educator and author of the acclaimed *Musical Truth: A Musical History of Modern Black Britain in 28 Songs*, introduces his fun new adventure *Kofi and the Rap Battle Summer*.

FREE EVENTS

A public space for all audiences and communities to enjoy, the Southbank Centre offers free events and use of the site. For families, there is a free programme across October half-term, including a day-long programme by Black British Book Festival with talks and readings from high-profile and emerging children's authors. **Johny Pitts** and **Elizabeth Day** host a special live recording of BBC Radio 4's popular *Open Book*, joined by a panel of celebrated writers for a deep dive into the world of books and reading. More vibrant spoken word performances, displays and workshops are lined up for **The National Poetry Library Open Day** for its theme of '*Spoken Word*', exploring the development of poetry from the Dadaists, to the Beat Poetry Movement, to today's poets exploding the binaries between poetry, music, text and visual art. To coincide with its 70th birthday, the library launches **The 70 Poet Challenge** to shift the nation's poetry reading habits, as well as its next exhibition with newly commissioned work by artist **Mary Kuper**, whose work explores the etymology of words. As well as platforming the next generation of talented poets and artists, The National Poetry Library is a public space and national service, helping to build confidence, creativity and literacy.

Tickets for London Literature Festival go on sale to Southbank Centre Members on Wednesday 5 July and to the general public on Friday 7 July. Tickets for the Black British Book Festival are already on sale. www.southbankcentre.co.uk / 0203 879 9555

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Southbank Centre's National Poetry Library

The Southbank Centre's National Poetry Library is the largest public collection of modern poetry in the world and is housed at the Southbank Centre in London. Founded by the Arts Council in 1953 and opened by poets T.S. Eliot and Herbert Read, the library contains over 200,000 items spanning from 1912 to the present day, extensive resources for poets, academics, schools and families. Hosting exhibitions and events, as well as offering an extensive catalogue and ebook service accessible online, the library is free to use www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre occupying a prominent riverside location that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. We exist to present great cultural experiences that bring people together and we achieve this by providing the space for artists to create and present their best work and by creating a place where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work. We want to take people out of the everyday, every day. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. It is also home to six Resident Orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra). www.southbankcentre.co.uk/



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