

**Norwich
Theatre**

**Annual
Review
2024**

Welcome

Welcome to this look back over 2024.

2024 was certainly another jam-packed year, sitting right at the heart of our four-year Creative Experiences strategy.

This year saw us drive forward in each of our strategic pillars and realise some long-held ambitions in delivering a range of large-scale projects.

Any strategy is a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but it is also a roadmap to another place. At this point in time, as well as achieving beyond our expectations against our current plan, we are laying amazing groundwork for future ambition way beyond this strategy and into the next.

A big personal highlight of the year for me has to be Carlos Acosta's Nutcracker in Havana. It is a project of the kind of scale that previously we could only have dreamed of undertaking. For me, it pulled together how we represent every single one of our values in one project. As I write this, the show has become a phenomenal success and will continue to support the organisation in years to come. It has also been game-changing in terms of transforming Norwich Theatre into a major contributor to newly produced work in the country. I will forever be grateful to Carlos for trusting us with his vision for such a special project as a way of supporting our vision for a new future as a producer of the highest quality work, and I am delighted that this bravery more than paid off on every level.

Once again, our programme of work beyond our stages goes from strength to strength, whether that is the incredible work with the Wensum Trust partnering with Norfolk schools to deliver some groundbreaking creative opportunities that have now been recognised as best practice in its sector, major community engagement initiatives, or our ever-popular Creative Matters season.

It is amazing to me that Creative Matters is about to celebrate a milestone 10th season. When we introduced the season back in 2017, it was all about bringing new audiences in and giving communities united by shared identities,

similar lived experiences or commitment to a specific issue a safe place for discussions and connections to be made, stimulated by creativity in all forms.

That power of bringing people together to explore issues was seen throughout the Creative Matters: Kindness through Creativity season this year, from the local business community getting together to children taking part in a creative workshop. The Creative Matters programme gets stronger every year and exemplifies everything the Creative Experiences strategy set out to represent.

One of the things I was most proud of in developing this strategy was that it was genuinely co-created. This process of reaching out and bringing people in made the whole team here feel that it was achievable, albeit really ambitious, if we were to make this co-creation process meaningful by living it out as we move forward.

As we rapidly head into the next strategy, we want to drive that even further, and we will do that with the strength of our Creative Assembly, which is now fully established. This will give us new avenues to consult and co-create with the needs of those we serve front of mind as we navigate what the world has in store for us over the next few years and how Norwich Theatre can play its part at a local, regional, national and international level.

I hope you enjoy reading about our year together and, like me, look forward to what the next 12 months will hold.



Stephen Crocker
Chief Executive & Creative Director





CREATIVE MATTERS

Kindness

THROUGH CREATIVITY

Kindness is one of our core values because we know that creativity thrives in a kind environment where you have the freedom to express yourself, learn from your experiences, try new things and make genuine connections.

Creative Matters: Kindness through Creativity explored how creativity and the arts can inspire change, tell unheard stories, build compassion and create a fairer and kinder society.

Since 2017, Creative Matters has focused on important issues that affect people of all ages and backgrounds. Each season features a mix of performances, films, exhibitions, workshops and events and involves artists, storytellers, local communities, and creative partners to stimulate discussion and make connections.

Throughout this season we directly engaged 530 people in a whole range of activities and more than 19,000 in the broader programme with headline shows such as *Boy at the Back of the Class* and smash hit musical *Come From Away*. The season included free Sunday film screenings, workshops with Norfolk & Waveney Mind, school holiday workshops and exploration of the theme in our Take Part groups. More than 90 individuals from businesses across the region come together to explore what paying it forward truly means in practice for the local business community.

Alongside a public programme of shows, talks, workshops and activities for all ages, we commissioned a visual art installation for a lasting legacy that reflected the community's voices and represented the communal impact of kindness within our spaces.

We have included Creative Matters: Kindness through Creativity activities throughout this review. For more information on Creative Matters visit our website.

"Anything that promotes and allows us to bring more kindness into a world of unkindness can only be of benefit"

Participant feedback, Kindness through Creativity



Christmas Appeal raises more than £17,000

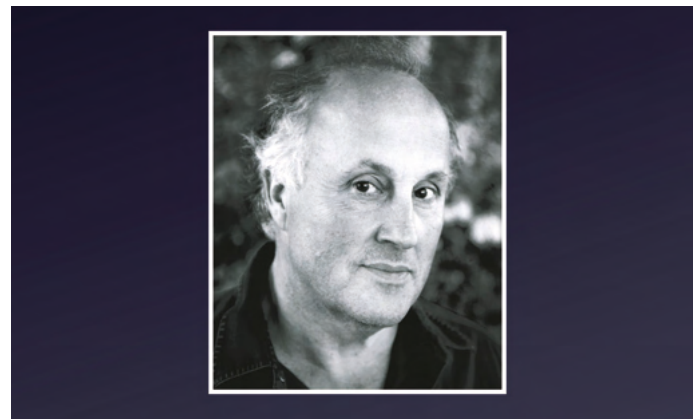
Alongside a successful pantomime season of *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Fairy's Tale*, we raised £17,306 in our annual **Christmas Appeal**. Donations were made online, and with bucket collections at the end of the panto, our Christmas shows at Norwich Theatre Playhouse and Stage Two, and at the end of *She Go Looks Back At 2023* at Norwich Theatre Playhouse.

The theme for the appeal was sharing the joy of creativity with those who need it most, focusing on breaking down barriers to make sure that everyone can take part in our creative experiences. The money raised in the Christmas Appeal has helped us engage children and young people in schools within some of the most deprived areas of Norwich.

We have supported pupils and teachers with the tools to improve social development, confidence, and literacy through creative activities, including storytelling, role play, improvisation, puppetry, movement, and much more. This includes our school partnership work with Ormiston Victory Academy, Catton Grove Primary School, Mile Cross Primary School and Wensum Trust. The appeal has also supported our Teacher Network, bringing together teachers who often feel isolated to explore current challenges in schools.

