

Riding Lights Theatre Company presents

NIGHT FALLS

A NEW PASSION PLAY
BY PAUL BIRCH

PROGRAMME

Directors Notes, with Paul Birch



Welcome to tonight's performance of *Night Falls*.

European theatre-makers have been creating Passion Plays for hundreds of years. Each adaptation of the tale of Christ's journey to the cross seeks to find new ways to engage with and explore this extraordinary story.

It is a story in which its protagonists wrestle with faith, doubt and how the darkest aspects of ourselves might be both confronted and reformed into something different and better. It is a story which takes place in a violent and unstable political world, whilst, at the same time, a spiritual battle is fought, offering a different kind of turbulence.

Riding Lights has been working within this tradition for nearly 50 years. We are based in York, famous for its medieval Mystery Plays, and our city has been fusing faith, theatre-making and community participation since the 14th century. Although we have made work all over the world, we are proud to find new ways to retell ancient stories, partly inspired by our local theatrical heritage.

Our Passion Plays seek to go beyond a simple retelling of the story towards a theatrical experience in which the audience is invited to consider, reconsider and reflect on these events and ideas in the run-up to Easter. For audiences of faith, we hope that new and surprising truths might be discovered. For those unfamiliar with the Passion narrative, we hope these five dramatic scenes offer a glimpse into the pain, struggle and hope which are found in the heart of the biblical account. Our ambition is that this new play is an interesting and provocative contribution to a centuries-old drama and faith tradition.

In *Night Falls*, we chose to explore this epic story through an unusual tiny lens. Jesus spent his final week before his crucifixion in Bethany, most likely at the house of his friend, Lazarus. It seemed extraordinary to us that the road to the cross begins in the house of a resurrected man. Perhaps, the man who has already been through death might have even more reason to try and prevent the inevitable? What happens if others, who follow the new messiah, might actually want him to sacrifice himself? How do the events of the Passion impact the minds and hearts of those closest to Jesus?

For Lazarus, hope is failing, fear is rising, and night is about to fall...



***“Don't want Safe. I want Life.
I want to Rise.”***

Q&A, with Costume Designer Caitlin Mawhinney

How do you begin designing costumes? I read the script a couple of times and trying to understand who the characters are and what their place is in the world. What has their background been? How have they found themselves where they are today? What has influenced their style? Then I gather research from street photography, historic paintings, media references that help me build a vision.

What kind of research goes into building a show's visual world? Especially for costume I am always looking at people around me and what they are wearing, how they carry their personalities in their clothes. And all of that influences how I put shows together.

How closely do you collaborate with the director, set & lighting designers? It's a constant evolving conversation - making sure everyone understands the world we are working in and how each of our disciplines is supporting each other. With Paul we had lots of calls about mess and changes, and with Sean we have adjusted tones to make sure that the scenic finish and colours of the costumes are balanced.

What was your inspiration for *Night Falls*? We knew we wanted this to feel like a world that abridged the original setting of the story and our contemporary world. Paul referenced the film *Winters Bone* as a starting point - in how the detailed wear of the costumes feels real and worn.

How do you design costumes that are both visually striking and practical for performance? It's a balance of finding garments that bring the story I want to portray but also comfortable for the actor to wear, and will last for the run of the show. Especially with the 'mess' that is part of this production, it is important to be creating duplicates of costumes to last.

What's the costume designer's role during tech week? During tech week I will be keeping an eye on how the costumes look under light as colours and textures can change dramatically once on stage. I make sure the actors are comfortable and as that the story of costume changes matches the timeline of events.

Do you have a favorite costume you've ever designed? I worked at The Dukes last year on an outdoor production of *Wizard of Oz*, and there were lots of wonderful characters to interpret! My red wicked witch felt like a stand out, but also a glamorous gate keeper and fluffy lion.

Is there a period or style you love working with the most? I have an interest in historical costume. Previously I designed for *Sherlock Holmes The Opera* and we did an authentically Victorian scheme which brought me great joy.

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more into local world

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Cast

Esther Atkins | Dvora

Esther is an actor and singer brought up in Australia, now based in Kent. Since moving to the UK, Esther has been able to explore the country through touring theatre productions.

Having worked with 4Front Theatre in *Bizarre Bible* and Rise Theatre in *Treasure Within*, Esther is excited to make her Riding Lights debut in *Night Falls*.

