

Discover the magic of *The Secret Garden* in an enchanting new staged adaptation

The Secret Garden

An enchanting tale of friendship and discovery

Commissioned by Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham

Premiering at Hexham Book Festival

Written by Lisette Auton & Becci Sharrock

Direction by Ali Pidsley

Musical Direction by Sam Slatcher

Design by Lizzie Leach

Co-produced by Becci Sharrock & Carole Wears

Opening night: Sunday 12 June, 5pm, Hexham Book Festival

Tour runs from Sunday 12 June to Saturday 2 July 2022

Families are being invited to discover the magic of *The Secret Garden* as writers Lisette Auton and Becci Sharrock join forces to bring a newly adapted version of this classic tale to the stage at theatres, community centres and schools across the North East of England this June.

The play, which has been commissioned by Queen's Hall Arts Centre in Hexham, will premiere at Hexham Book Festival on Sunday 12 June at 5pm. This beautiful reimagining, which includes brand new folk songs performed by the cast, will introduce a new generation to this tale of friendship, secrets and the human spirit as well as the transformational magic of the garden.

As director Ali Pidsley explains:

"Working on this project is an absolute joy, and I am wonderfully excited by the artists and partners we are working with. 'The Secret Garden' is a hugely resonant story for me, personally, about the magic of imagination, the need we have for the natural world and young people supporting one another. We can't wait to share the end result with audiences who are familiar with this classic tale as well as those experiencing this magical story for the very first time."

Families will be invited to meet 12 year old Lennox. When she's sent to stay in rural Northumberland after being excluded from her city comp, she is certain there is nothing there for her. Far away from home, with a family she barely knows, she must rediscover herself and in doing so uncover the mystery of the long hidden secret garden.

Actors Michael Blair, Sarah Boulter, Ellen Carnazza, Wambui Hardcastle, Zoe Lambert, Shreya Patel and Lauren Waine will, between them, take on the roles of the five main characters. This sharing of roles is one of the many adaptations being made by the creative team to ensure that the creative process is as accessible as possible.

As writer and co-producer Becci Sharrock explains:

*“Part of the driving force behind *The Secret Garden* was a desire to redesign the creative process and find solutions to some of the access barriers faced by creatives. By adapting the way we work we have been able to remove some of the barriers that prevent disabled artists, many with invisible disabilities, to engage. From using accessible working spaces and introducing shorter working days to paid rest days and an ensemble approach we have been able to create a positive working environment that we hope meets the needs of our team. We know that this doesn't go far enough but we hope that it's the start of a sector wide change. Flexibility and adaptability are at the heart of everything we do in our efforts to create something truly magical - both on and off stage.”*

Writer Lisette Auton added:

“I'm excited about working in a new way that respects bodies and rest, and focuses on how to make this a brilliant process for everyone involved. A piece that has kindness and creativity at its core.”

The Secret Garden will premiere at Hexham Book Festival before touring the North East stopping off at Arts Centre Washington on Thursday 16 June, Gosforth Civic Theatre on Saturday 18 June, Gala, Durham on Saturday 25 June, The Word in South Shields on Sunday 26 June, Coundon & Leeholme Community Centre on Friday 1 July and Lady Waterford Hall in Berwick upon Tweed on Saturday 2 July. Performances will also take place at community venues and in schools across Northumberland, Stockton, Cumbria and Gateshead including two dates programmed as part of Highlights Rural Touring Scheme. To coincide with the tour there will also be the opportunity for audiences to take part in a series of writing workshops across the region with writer Becci Sharrock and Wendy Errington from Write Stuff NE.

The Secret Garden was commissioned by Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham. The play has been made possible with support using public funding from Arts Council England as well as funding from Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham. For more information about *The Secret Garden* and for details on how to buy tickets visit <https://www.carolewproductions.com/theseecretgarden>.

Notes to Editors:

Listings

(Approx 50 words)

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“A secret garden, just for them, that no-one else knew about.”

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(Approx 100 words)

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"A secret garden, just for them, that no-one else knew about."

When Lennox finds herself sent to stay in Northumberland after being excluded from her city comp, she is certain there is nothing there for her. Far away from home, with a family she barely knows, she must rediscover herself and in doing so uncover the mystery of the long hidden secret garden.

With brand new folk songs, performed by the cast, this beautiful reimagining introduces new generations to the transformational magic of the garden.