"We are extremely proud to say Norwich Theatre is one of our partners. It feels like a true partnership. You get schools. The child experiences you offer are exceptional. It allows our students experiences they would never usually access."

- School partner feedback



Commemorating Peter Wilson MBE 1951 - 2023

Along with the producers we jointly offered 500 free tickets to **The Woman in Black** to schools and community groups in Norfolk to mark the inspirational legacy of Peter Wilson MBE.

The original producer of this production and founder of PW Productions, Peter, combined his work as a commercial producer with being Chief Executive of Norwich Theatre Royal from 1992-2016.

The Woman in Black is a play that is regularly on the school curriculum, and is a popular choice amongst school groups, with 46 schools attending the performances during the week.

Zimbabwean singer, musician, and storyteller, Anna Mudeka, brought the story of iconic South African artist and civil rights activist Miriam Makeba to the Playhouse stage with a sell-out performance of **Mama Afrika**.

Norwich Theatre Playhouse was the first venue on the Mama Afrika tour, where Anna retold the remarkable story of a woman who came to be known as Mama Afrika. The show charted her rise from the townships of South Africa to a global star who was forced into exile for her stand against apartheid and marginalised for championing Black rights.

Mama Afrika was part of Norwich Theatre's Artist Development programme, which develops and engages local talent to maximise Norfolk's potential as a brilliant place to be an artist and create new work.

Before the show, Anna hosted a free workshop for 11-16-year-olds to learn and sing Miriam Makeba songs of resilience, hope, and determination.



This page: Mama Afrika © Gideon Graylyons

JANUARY



Creative Assembly established

We announced a new and exciting leadership initiative - Creative Assembly - to diversify the voices across theatre leadership and governance and insure authenticity in creative direction strategy.

The Creative Assembly is made up of five groups, including Theatre Disruptors, Community Connectors, Young Cultural Leaders, Creative Advisory Group and Associate Company.

This is all about co-creation and involves audiences, participants, artists, stakeholders, communities, and partners that represent the region's makeup to help us deliver our Creative Experiences strategy.

With the Creative Assembly now established, we have a permanent rolling consultancy with communities, audiences, and artists, creating a space that fosters open dialogue, encourages questioning, and values listening.

"I am excited to be part of the conversation that has the potential to increase human connection and community with Norwich Theatre. As a disruptor, I feel it is important to raise questions and challenge the status quo. My aim is to inspire equality, inclusion, and champion the ability of theatre to bring people together and change lives."

- Theatre Disruptor



RSC First Encounters

Norwich Theatre is a partner theatre with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and we are part of the RSC Associate Schools programme, which enables us to bring First Encounters, an introduction to Shakespeare on stage for children and families.

Romeo and Juliet was performed by professional actors at Norwich Playhouse, as well as Hellesdon High School and Acle Academy. Pupils from both schools also had several opportunities to get involved in the production reworking of the Prince of Verona's role, with ten pupils performing as members of a Prince's counsel.

The RSC Associate Schools programme offers schools CPD for teachers, First Encounters and Playmaking Festival for pupil's to get immersed in Shakespeare.

"It's been such an exciting opportunity for our pupils to get to work with the RSC and experience what a professional rehearsal and show process entails. Our hope is that we can continue to develop our relationship with the RSC to ensure exposure of the arts to our Hellesdon community, drawing in people who might never have been to the theatre or who feel intimidated by seeing a Shakespeare play."

- Head of Performing Arts at Hellesdon High School



Artist Network

A group for professional and aspiring artists in the region, was launched. The Artist Network provides a rolling programme of free workshops that supports creative and personal development while providing opportunities for artists to meet and network.

The network was launched with three events: a social/networking event, an Arts Council England (ACE) grant-writing tutorial, and a creative workshop in physical theatre.

Theatre of Possibility

Partnering with Break and Norfolk County Council we co-created an inspirational holiday programme of creative workshops, talks and industry insights, giving young people insight into the process of theatre making, on and off stage.

Working with groups of care-experienced young people, this project explored routes of access into the industry, resilience and teamwork, and creative approaches to sharing stories and processing life's experiences.

"[The Theatre of Possibility] project also had a huge impact on us as professionals; we could see in action how those young people were healing. Traditional approaches like therapy sometimes don't work for young people in social care, they find it hard to talk. They were processing stuff in a safe environment creatively, which helped them make sense of it. It was so powerful."

- Children and Young Peoples Participation Coordinator

FEBRUARY



New partnership brings fresh musicals

Our new musical theatre partnership, Rewrites, with the Lowry in Salford, Birmingham Hippodrome, and MAST Mayflower Studios in Southampton, kicked off this month. This platform puts shows on their feet and in front of an audience for the first time, offering audiences a chance to be part of the journey from the very start.

As a consortium, we work together to select a musical in development and tour it across all our venues. This not only allows work to be tested differently but also gives artists a chance for wider support. It provides artists an opportunity to play with the genre, pushing the boundaries of what musical theatre can be.

The programme brought Sheep Soup's **Nel's Place** musical about hoarding to Norwich Theatre Stage Two.

"It's a brilliant way of connecting companies and shows with audiences throughout the process... It's rare that original musicals make it to the stage, so it's a dream opportunity to surprise audiences and take a risk on something they haven't seen before."

- Artistic Director, Sheep Soup



Theatrical magic at Stage Two

It wasn't just new musicals in our studio venue, Norwich Theatre Stage Two. We had an eclectic mix of performances, from a thought-provoking look at brotherhood and disability with **James Gardner: Born in a Wheelchair**, a funny reflection of self-discovery and sexual expression in **Rosy Carrick's Musclebound**, and even English Touring Opera's **The Great Stink**, an introduction to opera for families about Victorian London.