Matthew Rutherford | Lazurus

Matthew began his career with Riding Lights Theatre Company in 1996.

Recent stage credits include: *No Such Things As Wolves* (Birmingham Hippodrome); *Good Morning Bill* (Southwold); *The Raven* (Common Ground Theatre Company); and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Changeling Theatre Company). West End credits: *The Buddy Holly Story* (Strand Theatre) and an International tour of *Mamma Mia!*.

Other theatre credits include: roles in *Sweeney Todd* (with Jason Donovan); *Merrily We Roll Along* (Watermill Theatre); *The Inland Sea* (Oxford Stage Company); *Stone Cold Murder* (Vienna English Theatre); *Carmen* (Stephen Joseph Theatre); *James And The Giant Peach* and *The Hired Man* (The Mercury, Colchester & The Curve, Leicester); *A Dolls House* (Ibsen Festival, Oslo).

Television & film credits include: *Kingdom of Heaven* (Ridley Scott); *Commander* (ITV); *PREMature* (Channel 5); *Caregiver* (Philippines); *The Silent Fall* (South Africa); *Hate Story IV* (Bollywood); *Lion of Judah* (US animated feature).

Matthew has also been on tours of *The Happy Prince* and *The Selfish Giant* with the Kings Chamber Orchestra.

Creatives

Paul Birch | Writer & Director

Paul is a writer/director who specialises in creating participatory theatre with and for marginalised communities.

Recent directing credits include: *His Last Report* (Riding Lights/York Theatre Royal); *Switcheroo* (Claptrap Theatre); *Character of Home* (Fairfax House); *The Nuisance Inspector* (York Explore); *Voices of Reason*, *Retail Therapy*, *In/Significant*, *Disturbing Shakespeare* (Out of Character).

He is currently Artistic Director of Riding Lights for whom he has also directed *Christmas Inn Trouble*, *Give It Back*, *Mak* and the recent audio drama *The Passion*. His stage plays include *Legacy* (York Theatre Royal); *Cross Words* (York Theatre Royal/Bristol Old Vic/ Birmingham Rep/Hull Truck/Polka/Plymouth Theatre Royal); *Objects of Terror* (York Theatre Royal/Out of Character); *Filled with Phantoms* (Cheltenham Everyman).

His audio adaptation of *Baron Munchausen*, *The Barren Author*, ran for two series with Richard O'Brien in the lead and was nominated for an off-West End ('Offie') theatre award whilst his audio adaptation of *Passport To Oblivion* won Best Drama at the New York Radio Awards.

Sean Cavanagh | Set Designer

Trained under Ralph Koltai at the Central School of Art and Design. Sean is a long-standing Artistic Associate and director of Riding Lights for which he has designed many productions, including the acclaimed Riding Lights 2012 production of *The York Mystery Plays* and most recently *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Surprise Ending*. London credits include *The Tempest*, *The Mikado*, *The Aspern*

Papers, Sherlock Holmes - The Musical, Of Mice and Men, Treasure Island, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Rat Pack - Live from Las Vegas, Dancing in the Streets, Dreamboats and Petticoats, The Trial of Jane Fonda and The Rubenstein Kiss. Currently he is working on *Conundrum* at the Young Vic.

Caitlin Mawhinney | Costume Designer

Caitlin is a Yorkshire born and bred designer, whose work has seen stages across the country. Caitlin was the winner of the Evening Standard Future Theatre Fund in Visual Design and has continued to gain recognition with nominations for The Stage Debut Awards, the Arts Foundation Futures Award, The Naomi Wilkinson Award For Stage Design and finalist for the JMK Awards. Recent collaborations include Bradford 25, National Theatre, Hull Truck Theatre, Leeds Playhouse, Soho Theatre, Arcola Theatre, Northern Opera, Southbank Centre and Red Ladder Theatre alongside many others. For Riding Lights Theatre Company Caitlin designed the set and costumes for *Christmas Inn Trouble* (2025).

Nikki Crowley | Composer & Sound Designer

Nikki Crowley, a Bristol-based Sound Designer and Composer, is known for her fusion of electronic and live music elements. For this production, she crafts immersive soundscapes and integrates her electronic compositions with a live on-stage musician. Her work spans film, theatre, TV, and radio, featured on BBC and Channel 4 and in recent acclaimed shows at Bristol Old Vic and Tobacco Factory. Nikki is drawn to projects with impactful narratives, using her sound design to deepen the storytelling and create a memorable audience experience.

