

National Poetry Day and BBC Local Radio commission 12 new poems - celebrating the changes that really matter.

News for release: Monday 18th June 2018: National Poetry Day and BBC Local Radio are joining forces to celebrate the small changes that really matter to people in 12 specially commissioned poems - one for each of the 12 BBC regions in England.

From today, and taking their cue from National Poetry Day's 2018 theme - Change - BBC Local Radio stations across England are calling on listeners for stories of the changes that mean the most to them. The most inspiring of these stories - from personal changes of heart to changes affecting entire communities over time - will then become the creative spark for a dozen new poems by a dozen local poets, to be broadcast on the BBC on National Poetry Day, 4th October.

Across BBC Local Radio, on social media, and in interviews and discussions, people are invited to nominate real-life changes - whether external events that prove to be turning points for a community, or a glimpse of new possibilities that transform thoughts and feelings.

Poets have a special role to play in taking the nation's temperature, for they notice much that escapes the attention of pollsters and statisticians. They transform: even the most everyday words, when set in memorable poems, take on new resonance and significance. The 12 local poets, including Young Poet Laureate for London, **Momtaza Mehri**, award-winning Yorkshire poet, **Kate Fox** and the East Midland's **Andrew "Mulletproof" Graves**, are tasked with making the most of poetry's power to change how we see our world.

Launching the initiative, poet, writer, film and TV producer (Philomena, Alan Partridge, Gavin and Stacey), **Henry Normal**, commented on the power of poetry to communicate his own story of change:

"Change can happen in all sorts of ways and sometimes just one word can make a difference... I didn't write poetry for 25 years but what drew me to writing poetry again was trying to make sense of my journey with my autistic son, Johnny. He's now 20 and one day I took out over a thousand photos of him from age 2 to 20 and could see how he'd changed. The first poem I wrote was about trying to capture the feeling - the truth - of those photos. I think the great thing about poetry is that it gets to the truth of the human condition"

Kate Fox, one of the 12 BBC Local poets commissioned this year, went on to say:

"Change is exciting and terrifying but what better way to think and feel about it than with poetry? I'm looking forward to being inspired by Radio York listeners' stories of change to create something that might act as a spur or a crutch or a talisman. Poetry can make us hear words and stories differently, as if for the first time. They focus our attention and become a small present (in both senses of the word) in the middle of change."

Susannah Herbert, Executive Director, National Poetry Day, said:

“When you want to find out how people in the past really thought and felt, poetry is often a better guide than headlines or statistics. Our poets now are map-makers of the human heart, making visible the changes that count, the ones that escape the notice of satellites and CCTV. In calling on BBC Local Radio’s listeners for the subjects that deserve to be honoured in new poems for National Poetry Day, we are putting poetry at the heart of a national conversation, where it belongs.”

James Stewart, Editor GNS Programmes for BBC English Regions, said:

“Following the success of the last two year’s BBC Local Radio poetry initiatives, we’ve commissioned 12 more vitally important and thoughtful poems for National Poetry Day. Each one will be broadcast on the BBC’s local & regional radio and TV services, as well as being shared on social media. Once again, this inspiring celebration of stories of change through poetry shows BBC Local Radio giving voice and expression to the creative energies of England”

For a third year running National Poetry Day is partnering with BBC Local Radio. Last year on National Poetry Day the nation’s great local words were celebrated in 12 specially commissioned poems - one for each of the 12 BBC regions in England - with listeners feeding the creative process by nominating their favourite expressions, from “mardy” to “gurt”. In 2016 the 40 stations of BBC Local Radio marked National Poetry Day by each broadcasting a poem about a local landmark commissioned from 40 #BBCLocalPoets in an unprecedented lyrical mapping of the English landscape. The partnership, which celebrates and promotes poetry as part of everyday life, has reached millions across BBC Local Radio and on BBC regional TV 6.30pm news (England) - the most watched news bulletin across the BBC.

National Poetry Day (4 October 2018) is a mass celebration of poetry that annually engages people across the country with reading, writing, performing and listening to poetry. It enjoys very high participation rates, especially online and in schools and libraries: supporters include the Royal Mail, the BBC, and HRH the Prince of Wales. It is co-ordinated by Forward Arts Foundation, a charity which brings together leading poetry, literacy and literary organisations around a common purpose: promoting the enjoyment, discovery and sharing of poetry.

For further information, visit <http://nationalpoetryday.co.uk>

To share a story of change on social media use #PoetryforaChange #BBCLocalPoets

Media contacts

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Notes to editors

How the initiative works:

BBC Local Radio programmes will be calling for inspiring stories of change from Monday 18th June. 12 stories will be chosen - one for each of the 12 BBC regions in England - by a team of BBC producers. These stories will then be given to a local poet to inspire a poem for broadcast on National Poetry Day.

The 12 BBC Local Poets for 2018 by region are:

Rowan McCabe	BBC North East & Cumbria
Nicole May	BBC North West
Kate Fox	BBC Yorkshire
Kirsten Irving	BBC Yorkshire and Lincolnshire
Andrew "Mulletproof" Graves	BBC East Midlands
Sebbie Mudhai	BBC West Midlands
John Clegg	BBC East
Angela France	BBC West
Abigail Parry	BBC South
Momtaza Mehri	BBC London
John McCullough	BBC South East
Katrina Naomi	BBC South West

NATIONAL POETRY DAY

National Poetry Day is an initiative of the Forward Arts Foundation, a charity that celebrates excellence in poetry and widens its audience. National Poetry Day brings together leading poetry, literacy and literary organisations around a shared purpose: promoting the enjoyment, discovery and sharing of poetry.

<http://nationalpoetryday.co.uk>

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