Pay in Instalments

To ensure theatre is accessible to as many people as possible we introduced **Pay in Instalments**, a new scheme enabling audiences to spread the cost of their theatre tickets over three consecutive months with no interest added.

The scheme follows the success of our **Panto Payments scheme**, which was trialled last year to enable audiences to spread the cost of pantomime tickets. It applies to all shows at all Norwich Theatre venues and can also be used for Take Part activities.

From its launch in March to the end of 2024, more than 1,100 theatregoers used this option to pay for tickets. Notably, 46% were completely new bookers to us.

We continually seek talented and celebrated choreographers, dancers, and artists worldwide to captivate our audiences. As one of 21 venues in the Dance Consortium, we promote and present international dance across the UK and Ireland.

This year saw one of South America's leading dance companies, **São Paulo Dance Company**, visit Norwich Theatre Royal. We were the last stop on their first-ever UK tour, where audiences were treated to a combination of contemporary dance techniques and the rhythm and physicality of Latin American dance in three bold, contemporary works by three choreographers, Goyo Montero, Nacho Duato and Cassi Abranche, rooted in Latin American or Spanish culture.



This page: São Paulo Dance Company, © Tristram Kenton
Top left: Nel's Place
Top right: English Touring Opera: The Great Stink, © Julian Guidera

MARCH



Pride of place

As a local theatre, we know the importance of the communities around us. We believe in opening our doors to everyone, whether they're neighbours or share a common interest, and giving them chances to be creative together.

We have been working hard to collaborate with our brilliant audiences, taking pride in our place, in our city, and supporting civic pride and togetherness wherever we can.

We can't achieve this alone. We collaborate with others across the region to reach as many people as possible. It's a privilege to work with organisations as passionate as we are about making creative experiences accessible to everyone.

The year started with us working with our fantastic partners and neighbours The Forum with the **Norwich Science Festival**. The festival champions all things science and technology and showcase some of our city's great work. We hosted some fabulous shows with everything from songs about dinosaurs to a play developed with UCL Neuroscience and the Alzheimer's Society, a TED talking juggler, and a CBBC Operation Ouch presenter.

We continued our collaboration with The Forum throughout the year. In the summer, the **Norwich Games Festival** took over the Norwich Theatre Royal Long Bar, offering retro and modern game consoles for free play.

During the inaugural **Norwich Book Festival** we featured four events in Stage Two, showcasing stories from four different authors.

We proudly celebrated LGBTQ+ life and love in Norwich with our **Norwich Pride** events. We celebrated the day with an extravaganza of activities, kicking off with a musical-themed drag brunch in Prelude and a free party with a host of acts from local drag artists performing before and after the march.

Unique access to Norwich Theatre's amazing archive was available during **Heritage Open Day**, England's largest festival of history and culture. The Norwich Theatre Royal collection came alive with rare programmes, costume sketches, production photos, and more.

Thousands of runners took their mark outside Norwich Theatre Royal for the start of **Run Norwich** – a 10K road race across the city. The runners' families were invited to cheer on their loved ones from the balconies.

This year's civic events were a reflection of our ongoing commitment to our local community as a hub for creativity, connection, and celebration.





First-ever Associate Company

Norwich-based theatre company, **Limbik**, became our first Associate Company, starting a journey of collaboration with us to contribute to audience development, community engagement, and innovative creative practices.

Limbik Theatre creates new theatre and live performances in both the physical and digital space. Led by Sarah Johnson and Ben Samuels, the company's genre-defying work extends from visual storytelling and physical theatre to interactive fiction, 3D spatial audio, site-specific performance, and immersive virtual reality.

Over two years, we will partner with Limbik Theatre, developing existing areas of mutual interest and uncovering new, unexpected opportunities. Their focus will be on investigating the nature of place, the role of communities, and the potential of technology within storytelling.

The Associate Company is one of the five groups that make up the Creative Assembly.

"Having a partner like Norwich Theatre gives us the chance to take bigger risks, reach more people, and hopefully break new ground together. We're embarking on this journey filled with curiosity about where it will lead."

- Limbik Theatre Co-Director



Kindness through Creativity

Our Creative Matters season, **Kindness through Creativity**, launched with **The Boy at the Back of the Class**. Based on the award-winning book by Onjali Q. Raúf, the show is told from a child's perspective, balancing heart and highlighting the power of friendship and kindness.

The year-long season explored how creativity and the arts can inspire change, tell unheard stories, build compassion and create a fairer and kinder society.

Throughout the year, we hosted shows, talks, workshops and activities for all ages to get involved. We also commissioned an art installation symbolising the collective impact of kindness.

We reached a new milestone with our co-production of **Carlos Acosta's On Before**, which stopped at the Sarasota Opera House, in Florida, USA.

First conceived by Carlos Acosta in 2010, *On Before* is an intensely personal evening of dance created, directed, and performed by the legendary Cuban dancer. The 2024 tour also included dates across the UK at venues including Edinburgh, Plymouth, Birmingham and Buxton.

On Before was our first-ever touring production and a true statement of intent to originate and create more small and large-scale work. Since then, we have toured *On Before* across the UK and at Festival Peralada in Spain.



