

The Circular

February 2026



"[Spring] is the sun shining on the rain and the rain falling on the sunshine..."

from *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

That lovely evocation of spring seems particularly apt this year, when we've had what feels like week after week of rain. But warmer, lighter days are on the way, and with them a year of uplifting entertainment on our stages – our first SJT production, *Murder for Two*, has started rehearsals, so look out for more on that next month!

If you'd like to book for any of our shows, please visit our website: www.sjt.uk.com, call our box office on 01723 370541, or drop by – our box office is open from 10am until at least 7pm (closing time depends on the start time of that night's show/film) every day except Sunday.

New shows

If you thought our programme for 2026 was already busy, wait for it – there's more! We're delighted to bring you news of yet two more in-house productions, plus three more exciting visiting shows for this year.

As a valued Circle member, you have priority booking from 10am on Wednesday 25 February until 10am on Wednesday 4 March, when general booking opens.

All at Sea (16 to 31 October):

a co-production with Live Theatre in Newcastle, this will be our fifth of six in-house productions during 2026. Where do you turn when you've got £100,000 of credit card debt? And a £400,000 mortgage? For Colin, the answer is simple: fake his own death in a canoeing accident in the North Sea. Now his 'widow' Deborah is forced to enact a complex plan to secure life insurance money while lying to their sons. How do you pretend your husband is dead? What kind of toll does it take living a double life? And how do you keep the romance alive through a fake wall in your sewing room? Inspired by the notorious Canoe Man case, **All At Sea** is a deep dive into Colin and Deborah's relationship by award-winning playwright



Alison Carr.

Sunny Side (24 April):

Combining contemporary dance, theatre and spoken word, Yorkshire multi-disciplinary performance company Northern Rascals' socially urgent work follows the pain and loneliness on the path from adolescence to adulthood. A raw portrayal of the modern young male experience, touring in partnership with Andy's Man Club and informed by the experiences of over 750 young people across the UK.



We're Havin' a Party (4 June):

An unforgettable evening with Liverpool's charismatic Tim Lucas, who gained more than a few fans here in last year's *Love's Labour's Lost* (more or less). With comedy, music and eye-catching dancing, this lively show promises a delightful blend of laughter, nostalgia, and sensational music. Supported by a top-class band, fabulous guest singers and dancers, Tim brings his unique talent and comic style to you!



Party Piece (5 & 6 June):

Four good friends. One last party. Follow Will, Keane, Robyn and Tom through the outrageous events of the night before as they look beneath the showing-off and realise it's time they get out and grow up... they might just have to find their shoes first! This hilarious exploration of the hopes and dreams of young people is told through a mix of physical theatre and stand-up comedy and has performed all over the world since its multi-award-recognised run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. It's performed by the SJT's Young Company – a talent development programme for young creatives in Scarborough. It gives them



the opportunity to develop skills for a career in the creative industries. Come and support them on their journey! Content warning: adult themes and strong language throughout.



The Highwayman (7 to 10 October): Period drama from the ever-popular John Godber. It's 1769 and Yorkshire's population has exploded; York's races are packed, the new theatre in Hull is thriving, and the Spa towns are full. Everyone's flocking north, every ale house packed with the great and the bad. Yorkshire is the place to be, a region drunk on money, social climbing, gambling and gin. The Highwayman is a thrilling theatrical adventure from the region where Turpin was caught and Nevison made his great leap! It's visceral, venal and very funny; history has never felt so modern, theft never more attractive. The Highwayman's creed is simple; look after number one and to hell with the hangman...

Flat & the Curves: Rosé Tinted (27

February 2027): Award-winning comedy girl band Flat & the Curves return with their well-aged cabaret, *Rosé Tinted!* Join the vocal powerhouses as they piece together bygone years of revelry, from knee-defying slut-drops to toe-curling one-night stands. Through original music, the comedy girlband pays homage to friendships forged through grape-fuelled revelry. Expect a raucous look at life's disasters and absurdities, delivered with a cheeky wink and ferocious vocals.



