

Press Release

For Immediate Release Thursday 22 January 2026, 9am

Contact millie.oconnor@southbankcentre.co.uk; louise.gilbert@southbankcentre.co.uk

Press images [HERE](#)

Press pack materials [HERE](#)

The Southbank Centre announces Roger McGough as ambassador for *A Poet In Every Port*

Plus the full touring route for the new flagship national project taking a mobile
National Poetry Library to 11 coastal towns across the UK

Friday 29 May – Saturday 26 September 2026



Pictured: Roger McGough © Vicki Sharp, and map of locations

The Southbank Centre today announces poet **Roger McGough** as the celebrity ambassador for *A Poet In Every Port*, alongside the full touring route for the project bringing the National Poetry Library to 11 coastal towns across the UK. Inspired by the travelling exhibitions of the 1951 Festival of Britain, it forms a key part of the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary national programme.

Led by a touring version of the Southbank Centre's National Poetry Library in collaboration with 11 partners, *A Poet In Every Port* brings a selection of the world's largest public collection of modern poetry in a new mobile library, alongside free public events, workshops and poetry readings. The mobile National Poetry Library travels to each nation of the UK,

from **North Uist** in the Outer Hebrides, to **Penzance** in Cornwall; **Bangor** in Northern Ireland to **Caernarfon** in Wales.

Kicking off in **Great Yarmouth** in Norfolk on 29 May 2026, the project celebrates the UK's diverse dialects and languages and tells the stories of our coastal communities in poetry and spoken word throughout its journey. Mid-tour, the mobile National Poetry Library visits the Southbank Centre's Poetry International festival in London (12 July).

The mobile National Poetry Library features unique poetry collections, a recording studio, and space for workshops. Visitors of all ages are free to browse the collection, take part in free workshops and watch performances by local poets. They can also submit their own Word Exchange poem in a national competition. Anyone in the UK will be able to get involved via social media. Full details on how to participate will be released in May.

As ambassador, Roger McGough will launch the tour in Great Yarmouth on 29 May and join the mobile National Poetry Library at a number of stops across the tour. He will also write a specially commissioned new Word Exchange poem to launch the national competition, and support the schools activity across the tour.

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, said: *"We're thrilled to welcome Roger McGough as ambassador for A Poet In Every Port. Hailed as 'the patron saint of poetry', Roger is one of Britain's most beloved wordsmiths, defined by a signature blend of Merseyside wit, accessibility, and warmth. He has a unique ability to bridge the gap between literary excellence and community engagement, making him the perfect figurehead to unite our 11 partner organisations and champion our shared voyage."*

"This is a key project in the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary programme, where we consider what it means to be the arts centre of the future, and how, through creativity and culture, we can make a difference to people's lives."

Roger McGough, ambassador for A Poet In Every Port, said: *"May I begin by saying how honoured and excited I feel about being appointed ambassador for such a worthwhile project, helping to promote something that has been central to me my whole life: Poetry. And not only poetry, but the Southbank Centre itself, because I remember when I was 14 being brought to London by my parents and being overawed by the Festival of Britain celebrations. Until then I thought only Liverpudlians knew how to enjoy themselves."*

"As ambassador I will help promote something I have loved all my life. Helping others reach out and touch people through poetry. Guiding the reader towards thoughts and ideas they didn't know they had. Above all else, writing poetry is what helps us feel human, vulnerable and yet powerful, and above all, alive".

Roger McGough's extended quote can be found in the press pack [HERE](#)

At the heart of the project is a new cohort of the New Poets Collective, which has been formed to support emerging poets from each region *A Poet In Every Port* is visiting. They will lead the mobile National Poetry Library's free activities in each location, working closely with

the partners to celebrate local dialects and languages, and engage the wider community and public, showing that poetry is for everyone.

Poet and lead tutor of the Southbank Centre's New Poets Collective, Vanessa Kisuule said: *"We are excited to work with poets from all over the UK and continue to bring our playful, iterative collective experience to this group over the next two years. We hope that the combination of workshops, thoughtful collaborations with their local communities and support from the National Poetry Library will help them to flourish as poets and people".*

Press Pack [HERE](#). Includes 11 quotes from our project partners, an extended quote from Roger McGough, press images, FAQs and translated versions of the press release (Scottish Gaelic and Welsh).

FULL TOUR SCHEDULE

Fri 29 – Sat 30 May

Great Yarmouth

[Out There Arts](#)

Sat 6 – Sun 7 June

Weston-super-Mare

[Super Culture](#)

Tues 16 – Weds 17 June

North Uist, Scotland

[Taigh Chearsabhaigh Museum & Arts Centre](#)

Sat 20 – Sun 21 June

Dundee, Scotland

[Dundee Book Festival](#)

Fri 26 June

Thames Estuary

[Estuary Festival](#)

Sat 27 – Sun 28 June

Southend

[METAL Southend](#)

Mon 6 – Tues 7 July

Penzance

[The Acorn](#)

Thurs 9 – Fri 10 July

Caernarfon, Wales

[Gŵyl Arall \(Another Festival\)](#)

Sun 12 July

London

[Southbank Centre \(Poetry International\)](#)

Sat 25 – Sun 26 July

Blackpool

[The Old Electric](#)

Fri 18 – Sat 19 Sept

South Shields

[The Word: National Centre for the Written Word](#)

Fri 25 – Sat 26 Sept

Bangor, Northern Ireland

[Aspects Festival](#)

Please visit the relevant partner website for information on the programme activities and schedule at each location from Spring 2026.

For more information about the Southbank Centre's 75th anniversary celebrations, visit our [75th Anniversary](#) page. For more information on the project, visit the [A Poet in Every Port](#) page.

#ENDS#

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information contact millie.oconnor@southbankcentre.co.uk and louise.gilbert@southbankcentre.co.uk

PRESS IMAGES

Press images [HERE](#)

PRESS PACK AND ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Press pack [HERE](#)

Roger McGough biography

Poet, performer and broadcaster, Roger McGough has published over 100 poetry books for adults and children and has been hailed 'the patron saint of poetry' and 'the godfather of modern poetry'. He was one of the Liverpool poets, alongside Adrian Henri and Brian Patten, who influenced popular culture in the sixties. The Mersey Sound, published in 1967, is one of the bestselling poetry anthologies of all time, selling over a million copies. In the 1960's he formed The Scaffold with John Gorman, and Mike McGear, performing a combination of comic songs, poetry and sketches who had several top 20 singles including the hit song 'Lily the Pink'. He has won numerous awards, including The Cholmondeley Award in 1988, received the Freedom of the City of Liverpool in 2001, and was awarded a CBE in 2004. A Fellow of The Royal Society and President of The Poetry Society, he presents the popular Radio 4 Poetry Please series. His most recent book is "Collected Poems 1959-2024", published by Penguin.

www.rogermcgough.org

About the New Poets Collective

The Southbank Centre's New Poets Collective is a national programme launched in 2021 to nurture and showcase emerging voices, led by poets Vanessa Kisuule and Will Harris. As part of the project in 2026, a new cohort of the New Poets Collective has been formed to support emerging poets from each region. A Poet In Every Port is visiting.

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project – that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal communities and should be available and accessible to everyone – are still our guiding principles today. The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), two resident organisations (Kinetika Bloco and Tomorrow's Warriors) and 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

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



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**