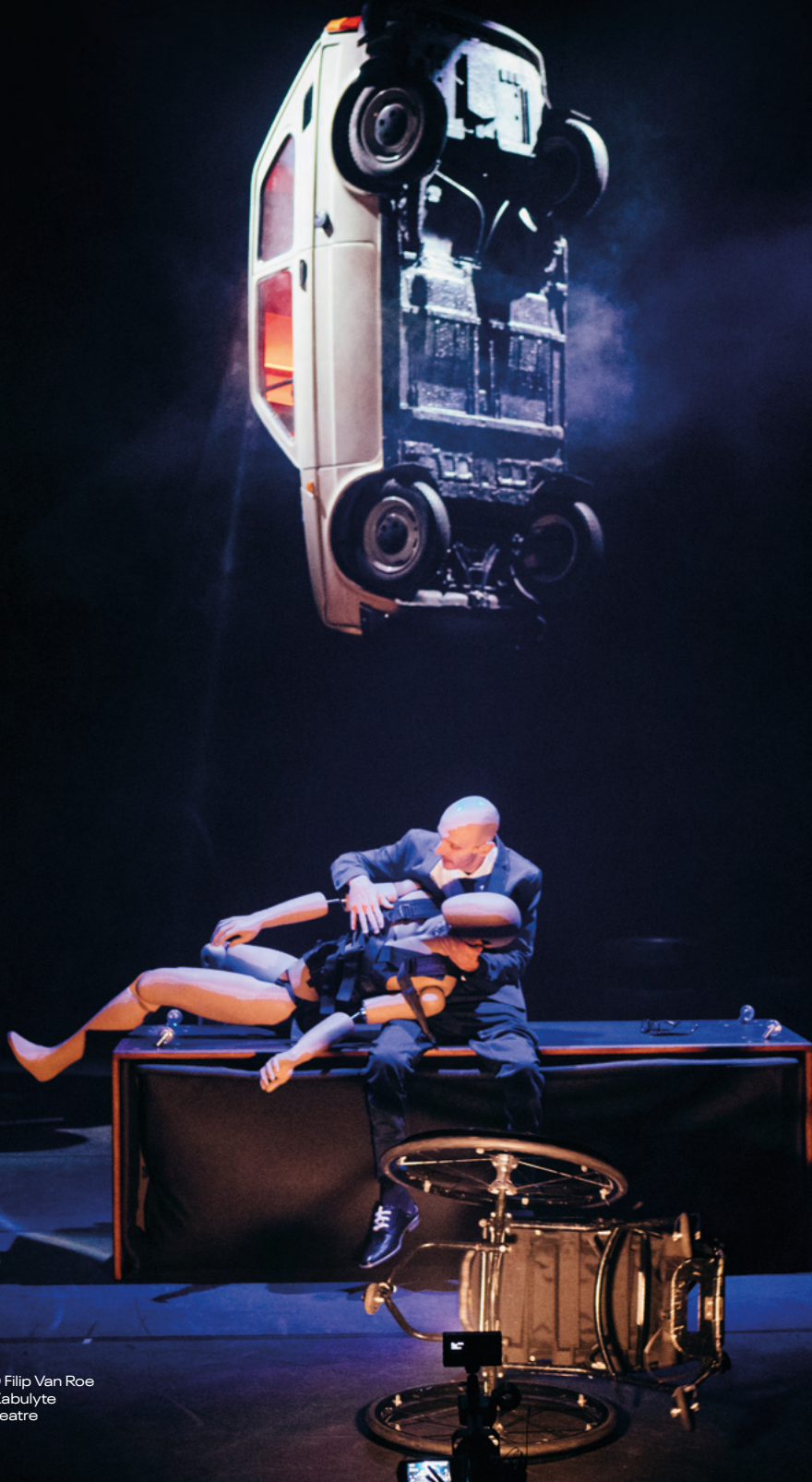
APRIL

International dance and physical theatre were celebrated at this year's Norfolk & Norwich Festival through our collaboration with the festival. Alongside the festival team, we curated a rich programme that featured some of the finest storytelling through movement.

At our venues, we hosted the adaptation of Thomas Hardy's classic *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Ockham's Razor. **Tess** is a thrilling, emotional blend of circus and physical theatre that brings to life the life, love, and landscapes of Hardy's heroine.

We also brought **an Accident / a Life** to Norwich Theatre Royal. The show was a special new collaboration between one of the world's most sought-after choreographers, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, and dancer Marc Brew, who explore life-changing moments in their lives. The starting point of this movement performance was a car accident, in which Marc went from ballet dancer to paraplegic in a split second.

It was a rich visual theatre experience exploring difficult things with and without words using storytelling, film, music, dance and a car on stage. The show was so powerful and emotive and the highlight of the festival for many.



Visit to The Great Hospital

Norwich Theatre Beyond sees us take shows that we have either supported, produced or enabled out of our venues in Norwich into the wider region.

This month we went to the Great Hospital with the electrifying show by Dante or Die, **Kiss Marry Kill**. Unlike a typical show, the performance took place around the audience. With no set stage area, the audience was plunged straight into the grittiness of the story about forbidden and intimate love between two prison inmates.

Ramps on the Moon

We are committed to ensuring that care for wellbeing, access and support are normalised and automatic in everything we do. This year, we were proud to join the latest cohort of **Ramps on the Moon**.

Ramps on the Moon is changing the arts and culture sector by elevating the presence of deaf and disabled people in the theatre, both on and off the stage. We are part of a national cohort of 18 arts organisations to be named a Ramps on the Moon Change Partner, providing peer learning and shared work to tackle ableism.

It is not just about physical access. We are challenging our own thinking, processes, and systems to ensure that everyone has what they need to be able to be their best selves.

We want the sector to get to a point where disability is no longer a barrier to professionals wishing to create theatre, or to audiences coming to experience it.



Public speaking event for young professionals

A public speaking masterclass was held at Norwich Theatre Playhouse for young professionals and our Young Cultural Leaders, thanks to a partnership with the Norfolk Chamber of Commerce's Co.next programme. The session covered connecting with one's voice, building confidence, effective presentation skills, overcoming stage fright, and utilising body language, vocal range, and breathing techniques.

This masterclass marked the beginning of a promising partnership between Co.next and us, which will provide further opportunities for young professionals and our Young Cultural Leaders.

"I found the workshop really engaging and came away feeling prepared and full of courage to take up more public speaking opportunities."