March shows

Meanwhile, there's still plenty to entertain you – in March alone, we bring you five visiting shows:

My Brother's a Genius (5 & 6 March): Daisy and Luke are twins navigating life in a council estate, where ambition and self-doubt collide. Both twins have labels thrust upon them: Daisy the 'idiot' and Luke the 'genius'. But will their bond and shared dream of flying launch them up together or crash them apart? Based on conversations with young people across the UK and written by Debris Stevenson (*Poet in da Corner*, *Royal Court*), *My Brother's a Genius* combines poetry, music and movement in a humorous exploration of neurodivergence, sibling rivalry, and the weight of expectations.



Night & Day: Sam Jewison sings Cole Porter (7 March): Expect evergreen songs that have come to define the Great American Songbook, including *I've Got You Under My Skin*, *Night and Day*, *Just One of Those Things* and many more when virtuoso pianist and singer Sam returns to our Round with his latest show.



Meet Fred (13 &

14 March): Fred's a cloth puppet just trying to live an ordinary life – get a job, find love, be part of society. But with his Puppetry Living Allowance under threat, Fred's world spirals out of control. How do you hold on to independence when the system pulls the strings? With biting wit, razor-sharp political satire, and moments of unexpected tenderness, *Meet Fred* is an unmissable comedy that's resonated with audiences across the globe. Created by award-winning inclusive theatre company Hijinx, the show features a stellar cast of performers with and without learning disabilities and/or autism, whose lived experiences bring depth and authenticity to Fred's struggle.



The Grand Babylon Hotel (18 to 21 March): Nella wants steak and beer as a birthday treat, but they're not on the menu of the exclusive Grand Babylon Hotel – so her American millionaire father buys... the entire hotel! But it isn't all it seems, and Theodore Racksole soon discovers there's more than a juicy steak on his plate – kidnapping and murder for starters! This rollicking comedy thriller features a virtuoso cast of five including Shelley Atkinson, who you might remember from *Martha*, *Josie and the Chinese Elvis*; Thomas Cotran, who was with us just a year ago in *Love's Labour's Lost (more or less)*; and, as Theodore, one of our best-loved company members, Bill Champion.



Rob Rouse: Funny Bones (21

March): Rob Rouse was named as the Comics' Comic Best Act in the UK Comedy Awards 2025, so we're really looking forward to seeing his new show. A star of the



BBC's *Upstart Crow* (in which he plays manservant Ned Bottom to David Mitchell's Shakespeare), *8 Out of 10 Cats*, *The Friday Night Project*, *Dave's One Night Stand* and many other TV and radio appearances, Rob is one of the UK comedy circuit's most respected and consistently hilarious performers. *Funny Bones* is a relentlessly funny, high-spirited evening packed with brilliantly spun tall tales, pitch-perfect characters and hilariously daft flights of fancy – a pure celebration of comedy and being alive.

Honk!

Just a reminder that we're celebrating our 30th year in this building this April with an in-concert version of the joyous musical *Honk!*

We world premiered this delightful show by George Stiles and Anthony Drewe, based on the story *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen, and it's since gone on to over 8,000 productions across the world and won many awards, including the Olivier for Best Musical in 2000.

And we're delighted to tell you that it'll be performed by some familiar faces, including Annie Kirkman, Georgie Samuels, Sarah Pearman and Simon Slater. The Director and Musical Director is Alex Weatherhill, with able assistance from Associate Director Chantell McGovern.

We'll be presenting *Honk! In Concert* on the afternoon of Sunday 12 April as a fundraiser. All money raised will go towards our New Work Fund, helping us to put new work on our stages and nurture new talent (we are a registered charity, number 253606).

What a celebration!

Many, many thanks to all of you who came to our season celebration on 20 February.

