

The Circular

June 2026



"If I had my way, I'd remove January from the calendar altogether and have an extra July instead" Roald Dahl



We're almost there! We've been thinking about our production of *Calendar Girls the Musical* for years – the logistics of such a huge show, with 12 professional actors, seven local teenagers, and, er, well, (very tasteful) nudity on stage – in the round! – have seemed at times like a hill we couldn't possibly climb.



But we did, and we can't wait for you to see it – it's funny, it's uplifting, it's moving and we're SUPER proud of it.

And that nudity? Well, we've been listening closely to the advice of writer Tim Firth, who says: *"As in the best tradition of vaudevillian fan dances, the art of the musical's nudity lies in what is withheld. The choreography of this section is best described as 'fabulous concealment'. Should we see anything we oughtn't, the scene will deflate like a soufflé on which the oven door has been too quickly opened. The scene in many ways epitomises the whole endeavour; it is a fast-moving team effort, perhaps the greatest team effort you can witness outside of a circus tent, one in which everyone around the subject is arranging the props and into whose hands that girl entrusts her modesty. So, in a sense perhaps it is in fact best described as a fan dance where someone else is holding the fans."*



And those remarkable *Calendar Girls* aren't the only extraordinary women on our stage this summer – as we open that show, we also go into rehearsals for our next, *Handbagged*, an imagining



of the sometimes thorny relationship between two of the most prominent women of our times – the Queen and Margaret Thatcher (played at different stages of their lives by Liz Garland, Alexandra Mathie, Pandora Clifford and Meriel Scholfield).

Director Hannah Tyrell-Pinder has spent months taking a very deep dive into the lives of these two powerful women who in many ways shaped this country in the dying years of the 20th, and the beginning of the 21st, centuries.

If that all makes it sound a little worthy, don't worry – if we tell you who two (male) actors play in what *The Guardian* called 'a clever, funny and charming political comedy', you'll see it's not that serious.

Deven Modha: **Kenneth Kaunda, Nancy Reagan, Enoch Powell, Neil Kinnock, Michael Shea, and Kenneth Clarke.**

Meanwhile, Simon Darwen portrays: **Denis Thatcher, Peter Carrington, Gerry Adams, Ronald Reagan, Arthur Scargill, Geoffrey Howe, Ruper Murdoch, Prince Philip and Michael Heseltine.**

As Hannah observes – they have to have range!



Pandora Clifford



Simon Darwen



Liz Garland



Alexandra Mathie



Deven Modha



Meriel Scholfield

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.

Looking ahead...

We're taking a short break from visiting shows while we concentrate on our own summer productions – *Calendar Girls the Musical*, *Handbagged* and *The Trial of Romeo Oscar*.



But we're also thrilled to bring you a summer concert from our very own Global Voices, and the Garden Choir, both directed by Sarah Dew (who many of you will know as a member of Raven).

This joyful concert celebrating the glory of the season will take you on a feel-good musical journey around the globe – expect soulful ballads and heartwarming folk, up-tempo world music and uplifting pop. It's on Thursday 16 July at 7.45pm.

And looking ahead to our autumn and winter visiting programme, just a heads up on a few things that are already selling well (so you might want to check your diaries and get booking!)

Daniel Kitson's *Thrum* on 4 November is almost sold out, so grab those remaining tickets while you can!



Comedians **Andy Parson** (12 November) and **Simon Evans** (21 November) are also selling steadily.

And our two regular Christmas treats – **Robert Lloyd Parry's** atmospheric candlelit readings of the tales of **MR James** (9 December) and **Holly at Christmas** (10 December) – are, as ever, doing brilliantly at the box office – we expect them to be sold out way before winter starts.

Finally, a word for two shows from our friends the **Isolation Creations**. Their saucy Sunday afternoon drag shows in Eat Me have built up a devoted following – this autumn/winter they're bringing their Halloween treat, **Dead Famous**, on 1 November and **The Christmas Special** on 20 December. With very limited seating, these shows sell out well in advance, so do book if you're keen to see them.