- Young Cultural Leader

MAY



Refugee Week

As a Theatre of Sanctuary, we are committed to being a place of support, safety, and hospitality for refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

In June, we were proud to join many local organisations of sanctuary in Norwich's Refugee Week programme. This included a workshop in partnership with **Norfolk and Waveney Mind** exploring stories of belonging, our sense of home, and our experiences of feeling like an outsider; a **Refugee Week Open Mic House Party**; an opportunity to see and share in the ongoing work of our **Theatre Makers: Being Migrant** and two free film screenings of **Name Me Lawand** and **Migration**.

During the week, Norwich Theatre Stage Two hosted a visual and poetic material exhibition, which included poems written by asylum seekers and a beautiful tapestry created in partnership with the RSC.

"It's so important for the city of Norwich to keep having these types of events. It's only through active dialogue that we have a chance to move the needle on the perception that is so wrongly portrayed by big media and ill-willed politicians. Thank you for allowing the panellists' voices to be heard. Everyone deserves to be seen, heard and cared for."

- Audience feedback, Name Me Lawand film screening and panel discussion



Summer of Kindness

June marked the Summer of Kindness, with drop-in sessions with local artist Chris Jackson to create a unique art installation symbolising the collective impact of kindness. The artwork was inspired by the shimmering, shifting forms of bird murmurations and fish shoals. The installation will represent our collective human experiences.

The summer of kindness continued with free **Women's Stories** sessions. These workshops were a creative space for women to come together to feel seen and heard, to tell their stories and explore how being authentically kind to ourselves impacts our relationships with ourselves, others and our communities. They explored the process of self-awareness and reflection to understand what 'being enough' looks like by using different art forms, including drama, spoken word and movement.

"I enjoyed feeling part of a group of women who were all on their own journey but together in a space of support, respect and encouragement. I enjoyed the drama games to free us up, the check-ins, the exploration of the theme and the reflections. I picked up tools and techniques I can use in my work and that I can use personally- but more than that, I had an incredible experience."

- Participant feedback, Women's Stories



Going Beyond

Outside the Forum, the iconic **DARKFIELD** shipping containers were back once again with two thrill-seeking experiences: **SÉANCE** and **ARCADE**.

DARKFIELD stages shows in complete darkness, using binaural sound – a technique that simulates the hearing cues created by acoustic interaction between our bodies and the environment around us – to create an immersive narrative that is imagined, not seen.

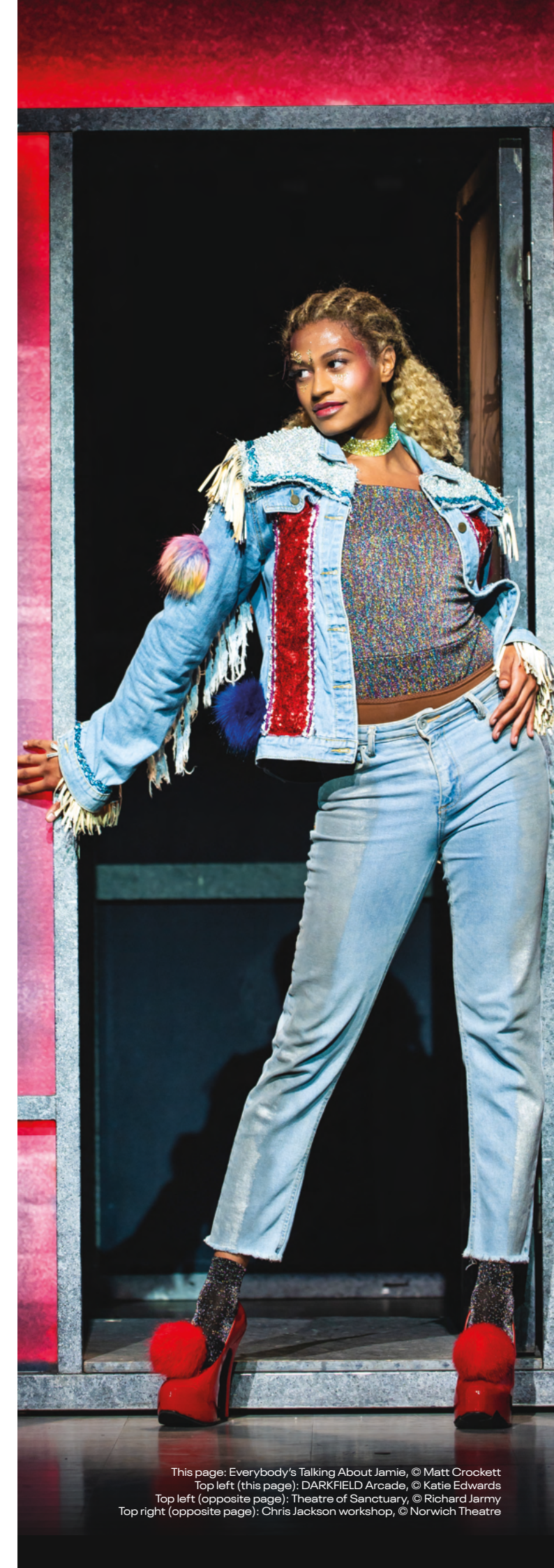
We were proud to bring another two shows to Norwich under Norwich Theatre Beyond, which brings fantastic and enthralling productions to Norwich and Norfolk in unusual places.

Sustainability in focus

The Creative Matters: Climate Stories season in 2023 was a call to action for Norwich Theatre, with the whole organisation inspired by the creative work in its venues.

Changes have included the launch of eco cups at Norwich Theatre Royal and Stage Two. These cups replace the disposable plastic cups taken into the auditorium. They are a great addition to making the theatre more sustainable, significantly reducing our reliance on single-use plastics at our bars.

Alongside this, we have invested in energy-efficient production LED lighting in our auditoria, during our panto we have switched from CO2 haze and dry ice smoke machines to water based solutions and we can already see our staff and volunteers choosing greener options when traveling to and from work.