Suitability: For those aged 7 – 11 years and their families

Duration: Approximately 1 hr 15 minutes

#TheSecretGardenPlay

The Secret Garden Tour Dates:

- Sunday 12 June, 5pm, Hexham Book Festival
- Thursday 16 June, 1.30pm, Arts Centre Washington
- Saturday 18 June, 1pm, Gosforth Civic Theatre
- Sunday 19 June, 1.30pm, Fishburn Youth & Community Centre, Stockton
- Saturday 25 June, 2pm, Gala, Durham
- Sunday 26 June, 1.30pm, The Word, South Shields
- Friday 1 July, 6pm, Coundon and Leeholme Community Centre
- Saturday 2 July, 2pm, Lady Waterford Hall, Berwick upon Tweed

Creative Team:

About Lisette Auton - Writer

Lisette Auton is an award-winning poet; the 2019 Early Careers Fellow for Literature at Cove Park; on the TSS Publishing list of Best British & Irish Flash Fiction; and winner of the Journal Culture Awards 2021 Performance of the Year for Writing The Missing - A River Cycle commissioned by Durham Book Festival. Her debut middle grade novel The Secret of Haven Point is published by Puffin. Lisette's work focuses on identity, curiosity and play, kindness and access. Disabled, neurodivergent and northern, some say she's a word artist, she says she does stuff with words.

About Becci Sharrock - Writer & Co-producer

Becci is a writer, theatre maker and creative producer who has worked for Live Theatre, Northern Stage, ARC, Stockton, Sunderland Culture and New Writing North. Recent writing credits include Christmas With the Hobs (Christmas animation, commissioned by Queen's Hall Arts, Alnwick Playhouse and The Maltings), It Takes Two (commissioned by Live Theatre as part of Your Voice: North East) and Looking Back At Lockdown (publication, Made With Many). She's previously been

a joint winner of the North East Theatre Guide's Best New Writing Award, a Leverhulme Trust funded Writer-in-Residence at Beamish Museum and shortlisted for the Old Vic 12.

About Ali Pidsley, Director

Ali is a Theatre-Maker from Yorkshire. He is a Co-Director of Barrel Organ and a Core Artist with Unlimited. Ali is also an Associate of NSDF and a Mentor Director with National Theatre Connections. Directing includes All Your Houses, Once & Future, Some People Talk About Violence & NOTHING (all with Barrel Organ), Me for the World by Molly Taylor (Young Vic), Antigone by Lulu Razcka (New Diorama), Pops by Charlotte Josephine (Hightide/Live Theatre; Winner of The Stage Edinburgh Award 2019), A Girl in School Uniform (Walks Into a Bar) by Lulu Razcka (Leeds Playhouse), Blasted by Sarah Kane (RIFT Theatre).

About Sam Slatcher, Musical Director

Sam is a musician, singer-songwriter and community arts facilitator. He is passionate about engaging different communities in the process of storytelling and songwriting through a social enterprise he directs called Citizen Songwriters. His recent project 'Stories of Sanctuary' funded by Arts Council England brought together Syrian refugees in County Durham with local residents in a series of songwriting workshops. The production toured the UK, including the Migration Matters Festival in Sheffield and Journeys Festival in Leicester with viola player Raghad Haddad from the National Syrian Orchestra. Sam has been commissioned by ARC Stockton, Stronger Communities Middlesbrough (Middlesbrough Council), delivered songwriting workshops at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) and performs in festivals/venues across the North East, such as the Georgian Theatre Stockton, Hartlepool Waterfront Festival and the Miners Hall Durham. He has also been the songwriter in residence at the summer studios at SAGE Gateshead.

About Lizzie Leach, Designer

Lizzie is a theatre designer and theatre maker from Cumbria. She trained in Theatre Design at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School where she was awarded the John Elvery Prize for exceptional design work. Prior to this she studied English Literature at Warwick University. Lizzy is a regular visiting practitioner at Central School of Speech and Drama, working with the Contemporary Performance Practice department exploring the role of design in the devising process.

About CaroleW Productions

CaroleW Productions philosophy is to provide people with 'a good night out' at festivals, in theatres and in life! They programme short pieces of work of exceptionally high quality across genres and across venues, by companies whose work they love and enjoy themselves. The artists they work with offer workshop packages to other artists, schools and colleges.

CaroleW Productions lead audiences to a seam of treasures, encourage them to try something different. With contacts at Festivals around the world, founder Carole Wears has a good eye for quality! CaroleW Productions also offer production and event support and work in partnership with other producers.

The Cast (in alphabetical order):

Michael Blair

Michael is an actor and musician. He trained in theatre-making at Northern Stage through their NORTH programme in 2013. Through this he helped to form The Letter Room. Alongside making work with The Letter Room, he worked extensively with Northern Stage, in shows such as James and the Giant Peach and most recently the UK and Ireland tour of The Last Ship, which held its first UK performances at Northern Stage. Outside of theatre, his main pursuits are musical – he trained in classical guitar for six years, before branching out into blues jazz and folk guitar.