We enjoyed a lively discussion chaired by actor David Kirkbride (who you may remember as the giant ice cream in *The Comedy of Errors* (more or less!)), with Caroline Leslie (director of *Murder for Two*), Tim Firth (co-writer, with Gary Barlow, of *Calendar Girls the Musical*), Hannah Tyrrell-Pinder (director of *Handbagged*), Alison Carr (writer of *All at Sea*) and, of course, our own Alan Ayckbourn, who is directing his 92nd play, *The Trial of Romeo Oscar*, in the autumn.

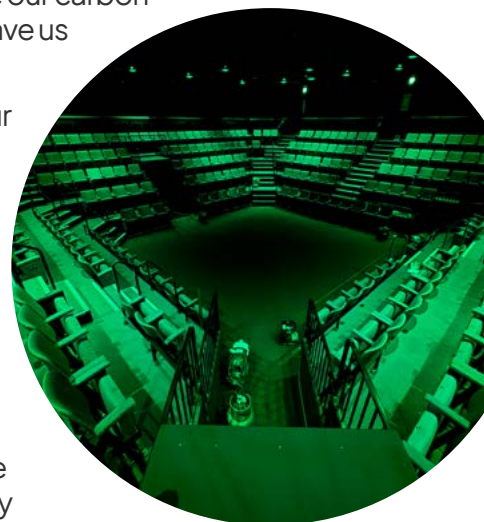


Thank you to the Theatres Trust!

We're very grateful to the Theatres Trust, who gave us a grant of £18,800 to replace all 36 incandescent house lights in the Round with LED lights.

Incandescent lights are now inefficient and expensive (ours were installed back in the original 1996 conversion); it's also increasingly difficult to replace the bulbs so we were running the risk of not having an operating system. The new LED lights will not only help to reduce our carbon footprint, they'll also save us money.

As you can see from our photos, they're also much more flexible than the original lights and give us endless colour options which will give our lighting designers more to play with – which works particularly well in the Round where the auditorium basically becomes part of the set design. We're going to have a lot of fun on the Christmas show!



Take a seat

Just a reminder that we've renumbered our seats in the Round – hopefully, it's going to make life much easier! You can find out more here: <https://sjt.uk.com/news/renumbering-the-round>

Don't trample on the dialogue...

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be an audio describer? Our in-house AD expert, Steve Carley, talks us through it...

"Around 20 odd years ago, I was one of a few members of staff who did a training course with a woman called Veronica Hikes – she was ex BBC, and a professional audio describer from when it all started. I'm the last one of those standing – they've all moved on now. It was really interesting. I remember things like her getting us to describe the set that was in the round at the time. We walked around making notes and then described it – I think I mentioned every type of glass in this glass cabinet, going completely overboard with the details!

"I have a little room overlooking the Round that's like a sports commentator's box, and I wear a headset. I start off with the script – that can be tricky with the Christmas show which can change a lot during

rehearsals! I do photos of the set, and I get a list of costumes from our Wardrobe Assistant, Izzy, and furniture and props lists from stage management.

"I do an introduction about 10 mins before the show starts where I start by describing the auditorium: "it's a square central stage about 20ft along each side, with three entranceways in the form of tunnels through the seating. One is at the far-left corner from where you're sitting, another at the far right, and the third just to your left." It's crucial (in the Round at least) that all those who have chosen to have AD are sitting in the same area, so I can say 'to your left, or to your right'.

"Then I describe the set - 'we are in the dining room of the Smith family, the floor is like this, the furniture is like that, etc'. I describe the characters they're going to meet - what the actors look like, height, build, the clothing they're wearing, and even their bearing - I might say someone is energetic, or gestures a lot - do they saunter on and off stage, or do they march?

Then we start on the performance - I try to watch the show beforehand (but sometimes have to make do with a video!) because the golden rule is 'don't trample on the dialogue'. If you absolutely

have to, you try to find a line that's less important. Then it's just going through it line by line, trying to keep pace with costume changes and so on. It sounds obvious, but you're just trying to describe all things visual, including facial expressions.