JUNE



Creative Families

We firmly believe that creative experiences can have a life-changing impact on individuals, and these opportunities should be available to everyone. We want to open our doors to all families and ensure no child or parent misses out on an enriching experience.

However, in today's challenging economic climate, many families in Norfolk are facing more challenges than ever before. With rising living costs, one-third of Norfolk's children are living in poverty, feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Families can often feel that they are facing these struggles on their own.

At Norwich Theatre, we provide a welcoming, inclusive community where parents and children can connect with one another, get creative, and share their experiences.

Our Creative Families programme ensures that all creative experiences for families are accessible to all, regardless of financial circumstances. The programme offers a range of ticketed events the majority of which are Pay What You Feel plus free activities for the whole family to get creative together.

This has been made possible by generous donations from the Alan Boswell Group Charitable Trust, The Geoffrey Watling Charity, the Simon Gibson Charitable Trust, and The Educational Foundation of Alderman John Norman.

Some of the activities include our Imagination Fuel sessions, a series of free workshops that provide families with quality creative time together. To ensure that no child goes hungry, a free lunch was provided at the end of each session.

"Thank you for a lovely workshop, my granddaughter was a bit shy at first but then loved the experience and the fact that the children wrote the story! Your 'pay what you feel' scheme enabled Chloe to attend. Her mum is a single parent mature student midwife with three children and cannot afford holiday activities normally."

- Creative Families participant feedback





Family Festival

This year, the Family Festival returned with a bang for its third outing with lots of free and low-cost activities. The same week as the show **Bluey's Big Play**, activities included a pop-up performance with Sin Cru Dance, a drumming circle, a drama workshop, and more, ensuring there was something for everyone and everyone was welcome at the Family Festival.

More than 255 people took part in our booked workshops this year, with many more dropping in for free activities and events like Family Jam sessions and street dance throw-downs.

"It was lovely to be able to do [the disco] together with both my disabled daughter and my able-bodied daughter and then to enjoy doing some artwork with them and then for there to be a drama workshop to suit one daughter while I took the other to the sensory story. A rare treat for both their different needs to be met!"

- Family Festival participant feedback

TAMED or It's Hard To Get A Real Horse

Norwich Theatre Beyond went to St George's Theatre in Great Yarmouth with **TAMED or It's Hard To Get A Real Horse**, a new theatre show by Flight of the Escapes that takes a playful look at how we are tamed by the structures and systems that surround us.

Written and directed by Sarah Calver, this new piece was made in collaboration with women in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. It was great to see this ambitious work fully realised with communities, having supported its development through our Artist Development programme since 2022.

Festival of new musicals

We love to bring our audiences new work before it goes anywhere else, and this summer and this summer, we brought the vibrancy of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to Norwich Theatre Playhouse with The Festival of New Musicals.

The Festival featured three brand new musicals – **Come Dine With Me: The Musical**; **I Wish You Well – The Gwyneth Paltrow Ski-Trial Musical**; and **SILENCE! The Musical**. All three are delightfully silly and outrageously funny and were with us right before they headed off to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for their debut.

Each show was an hour long, perfect for anyone who wanted to see all three in one day or throughout the weekend. And our audience did, with a third of bookers seeing all three musicals.

This was the second year of our co-producing partnership with Buxton International Festival, which is part of our ambition to produce and co-produce more work and ensure a range of opera is available to our audiences.

As part of this commitment, Norwich Theatre is working with organisations like Buxton International Festival to bring audiences opera that they crave and introduce new audiences to the art form.

Le Tragédie de Carmen, with its recognisable melodies and its focus on the tragic love story between Carmen and Don José, was the perfect opera for audiences both old and new. It combined wonderful production values with accessibility to challenge the perception of who opera is for.



JULY

This page: Le Tragédie de Carmen
Top left: Family Festival, © Norwich Theatre
Top right: TAMED, or It's Hard To Get A Real Horse



Open Day

We once again opened our doors and welcomed everyone to come in and see behind the scenes of our venues with our annual **Open Day**. There were chances to get backstage and on stage, see our Associate Company and other artists from our Artist Network, discover our Creative Assembly and its work, and try on a panto costume or two.

The event was completely free, with guided tours, including **Audio Described**. For the first time, we held a **Quiet Tour** before the theatre opened for the day for those who prefer a calmer environment.

The Tech Talks, where our expert technicians delved into all backstage disciplines and offered opportunities to ask about career prospects, filled up Stage Two. Behind the scenes it is rare that the team gets centre stage but it was great to see them get the spotlight. The Tech Talks were a big hit with over 300 people booking on to them and more dropping by on the day.

The Nimmo Twins

The beloved **Nimmo Twins** have been making the county laugh for over 25 years with jokes that are quintessentially Norfolk. The Nimmo Twins **If You Tolerate Diss, Your Children Will Be Next** was their fastest ever selling show, selling out in just over a week.

The Norfolk duo performed the show at both Norwich Theatre Royal and Playhouse, with 6,572 audience members coming to see the show. Nine people came from the show's title of Diss. 41 people came from over the border in Suffolk, with just two customers coming from Ipswich... we believe they were lost.



Ageless Wisdom

Ageless Wisdom was a pilot two-term project developing Norwich Theatre's work with older adults and ageing creativity. The project aimed to explore, through storytelling, the achievement of wisdom as one confronts the challenges of ageing.

This was a collaborative project between Norwich Theatre and our participants as they worked towards a short piece of theatre that would celebrate journeys of reflection, growth, reinvention and wisdom.

It was an opportunity to begin conversations by introducing new skills, tackling isolation, supporting wellbeing, and continuing to develop a dialogue focused on reinvention, not retirement. The pilot project informed our Creative Ageing programme with a new two-term project that started in the Autumn.

"It gives me more confidence to continue to reinvent myself. I revel in being this new person that I am finding and long may my search continue. It is a very exciting journey."

