

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Press release -for immediate release

Durham Book Festival 2021 begins

The North East's biggest book festival is back with a bursting programme of both IN-PERSON and ONLINE events with headline guests including Lemn Sissay, Val McDermid, Anita Rani, Ed Balls, Pat Barker, Leïla Slimani, Fiona Hill, Mick Herron, and The Gordon Burn Prize

As soon as the autumnal nip is in the air, it means one thing for the North East's book-lovers: Durham Book Festival is back!

Durham Book Festival is commissioned by Durham County Council and produced by New Writing North, with major support from Durham University and Arts Council England.

After a fully digital event in 2020, the 2021 festival combines a packed online programme (9-17 October) with a live festival weekend at Gala Theatre (14-17 October).

So, however you like to engage with books, ideas, and your favourite authors, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved!

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL ONLINE

Grab a £20 Digital Pass for the opening weekend of the festival (9-10 October) to get access to over 20 festival events, including those with Pat Barker, Francis Spufford, Sarah Winman, Musa Okwonga, Anita Sethi, Hadley Freeman, Fiona Hill, Tawseef Khan and more.

You can also buy individual tickets for these digital events for just £5 per household. Each event premieres between 9 and 10 October and you can watch it back at a time of your convenience until 31 October.

Children can also take part in FREE activities and workshops based on this year's Little Read picture book, *Look Up!* by Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola. Copies of *Look Up!* have been sent to every primary school and nursery in the county and families and schools are invited to join in the fun online, with highlights including a draw-along session with illustrator Dapo Adeola.

COMMISSIONS PROGRAMME

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New writing is something that sets Durham Book Festival apart from its peers, and this year all of the new commissions are FREE to watch as part of Durham Book Festival Online.

The commissions programme offers new content in the form of videos, essays, podcasts and walks that you won't find anywhere else. Lull yourself off to sleep with three new 'nodcasts', or sleep podcasts, by Salena Godden, Andrew McMillan and Jenn Ashworth. Engage with Disability and the Politics of Visibility with a daily short by disabled artists Dolly Sen, Cheryl Martin, Jamie Hale, Steph Robson and Sophie Woolley. In another daily provocation, world-class academics from Durham University offer their 'Ideas for Positive Change', from nature conservation to health research.

Growing Home by writer Jodie Russian-Red explores the place where gardening, memory and emotion meet; while Louise Powell's film Counter Culture is a celebration of working-class life. Dawn Chorus, by Linda France, Christo Wallers and a chorus of voices, is a climate emergency call-to-action, asking us to imagine the world if we could begin again. Linda France has also created a podcast series, In Our Element, in which she speaks to activists, scientists, writers, and thinkers about how we can all engage a radical change of hearts and minds.

LIVE EVENTS AT GALA THEATRE

For many of us, Durham Book Festival is synonymous with meeting our favourite authors in person at the theatre, and the final weekend (14-17 October) offers just that. For most live events, a live-stream is also available, allowing you to watch from home if you prefer.

The weekend kicks off with the announcement of the Gordon Burn Prize (14 October), an internationally recognised prize celebrating new books at the cutting edge of fiction and non-fiction. Discover fantastic new books as each of the shortlisted authors reads from their work before the winner is announced. This year's shortlisted authors are: Hanif Abdurraqib, Sam Byers, Jenni Fagan, Doireann Ní Ghríofa, Salena Godden, and Tabitha Lasley.

Elsewhere in the weekend be entertained by Ed Balls' tales of family kitchens and Westminster dining halls as he talks about his memoir, *Appetite*. Discover brilliant new historical fiction from Denise Mina and Lucy Jago. Don't miss the queen of crime, Val McDermid, as she unveils her first new series in 20 years, *1979*. Host of *Woman's Hour* and *Countryfile* Anita Rani reflects back on her coming-of-age years as a British-Asian woman in a memoir that is both poignant and hilarious, *The Wrong Sort of Girl*.

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North East writers make a strong appearance. Michael Chaplin talks about his long-time love affair with Newcastle United. Rowan McCabe's brilliant new show *Hopeless Romantic* deals with imposter syndrome. Chris Mullin looks at the rise in English nationalism, and thriller writer Mick Herron charts his career from growing up in a working-class family in Newcastle to topping the bestseller lists. Beloved children's author David Almond shares his latest book for a family audience, *Bone Music*, in which the heroine Sylvia moves into wild Northumberland from the city of Newcastle. A special event, *African Lives in Northern England*, launches a new booklet celebrating the history of Black lives in the North.

Finally, don't miss the festival's Big Read, the incredible memoir, *My Name is Why*, by Lemn Sissay. Lemn will be appearing at Gala Theatre on 16 October to talk about his quest for identity and belonging following a childhood in the care system. Pick up your free copy of *My Name is Why* at libraries throughout County Durham.

Rebecca Wilkie, Senior Programme Manager (Festivals and Events) at New Writing North said: "We're so looking forward to welcoming people back to live events for Durham Book Festival this year. It will be so great to see you and to spend time doing something we all love again, meeting authors and sharing a love of books, writing and new ideas. We also know that not everyone will feel ready to return to theatres just yet, so we're also offering a fantastic digital programme and the option to watch some of our live events as live-streams. Books have been such a solace and joy to so many of us over the last 18 months, we hope there's something in our programme for everyone. We hope Durham residents will drop into their local branch library to pick up a copy of our Big Read title *My Name is Why* by Lemn Sissay and Durham University staff and students can also collect a copy from the Bill Bryson Library on campus."

Cllr Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet member for economy and partnerships at Durham County Council, said: "With the nights starting to draw in and the temperatures falling, there is nothing better than settling down with a good book. And if you are looking for inspiration for your next literary adventure, Durham Book Festival's action-packed programme has something for everyone.

"Events like Durham Book Festival not only provide entertainment and escapism, but they also support a prosperous economy. By attracting more people into the county, they help boost the takings of local businesses. At the same time, staging such events raises our profile as a cultural destination. That is why festivals are such a key part of the Durham 2025 campaign, which has helped secure County Durham a place on the longlist for the prestigious title of UK City of Culture 2025."

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To book tickets for Durham Book Festival or watch one of the commissions, visit www.durhambookfestival.com

To find out more about the Durham 2025 campaign, visit www.durham2025.co.uk

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High res images relating to festival highlights can be found via this link: [New Writing North - Author images DBF2021 - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

For all media enquiries, including interview requests, review tickets, photographers' passes and any other images, please contact Laura Fraine laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com 07411 164 837 or 07840254153

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