Sarah Boulter

Sarah recently performed in 'The Importance of Being Earnest' as Gwendolen, and as Diane in 'One Of A Kind' as part of Elysium Theatre's award winning, online 'Covid-19 Trilogy'. She is thrilled to be part of such a wonderful team bringing the magic of 'The Secret Garden' to life. Other theatre credits include; 'A Viking Christmas' an Alnwick Playhouse/Queens Hall Arts production, Teechers (York Theatre Royal/Gala Theatre Durham), Our Laygate/The Dolly Mixtures (Customs House),

Raising Shame (BRASH Theatre), The Great Joe Wilson (Wisecrack productions/Darlington Hippodrome) A Doll's House/Twelve Pound Look (Hangfire Theatre) Sunset on Tantobie (radio) (Gala Theatre Durham).

Ellen Carnazza

Ellen is a Yorkshire born-and-bred actor, writer and theatre-maker. Initially, Ellen trained as a scriptwriter and gained a first-class degree in English with Creative Writing from Falmouth University. While studying, she produced her own play *Whodunnit?* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and performed in numerous productions where she caught the acting bug and decided to pursue acting professionally. Since then, Ellen has performed in a wide variety of roles from theatre and film to virtual reality and voiceover, and continued training with companies such as the National Youth Theatre, the Lee Strasberg Institute, Red Ladder and act4tv. Recently, Ellen has been specialising in immersive theatre and was a lead in *Our Gate* directed by Amie Burns Walker, co-creator of *Immersive Great Gatsby*. As a passionate advocate for representation and inclusivity in the arts, Ellen is the Administrator for The Act For Change Project and organised the event 'Keeping The Conversation Growing' at The Globe Theatre.

Wambui Hardcastle

Wambui Hardcastle is a young Northern creative, specialising as a performer, writer, and director. Wambui credits Northern Stage's Young Company, City of Dreams, and Eclipse Theatre's SLATE programme for providing them with the support needed to become a young professional. Since the start of 2022, Wambui has been a Creative Associate Artist at Unfolding Theatre.

Wambui is all about making great work with good people_ and doing that all with some "umph" and creating a bit of good in the world along the way. They are always up for the next adventure, in whatever form it presents itself as.

Zoe Lambert

Originally from Yorkshire Zoe has been living and working in The North East for 37 years. She has worked Open Clasp Theatre Company on many occasions, November Club, Live Theatre, Northern Stage, New Writing North, Alphabetti Theatre, Gala, Durham, The Customs House, has created her own work and plays with the band Kissed. Most recently she has worked on a season with the RSC performing in *The Winters Tale* and *The Comedy Of Errors*. Outside the region she has worked with Northern Broadsides, Bolton Octagon, Leeds Playhouse, Lancaster Dukes and Dundee Rep. TV credits include *Emmerdale*, *Tracey Beaker* and *The Royal Today*.

Shreya Patel

Shreya M Patel is an actor, writer and director based in Hertfordshire. She started acting with Leeds Playhouse as a community performer in *Searching for the Heart of Leeds* in 2018. Since then, she has appeared in several projects in Leeds such as *Hamlet* (2019) and *Mother Courage and her Children* (2018). Her most recent credits include *Then Barbara Met Alan* (BBC 2) and *The Fairy Who Fell off the Christmas Tree* (2021, She Productions). She has an affinity to projects that explore aspects of her identity she is passionate about, such as queer identity, disability, race, and mathematics.

Lauren Waine

Lauren is thrilled to part of *The Secret Garden* with such an amazing team! Originally from Sunderland, Lauren has worked all across her beloved North-East as well as further a field. Training: LIPA. Theatre Credits: *No 9* (Alphabetti), *Wor Bella* (NE Tour), *The Snow Queen*, *The War of The Worlds* (Northern Stage), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Hangfire Theatre/Durham Gala), *Skellig* (Nottingham Playhouse), *Wormtown* (The Customs House/Alphabetti), *Faustus* (The Globe, Sam Wanamaker Festival), *Three Jumpers* (Unearthed Theatre at EdinburghFringe), *Robinson Crusoe*, *Snow White*, *Robin Hood* (Gala, Durham), *Pericles* (Brighton Open Air Theatre). TV/ Radio: *The World's Worst Dinner Party* (Channel4), *The Dumping Ground* (CBBC), *Vera* (ITV), *The Infirmary* (Amazon/Audible), and a series of Radio Shorts (*Cranked Anvil*). Other: *Hylton*, *We Have a Problem* (Tiny Dragon Productions).

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