- Ageless Wisdom, Participant

AUGUST



Back to school

At the start of the school year we took **Matthew Bourne's New Adventures, Doorstep Duets**, to schools across Norfolk. This project offered a free opportunity for pupils at Norwich Theatre partner schools to enjoy world-class performances in their own space, bringing joy, escapism and connection.

We visited eight schools with New Adventures dancers, engaging an audience of around 1,120 from primary, secondary and SEND schools in Norwich and North Norfolk.

The pupils watched a performance of Hum created by choreographer and movement director Anjali Mehra. The new piece explores how one small gesture of kindness to a stranger ripples out to create a community for those who need it most.

"These opportunities change our children's view of dance and theatre for life. It tells them it's something that is not just for the upper class. Before they go onto high school, it allows them to be a part of something so they can then go on and access the arts in high school."

- Partner feedback



Cultural Music Celebrations

Throughout the year, musicians Samia Malik and Pete Murdoch have worked with sanctuary seekers communities to co-create cultural music celebrations, working with communities in asylum hotels in Norwich and Diss, the Norwich International Youth Project, and the People From Abroad Team.

This project, which was funded by Norfolk County Council, saw each group take part in three creative music workshops, encouraging sharing of music, dance and traditions from the groups' cultures, culminating in a sharing event in each location. This project engaged around 300 individuals in a celebration of togetherness.

"Seeing the young people like that was incredible. Their joy is so infectious, and they don't always have many spaces to let loose and have fun. Thank you for the theatre's support in making that happen."

- Partner feedback, NIYP

Partnership with UEA renews

We renewed our longstanding partnership with the UEA by signing an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that builds on the success of recent collaborative work and both organisations' ambitions for the future.

The formal MOU agreement crystallises our shared vision to champion engagement in the arts, build stronger communities, cultural experiences, and career opportunities, and tackle important issues such as climate change. As anchor institutions in the region, we are thrilled to further our relationship and continue to work in partnership to grow a thriving creative economy that benefits the whole of Norfolk.



SEPTEMBER



Carlos Acosta's Nutcracker in Havana

In the next major step in Norwich Theatre's evolution as an originator of new work and creative force and committed to taking Norwich and Norfolk to the world, we co-produced Carlos Acosta's Nutcracker in Havana.

The show premiered right here to a sold out Norwich Theatre Royal in November 2024 before embarking on a nine-date UK tour, including a sold-out week-long run at London's Southbank Centre in December 2024.

Dance legend Carlos Acosta infused the culture of Cuba into the timeless story of the festive classic. Set to an exuberant Cuban newly-commissioned version of the magnificent Tchaikovsky score, it was arranged by Cuban composer Pepe Gavilondo. It featured over 20 dancers from Carlos' Cuban company, Acosta Danza. This traditional story was brought to life with ballet at its core but with Carlos' signature style, seeing dance traditions of Cuba carefully fused and woven throughout the classic tale.

This was a landmark production for us and a realisation of our ambition to originate and co-originate more work right here in our city and take both the work and the brand of our city and county on tour across the UK.

Nutcracker in Havana was our beacon around the country, putting Norfolk and East Anglia on the map as places where international creativity and art are formed. Across the tour, over 33,000 people came to watch the show, with 29% of those who booked new to dance.

The show has been many years in the making, starting with Carlos Acosta's solo show On Before, which we toured across the UK in, Europe and the USA. Carlos understands our ambition and has matched it with his own ambition, passion, and creative vision.

Nutcracker in Havana is Carlos's show and co-produced with his company Valid Productions, but it has Norwich Theatre written all over it. The show was made in Havana and Norwich, and it is really special to have the very best artists in the world making work right here in Norfolk.

And to take that show out on the road with Norwich in its DNA is really special and absolutely a first for this organisation. We were thrilled with the reviews and are now working on the next tour of this show.

This production could not have been made without those who gave their time and patience so readily. We would also like to thank members of our Nutcracker Circle for their generous support of the production.

★★★★

"Acosta has created a fun, festive variety show that is as warm and likeable as the man himself."

The Guardian

★★★★★

Reviews Hub

★★★★

The Times

★★★★

Financial Times

★★★★

The Observer

★★★★

Culture Whisper



Paying it forward

The Norfolk business community came together for **Paying it Forward in Business** at Norwich Theatre Playhouse. The event was part of the Creative Matters: Kindness through Creativity season.

Over three lively and engaged panel discussions, leaders from the fields of HR, coaching, councils, law, and PR came together to demonstrate how kindness plays an integral role in their professional settings.

The purpose of the event was to provide like-minded individuals in the room with actionable steps and guidance to apply within their own organisations, with kindness at the forefront of the discussion.

"I came away from the event feeling blessed that here in Norfolk, we truly do have a community of businesses that work quite closely together and have the paying it forward mindset."

- Director/Founder, Mindset HR



Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine

We were deeply honoured to be the first venue on the **Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine** tour for their first visit to Norfolk. The tour was a symbol of musical solidarity with our friends in Ukraine, and there is always a special atmosphere at Norwich Theatre Royal when a Ukrainian orchestra plays.

The evening was not only a celebration of the rich musical heritage of Ukraine but also Norfolk's own culture of giving sanctuary. We jointly held an event with Norfolk County Council for local dignitaries, Ukrainian guests and a delegation of civic leaders from the Lviv region in Ukraine before the concert to promote the cultural exchange between Norfolk and Ukraine.

We are extremely proud of our status as a Theatre of Sanctuary and are committed to making it an open and safe space for all. To mark this, we worked with partners to invite Ukrainian guests who have sought refuge here in Norfolk.

In reflection of the Creative Matters season and **Come From Away**'s real-life story of compassion, community, and resilience, Norwich Theatre asked its theatregoers to donate non-perishable food items to its two donation points during the 15 performances of **Come From Away**.

