

Press Release

Monday 3 August

Man on the Moon prepares for blast-off in County Durham

A new family theatre production will be touring the North of England this autumn and children from County Durham have been helping the creators come up with ideas for the show.

Man on the Moon is a theatre adaptation of the award-winning picture book by Gateshead author-illustrator Simon Bartram. Produced by New Writing North in association with Sage Gateshead for Durham Book Festival, the production will feature original live music and will tour to libraries, community centres and primary schools.

The story follows a day in the life of Bob, an ordinary man who happens to have the most extraordinary job of caretaker and tour guide on the moon. Bob is very orderly, sensible and likes to keep things tidy (a bit like mum and dad). He knows everything there is to know about the lunar landscape, and if there is one thing he's sure about, it is that there is no such thing as aliens.

The children at Pelton and Greenhills Community Centres are not so sure.

In both community centres, families have worked with director Ruth Johnson, writer Zoe Cooper and performer Claire Tustin to share their ideas about how to transfer the story from picture book to stage.

The children have been showing the team how to walk and

dress like aliens. They have made alien artwork, and even written new alien songs and played along on their own instruments.

It's fair to say that they have had a few ideas that Bob might find perplexing.

Luckily, they are also huge fans of Bob's. At Greenhills Community Centre, the children made ties and tank-tops, as well as their own space helmets, so that they could dress up like Bob. They even wrote their own list of rules for the Bob Fan Club.

Now, the organisers want to encourage other fans of Bob to join in by posting their own photographs and videos to the tour's Facebook page. To encourage children to take part, they are offering five signed copies of the picture book *Man on the Moon* to the most convincing Bobs.

Director Ruth Johnson was impressed by the creativity of the children she worked with. "We have been so overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the children and their families in engaging with the story and I look forward to seeing how these ideas can help inform the production," she said.

This is Ruth's third year working with New Writing North and Sage Gateshead on their touring theatre production for young children. In 2013, the team produced *My Granny is a Pirate* and in 2014, *The Worst Princess*.

Ruth said, "The project has had a profound effect on me as a director. The production is aimed at children under 7, and so is often the first theatrical experience the audience may have. I feel very lucky to be involved with creating shared family memories and encouraging a lasting love of sharing

stories.

“Creating work for children means creating work for some of the toughest critics out there. If they don't like it they will certainly let you know! Being able to work directly with young people and their families as we create the piece allows us, and them, to ask questions, to try out ideas and for our audience to build a connection and ownership of the work.”

Claire Tustin is one of four musician-performers in the production and, like Ruth, has worked on the last two tours. In her day job as Schools and Family Learning Programme Leader at Sage Gateshead, she runs music workshops for children both within and outside of the venue.

Claire said: “This is the first year that we have been able to work with some of the communities prior to creating the production and I am extremely excited about this. Working with children always helps inspire the songs I write. Children are so naturally creative and playful, and it has been really helpful to get their input and to see things slightly differently. These workshops are going to help everyone involved in the show to create something really special.”

Claire will be joined in the cast by Calum Howard, Samantha Morris and Matthew Smith.

Anna Disley, programme director at New Writing North, is producing *Man on the Moon*. “We are incredibly excited to be touring a brand new production for under 7s and their families this autumn. We feel very lucky to have Simon Bartram’s permission to adapt his much-loved picture book. He has created such a rich, vivid world, which really speaks to the imagination.

“As we tour to libraries and community centres across the north we are running a range of events, workshops and projects in addition to the show, which give local people a chance to get involved in arts activity. An important feature of this tour is that we are visiting many rural areas and small towns and villages – places without their own theatres. We want to show our audiences that theatre and art can take place wherever you are. It’s not about the big stage and the fancy setting, but about the fun you can have when you let your imagination run wild. This is something that all children are brilliant at, which is why they are a key part of our development process. As with the aliens, children are often fantastic at spotting things that adults don’t notice.”

But there is no such thing as aliens, is there?

You will have to watch the show to find out...

Man on the Moon tours the North of England from Saturday 26 October to Sunday 1 November 2015. For all tour dates, see www.manonthemoontour.com

To add your own pictures to Bob’s fan club, and be in with the chance of winning a signed copy of the picture book, *Man on the Moon*, visit <https://www.facebook.com/manonthemoontour>

High res images are available at this link <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/uza9yt3ianijb3g/AAAwFPoN81pAMzvSED934VQDa?dl=0>

For all media enquiries including alternative images and interview requests, please contact Laura Fraine at New Writing North on 0191 204 8854 or laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com

NOTES TO EDITOR

Man on the Moon is a Durham Book Festival commission, produced by New Writing North in association with Sage Gateshead, with funding from Arts Council England's Strategic touring fund.

New Writing North is the writing development agency for northern England, and opened in 1996. In 2012, New Writing North joined Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations and now works on projects across the greater North.

New Writing North works with writers to develop career opportunities, new commissions, projects, residencies, publications and live events. It works in partnership with a broad range of organisations, universities, local authorities, regional development agencies, sponsors and media producers to develop opportunities for writers in our region.

Durham Book Festival takes place in October 2015 at venues across County Durham with events for all ages. Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council festival produced by New Writing North, which is made possible by support from partners Durham University and Arts Council England.

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