"It sounds obvious, but you're just trying to describe all things visual, including facial expressions"

Multi-roling is an interesting challenge - I'll say in my intro that there are, say, five actors playing multiple roles, then start with the first character, then when they change, I'll say 'and in comes X, wearing whatever, and played by the same actor who played Y'.

"I used to be a bit formal, but these days I let myself laugh at things or, if there's a surprise, I might go 'OOH!'. I want to be on my listeners' side. I remember talking to one of our actors about being on the radio, and he said the secret is to do it with a smile on your face - people can hear it in your voice.

"The Christmas show is a different kettle of fish - all broad brushstrokes, because there's so much going on! And there's loads of ad libbing. And Noises Off - that second act! I think that was the most difficult one I've ever done!"

Circle member Liz Pimperton, who regularly uses our audio description service, says: "Steve is a fabulous audio describer. I have listened to many across the country and he rates highly. He brings every production alive. His personality and passion for the

theatre come through in his descriptions.

"I love the way he chuckles to himself when the parts he's describing are funny - he's totally engrossed in the show. It makes me feel fully immersed - I never feel that I don't know what's going on as his descriptions are fabulous, second to none. If you haven't tried audio description, give it a go - it's enabled me to continue to go to shows."

Circle Cafés

Those of you who came to our first Circle Café of the year in February enjoyed hearing from writer John Godber and producer Elizabeth Godber about how and why Teechers was updated from its original version nearly 40 years ago. Our Circle Cafés cover a wide range of subjects, from the thinking behind shows to hilarious stories from the actors about on-stage mishaps.

They're getting busier and busier by the month, so it really helps us if you can book your tickets in advance of the day. That way, we arrive first thing that morning knowing how many people to expect, how many chairs to lay out, how much coffee to make, how much cake we need - all the important stuff! We also need to allow time at the end for Eat Me Café to clear the tables ready for their opening at 11am, so please don't be offended if we ask you to move to the bar end of the room! Thanks for your help.

Circle Cafés for the rest of 2026 are (all Thursdays, and all a 10am arrival for a 10.15am start except for December):

19 March: We're delighted to welcome Claybody Theatre, a new venture from former Northern Broadsiders Deborah McAndrew and Conrad Nelson. They're rooted in the unique cultural heritage and contemporary lives of the people of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire, so what better show for them to bring on their first visit to us than The Grand Babylon Hotel, adapted from the comic novel by that great champion of the Five Towns, Arnold Bennett?

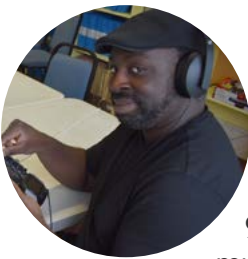


9 April: It's our first SJT production of the year: Murder for Two promises to be a riot!

21 May: Meet Rob Salmon, our Head of Creative Engagement,

who has a wealth of experience in the theatre industry - so lots of stories to tell!





18 June: Meet Ernie Acquah, our Creative Engagement Co-ordinator, who's also a freelance sound designer. Ernie will educate and entertain us with a sound workshop.

9 July: Your chance to meet the multi-talented company of our second SJT production: Calendar Girls the Musical.



6 August: Those SJT productions come in thick and fast at this time of year! Meet the company of Handbagged and find out what it's like to play two of the 20th century's most iconic women – the Queen and Margaret Thatcher.

Handbagged



10 September: It's Alan Ayckbourn's 92nd play – the Trial of Romeo Oscar company isn't cast yet, but it's bound to feature a few familiar and much-loved faces.



22 October: Alison Carr's latest play is inspired by the story of the Darwins. John Darwin faked his own death in a canoeing accident near Seaton Carew to claim a £250,000 life insurance windfall – find out more!

ALL AT SEA

12 November: Meet our Marketing team and find out what they do!

10 December: Meet the sparkling Puss in Boots company (please note that this will be an afternoon Circle Café at 1pm).