Our audiences replicated the **Come From Away** spirit, donating 1.3 tonnes of food in 101 crates across the fortnight run of the smash hit musical at Norwich Theatre Royal. Using The Trussell Trust calculations, this would be enough to provide for approximately 150 food parcels for three days.

This foodbank collection was the embodiment of how one creative action can spark hundreds of little actions of kindness.

"We have been blown away by the generosity of physical donations and of the kindness of so many who came to the theatre recently. The spirit of giving comes through so clearly during **Come From Away, and it was the perfect opportunity to work with Norwich Theatre, and we're delighted that audience members agree!"**

- Project Manager for Norwich Foodbank



OCTOBER



Home

Temper Theatre brought their signature combination of physical movement and innovative staging to Norwich Theatre Playhouse with their show **Home**.

The show addresses the urgency around environmental issues and climate change. HOME uses the landscape of East Anglia's Fenlands as a foundation for this compelling journey battling the elements and time.

Award win

We were extremely honoured to win the EDP Norfolk Business Award for **Positive Impact in the Community**. This award highlights our dedication to working with and for our local communities and is a fantastic endorsement of our vision to offer creative experiences for all.

We try hard to ensure that theatre remains an accessible experience for all and that people do not miss out on the joy of a live performance, activity, or experience. This award recognises the hard work the whole Norwich Theatre team has put into ensuring everyone in the community can enjoy getting creative and reaping the rewards that doing so has to offer.

The judges commended our My Theatre scheme and commented on how our strong values drive our holistic approach to community responsibility.



Joe Tracini sweeps up at documentary awards

Joe Tracini's Channel 4 documentary **Me and the Voice in My Head**, won two awards (Best Documentary Presenter and Best Single Documentary) at the Grierson British Documentary Awards 2024.

The documentary, filmed in part at Norwich Theatre, is an intimate and personal account of Joe's struggles with his borderline personality disorder and focused on his work-in-progress performance at Norwich Theatre Playhouse. The show was called Joe Tracini Needs Help and played to a sold-out audience.

NOVEMBER



Aladdin

This year, we welcomed audiences to Norwich on the Verge for a genie-us Norfolk pantomime adventure! The panto retold the magical story of Aladdin with a Norfolk twist. It starred Joe Tracini, Lisa Maxwell, Tarik Frimpong, Meesha Turner, and Norfolk Canaries icon Delia Smith, who voiced the role of the Great Spirit of Norwich. Owen Evans, best known as one-half of Norfolk's incomparable Nimmo Twins, donned the Dame's shoes for the very first time. Owen brought his love of Norfolk and his comedy prowess to the role of Molly Piecrust.

Aladdin broke Norwich Theatre records with more than 48,000 visitors coming to see the festive pantomime and 23 sell-out performances. We welcomed audiences from far and wide, with audience members from 19 different countries, including Australia, the USA, Singapore, and, of course, the UK. Not only that, but 18% of those who came to see the show visited Norwich Theatre for the first time.

Well over 3,000 tickets were gifted to foodbank users, charities supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and charities supporting those who would ordinarily be unable to attend the panto.

"We watched the opening show, it was incredible! Nothing could improve such an awesome experience!"

- Audience member



Jolly good times at Playhouse

As well as all the panto fun at Norwich Theatre Royal we curated a fantastic festive offering at Norwich Theatre Playhouse, perfect for those theatregoers who were looking for an alternative Christmas offering.

This year the Christmas selection at the Playhouse was called Jolly Good Times and there was a whole host of exciting festive shows. We had Mat Ricardo return with his Christmas Cabaret offering comedy, circus, burlesque, music and guaranteed shenanigans; a Christmas edition of Norfolk's biggest poetry night Toast Poetry; a big Christmas Assembly with all the primary school bangers and Joe Ringer and his big band. The Playhouse was also home to the loveable **The Cat in the Hat** for the first theatre experience and **Ghosted**, the adult twist on Dicken's A Christmas Carol.

Overall, more than 6,500 customers visited the venue over the Christmas period.



DECEMBER



Thank you

It has truly been a fantastic first 12 months as Chair of Norwich Theatre.

I have come into an organisation that is vibrant, strong, and full of ambition.

Looking back over the past year, you can truly see that ambition shining through. I know that it doesn't stop here, and even just being in our buildings, you get the sense that we are on the edge of even bigger things.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Michael Newey, and everybody who has come before me and has given me this opportunity to take on the role of Chair.

I have absolutely loved getting to know everyone, from the staff to the audience members and everyone in between. Everyone has made me feel extremely welcome, and I am extremely grateful. Norwich is truly a fine city, and I may be biased, but Norwich Theatre is a real gem in the region's crown.

While it was my first year as Chair looking through the Annual Review, it was a year of firsts for the organisation as well. We launched our Creative Assembly, took Norwich Theatre to Florida with the show *On Before*, announced Limbik Theatre as our Associate Company and even held a festival of musicals at Norwich Theatre Playhouse.

It was a moment of huge pride that I was able to close my first year as chair with Carlos Acosta's *Nutcracker* in Havana. It was a really special moment for us at Norwich Theatre not only was it a longheld ambition finally realised, but we can truly see that there is appetite for the work we create and the success it can have. This has spurred on our ambitions even further and I cannot wait to see what the future holds.

I am particularly passionate about how the work that we co-produced and co-originated work has local resonance and how it can have a wider impact on our communities. That is why, as we close the year, I am delighted to be working alongside Stephen to bring the many voices from communities across the region together to develop our new strategy. While work is only just beginning on the new co-created strategy, I know I can safely say that it is going to be even bolder than the last.

Thank you all for making me feel very welcome, and here is to a fantastic new year.

Tom Sleigh
Chair of Trustees

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Thanks



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Registered Office: Theatre Street, Norwich NR2 1RL.
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