John Tracey is F.A.B.

We were privileged to meet last month with a theatre superfan extraordinaire.

Canadian John Tracey, who lives in Ottawa, has contacted us several times in recent years to request posters for shows here, and we thought his story was so remarkable, it was worth bringing to you in the Circular.



We'll let John tell it himself:

"I've been coming to the UK for 38 consecutive years now. This is my 80th theatre trip: last night was the 1876th play that I've seen over here – the touring production of Midsomer Murders; The Killings at Badger's Drift, in Darlington. Tonight, I'm here to see Spitfire Girls at the SJT."

"I always try to get to at least one new city or town – this time, Colchester and Darlington. This trip is 16 days, and I'll see 16 shows in 13 different cities, using one British rail pass!"

"But in 1989, you couldn't pay me to go to the theatre. I was taking a 30-day trip hitchhiking around Britain. I had this friend in Ottawa, very artsy, and she hounded me to go to the theatre here – it was the last thing I wanted to do. But for three solid weeks, she left voicemail messages on my phone, and I finally caved in."

"So, on day two in London, I figured I'd get it over with. I went to the Palace Theatre – Les Misérables. I went to the box office and said 'sell me the cheapest ticket you have'."

"The music started and, as you Brits say, the penny dropped! I just fell in love with theatre, and on that 30-day trip, I saw 22 productions. That led to one trip a year, then two a year, then three and four – I'm back down to two now because I have a bit of a hip problem."

"About 20 years in, I thought 'wouldn't it be great to open a gallery in Canada to showcase everything I've ever seen?' But the problem was, to start with, I didn't buy anything, not even the programmes."

This is my 80th theatre trip: last night was the 1876th play that I've seen over here.

"So I went on ebay and spent a lot of money on the programmes and posters of plays I'd seen! Some were more difficult: things like Miss Saigon, Les Mis, Phantom, because there's so many multiple casts and I wanted the particular show I'd seen, but mostly I got them.

"And that started me off collecting autographs – I'd wait for the actors at the stage door, and for most of them – not all! – it's a pleasure. I started to make what I call 'mats' of the plays. It's the artwork in a mount, and I get the actors to sign around it. I've got over a thousand.

"It's all on a giant Excel spreadsheet – I have the date and name of every play I've seen, and the name of every actor – and if I have their autograph, it's highlighted in yellow. Before each trip, I go through the spreadsheet and say, 'I didn't get their autograph in that play, but they're in this one I'm seeing on this trip', so I'll bring the programme or mat from that previous show and get them to sign it.

"I'm hoping this year or next to have my first exhibition with maybe 50 to 100 of the plays I've seen showcased.

"I just love it!!! Some of the actors remember me. Here at the SJT, a couple of years ago, I was waiting for the actors from The 39 Steps, and one of them walked out, and said: "Hello, John"! I was just flabbergasted."

John is still searching for certain programmes and posters from his early years of theatregoing – these include: A Taste of Honey and Miss Saigon, both at London's Theatre Royal in 1989; Chicago at the Adelphi, London, in 1999; Twelfth Night at the Albery, London, in 2004; Richard III at the Southwark Playhouse in 2007.

If any of you have them and would be willing to part with them, do please contact John on basienut@yahoo.com

And you can find out more about his extraordinary passion [here](#).

Circle Cafés

Members enjoyed an extremely lively June Circle Café led by our Creative Engagement Co-ordinator, Ernie Acquah, who's also a freelance sound designer.



Ernie explained the work of a sound designer and led members through some riotous audience participation!

Circle Cafés are 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! Thanks for your help.

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



Thursday 6 August: Our 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.



Thursday 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.



Thursday 22 October: Meet the cast of Alison Carr's intriguing new play, *All at Sea*.



Thursday 12 November: Meet our Marketing and Sales Department team and find out what they do.

Thursday 10 December: Meet the sparkling *Puss in Boots* company (please note that this will be an afternoon Circle Café at 1pm as the company will be on stage performing at our usual time).