Yvonne Morley-Chisholm | Voice Coach

Theatre credits include: *Little Women, The Crucible, Two Planks and a Passion, See How They Run, Betrayal* (York Theatre Royal); *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time, One Man Two Guvners* (Royal National Theatre West End transfers); *As You Like It, Measure for Measure, The Taming of the Shrew, Julius Caesar* (Royal Shakespeare Company); *MacBeth, A Midsummer Nights Dream, Richard III, Twelfth Night, Henry V, The Tempest, Hamlet* (Shakespeare's Rose York); *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare's Globe, London); *Our Town Kingston, The Vortex, Wind in the Willows* (Rose Theatre, Kingston); *Salaam Bethlehem* (Riding Lights Theatre Company).

Television & Film credits: *Eastenders, Brookside, Newsnight, Road to Riches, Panorama*; Radio: *Women's Hour, Today Programme*, various radio drama; *Vain Glory, Exile to Restoration, The Forsaken Promise, A Voice for King Richard III* (a documentary about her research to create the literal voice for a long-dead King).

Yvonne is also a director for Riding Lights.

Christie | Movement Director

Christie has worked recently as Assistant Movement Director on *His Last Report* (Riding Lights & York Theatre Royal); *Sovereign* and *The Coppergate Woman* (York Theatre Royal). She has also done Movement direction for various productions with Out of Character Theatre company. Currently she runs an inclusive Adult Dance Company (ADC) with Northern Dance Academy, and teaches physical theatre at York St John University.

RL Staff

Ollie Brown

Executive Director

Paul Birch

Artistic Director

Hannah Carter-Brown

Head of Marketing & Comms

Charis Stead

Producer / Programmer

Rachel Sanders

Company & Finance Administrator

Patrick Burbridge

Marketing & Comms Officer

Rose Batey

Facilities Officer

Bev Wood

Membership & Data Officer

Kelvin Goodspeed

Director: Acting Up!

Sean Cavanagh

Associate Director

Bridget Foreman

Associate Director

Emma and Mike Perkins

Company Chaplains

For *Night Falls* Production:

Jacob Burns

Technical Stage Manager

Set Build

Yorkshire Workshop

SPECIAL THANKS to Nick Page whose wonderful book *The Longest Week* put a creative flea in our ear. To Bridget Foreman and Ian Birkinshaw for all their help in shaping the text. And finally to all our Riding Lights Members, whose regular support makes all of this possible.

In the Rehearsal Room





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MAKE is Riding Lights' dynamic artist development programme designed to inspire, equip and empower theatre-makers at every stage of their journey. We offer courses in York and residential retreats designed to ignite your creativity and nurture your wellbeing. Whether you're looking to sharpen your skills, find inspiration, or simply take a breath from the everyday, our creative breaks offer the perfect balance of learning, connection, and reflection.

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MAKING THEATRE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As a charity, Riding Lights Theatre Company has toured to communities across the UK, performing in churches, schools, prisons, theatres, and on the streets for nearly 50 years. The company is shaped by a Christian ethos, but our work is inclusive, accessible and welcoming to all.

Our productions include new writing such as *His Last Report* (with York Theatre Royal), *African Snow* (UK tour and West End), classic plays such as *The Alchemist* (Coventry Belgrade), *All's Well That Ends Well* (Friargate Theatre) and *The Fire Raisers* (The Bridewell). Alongside this, we make shows that engage directly with social issues, including *Cups on a String* - a UK tour exploring how mentoring young people can be a catalyst for early intervention and *My Place* - examining the impact of fostering and adoption. Entertaining childrens' theatre such as *Christmas Inn Trouble* and *The Selfish Giant* toured to younger audiences all over the country.

We seek to joyfully inspire audiences to engage with ideas surrounding creativity, faith and social justice.

We also run theatre-making courses, summer schools and creative retreats to support emerging and community artists, as well as resourcing schools and churches with podcasts, films and scripts to make their own theatre which makes a difference.

We do all this without public funding or subsidy. Our work is only possible because of the generosity of people like you. If you would like to support Riding Lights going forward, you can make a one-off donation by following the QR code. Better still, you could make Riding Lights Theatre Company your theatre company by becoming a member through regular giving. The amount is up to you - it could be anything from £2 to £200!

Whether or not you are able to give, please subscribe to our mailing list on our website to stay informed about our work.



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