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Press release
For immediate release

Hey Presto! Magical new theatre production brings all the fun of the fair to communities across the North

A new theatre production for children under 7 and their families is touring the North of England this autumn and will visit 38 libraries, village halls and community centres between 22 September and 30 October.

Hey, Presto! is a theatre adaptation of the popular picture book by author-illustrator Nadia Shireen. Produced by New Writing North for Durham Book Festival, the carnival-themed production promises to bring all the fun of the fair to communities across the North, including to many towns and villages without their own theatre venues.

The production follows sell-out tours of *Man on the Moon* (2015) and *The Worst Princess* (2014) by the same production team.

Presto the cat and Monty the dog are best friends. Monty (played by Matthew Gundel) is great at singing, eating ice cream and pulling funny faces, while Presto (played by Samantha Morris) is a brilliant magician! When the carnival comes to town, Presto and Monty decide to join up with their amazing magic act. The show is a huge success, but fame goes to Monty's head.

Can the friends work out how to work together, before it's too late? Families will have to come along to this musical, magical production to find out!

Nadia Shireen's picture book has been adapted by Laura Lindow, an award-winning Scottish writer/director based in Newcastle, whose writing credits include *Beyond the End of the Road* (November Club), *Up & Out*, *Christmas Sprout* (Northern Stage), *Wee Red* (The Empty Space) and *Your Aunt Fanny* (Live Theatre). Ruth Johnson, who also directed *Man on the Moon* and *The Worst Princess* for Durham Book Festival, directs. The fairground set is designed by award winning designer Imogen Cloët.

The four-strong cast of North East actors includes Ziad Jabero of the Baghdaddies, alongside performers Claire Tustin, Samantha Morris and Matthew Gundel.

Ruth Johnson, director, said: "I am delighted to be working with such a brilliant team of cats, dogs, mice and humans in bringing the magical story of *Hey, Presto!* to so many venues. The story is so rich in fun, friendship and magic and will be an experience for all the family to enjoy. Laura Lindow and I had so much fun sharing Nadia Shireen's wonderful book with young children and we were inspired by their reactions to it and how much they cared for the

characters.”

Anna Disley, programme director at New Writing North, is the producer of *Hey, Presto!* Anna said: “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 Nadia Shireen’s permission to adapt this brilliant picture book, which is full of laughter and fun, as well as a very heart-warming message about friendship and the fact that we are all different but all have our own special talents, which should be celebrated and nurtured.”

“This is our fourth children’s theatre production for Durham Book Festival, and an important feature of the tour is that we visit many rural areas and places without their own theatres. We want to show our audiences that theatre and art can take place wherever you are. We are looking forward to returning to some of the venues we visited last year, and to meeting the children at new venues. Even if you’ve never been to the theatre before, we hope you’ll come along for a fun afternoon of family entertainment.”

Hey, Presto! tours the North of England from 22 September to 30 October 2016. For all tour dates, see www.heyprestotour.com

Ends

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

High res images are available at this link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3qm4e78kpef9k38/AABmY4fPuE9CuZwC4pzwabk6a?dl=0>

Production shots will be available from 21 September

NOTES TO EDITOR

Hey Presto! is a Durham Book Festival commission, produced by New Writing North 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 2016 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.

CREATIVE TEAM

Stage adaptation

Laura Lindow is an award winning Scottish writer/director based in the North East of England. Her writing credits include: *Beyond The End of the Road* for November Club, *Up & Out*, *Christmas Sprout*, under 6s sell-out Christmas show for Northern Stage, *then LEAP* (writer & solo performer) for The Lowry & Ovalhouse which toured in Autumn 2015.

Additionally, Laura is Associate Lecturer for the Performing Arts at UNN and also doubles as 'Dr Lulu McDoo' Lead Clown Doctor for Tin Arts working with hospitalized children and their families.

Director

Ruth Johnson is a director and performer with a particular passion for creating work for children. She loved directing *Man on the Moon* and *The Worst Princess* and is thrilled to be working with New Writing North again for *Hey, Presto!*

Designer

Imogen Cloët is an award winning designer and visual artist based in the North East. Imogen has worked nationally and internationally in site specific installation, theatre and film. She is an associate artist of November Club. Imogen has always loved fairgrounds, circus and magic, and so is delighted to be designing *Hey, Presto!*. Her daughter dreams of becoming a magician..

Performers

Matthew Gundel

Matthew Gundel is London based actor and improviser. Originally from the North East, Matthew is excited to return home for this production of *Hey, Presto!* as he did last year for *Man on the Moon* when he played Bob. Most recently he played Macduff in *Macbeth* at the Steiner Theatre and completed his 3rd Level of improv training with the Free Association.

Ziad Jabroo

Ziad has been a professional musician for over 20 years, he has performed all over the world playing in world music band the Baghdaddies. He has written music and performed for Knee High Theatre company in *Cry Wolf*, and for the

circus production *Flying Dragon*. He has also written soundtracks for a number of short films and animations.

Samantha Morris

Samantha is a North East based actress, originally from Yorkshire. Her recent theatre credits include: *Sleeping Beauty*, *All Creatures Great and Small*, *Be My Baby* - Gala Theatre, *Dick Whittington*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* - Journal Tyne Theatre, *Berth* - Stockton ARC, *Fen*, *Gaslight on Grey Street* - Theatre Royal Studio, *Hull's Angel* - Ensemble 52, *Guineapig* - Hull Truck and rehearsed readings with Live Theatre, *Spelling Bee* - Sage/Whitley Bay Playhouse and *Dolly Mixtures* - Customs House, South Shields.

Television credits include: *The Paradise*, BBC, *Emmerdale*, ITV, *Inspector George Gently*, BBC and most recently *Vera*, ITV. This is her second time working for New Writing North and she is delighted to be part of this project for the second year

Claire Tustin

Claire Tustin is a singer, songwriter, actor, and music educator, specialising in creating music and theatre for children. Previous shows include; *Man on the Moon*, *The Worst Princess*, *My Granny is a Pirate* (all with NWN) and numerous productions with Sage Gateshead including *Get Down with the Animals*, *Winter Wonderings*, and *We're going on a Bear Hunt* with Royal Northern Sinfonia. Claire also likes to work in her garden, and walk in the woods with her family, where she gathers ideas for new stories and songs.