

DURHAM BOOK FESTIVAL

Toby Jones brings St Cuthbert to Durham in Benjamin Myers' *Cuddy*

Durham Book Festival in partnership with Live Theatre present a world-exclusive dramatic live reading from Benjamin Myers' acclaimed novel, *Cuddy*, performed by the award-winning stage and screen actor Toby Jones alongside actress and writer Samantha Neale (Sunday 15 October, Gala Durham).

Toby Jones is well known for his roles in popular film series *The Hunger Games*, *Captain America* and *Harry Potter*, and television series including *The Detectorists* and *Sherlock*. In 2020, he was nominated for an Olivier Award for his role in *Uncle Vanya* at The Harold Pinter Theatre.

Cuddy (Bloomsbury, 2023) is the boldly experimental new novel from Benjamin Myers, the Durham-born author of *The Gallows Pole*, *The Perfect Golden Circle*, and *The Offing*. *Cuddy* is on the shortlist for the Goldsmiths Prize 2023.

The novel evokes the spirit of St Cuthbert and traces the stories of ordinary people connected over 1,500 years to Cuthbert's final resting place in Durham Cathedral.

For one performance only, Toby Jones will bring to life the voice of Cuthbert, the unofficial patron saint of the North of England.

This Durham Book Festival commission is directed by Jack McNamara in partnership with Live Theatre, with music from The Shining Levels.

Durham Book Festival is a Durham County Council festival produced by New Writing North with support from Durham University and Arts Council England. New Writing North leads the development of creative writing and reading in the North of England, identifying talent, creating career-changing opportunities and ensuring excellent writing finds great audiences.

Durham Book Festival takes place 13-15 October in central Durham and livestreamed, presenting 35 events with 40 authors over a long weekend. Other festival highlights include Jeanette Winterson, Janina Ramirez, Grace Dent, Zaffar Kunial, Melanie Sykes, Ruth Ware, Chris Mullin and Sebastian Payne.

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Benjamin Myers said: “To be able to bring my literary interpretation of the life and legacy of St Cuthbert back to the very cobbled streets on which the novel is set feels like an achievement, but to have one of the greatest and most versatile actors of his generation deliver it is beyond a dream come true. What a way to celebrate a saint, a story and a city.”

Rebecca Wilkie, Director of Durham Book Festival, New Writing North, said: “Durham Book Festival has a rich history of commissioning work that celebrates the literary history of Durham. When we read Durham author Benjamin Myers’ glorious and ambitious new novel, *Cuddy*, we knew we had to commemorate it at this year’s festival. It’s a love letter to County Durham, inspired by the enduring influence of St Cuthbert and the lives of people real and imagined, connected to Durham Cathedral across many centuries. It’s wonderful to be working with Jack McNamara and Live Theatre to dramatise an extract from the book and to see it brought to life by brilliant actors Toby Jones and Samantha Neale.

Jack McNamara, Artistic Director/ Joint Chief Executive Officer, Live Theatre, said: “Live is thrilled to partner with New Writing North and Durham Book Festival to bring a fragment of this magnificent North East novel to audiences. And who better to give St Cuthbert a voice than the always brilliant Toby Jones, who we’ve developed a very special relationship with over the last few years. Plus, bringing him together with amazing North East talent in Samantha Neale and *The Shining Levels* will be quite something witness. All hail St Cuddy!”

Cllr Elizabeth Scott, Durham County Council’s Cabinet member for economy and partnerships, said: “It’s an honour to have Toby Jones join us at Durham Book Festival. We’re excited to see how the team will bring Benjamin Myer’s *Cuddy* to life, especially given the significance the story of St. Cuthbert for the County Durham community.”

Cuddy: A Dramatic Live Reading takes place at Gala Durham on Sunday 15 October, 5-6pm. This event will be livestreamed and will be available to watch back until 31 October. Tickets £12 standard, £10 concessions, £5 livestream. [Book online here](#) or call Gala Durham on 03000 266 600.

Find the full Durham Book Festival programme [here](#)

*This event will be followed by a book signing with author Benjamin Myers and album signing with *The Shining Levels*.*

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About New Writing North

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New Writing North is the development agency for creative writing and reading in the North of England.

Based in Newcastle upon Tyne since 1996, it is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. The organisation works in partnership with regional and national partners to produce a range of literary and performance activities including flagship projects such as the Northern Writers' Awards, Young Writers, the Gordon Burn Prize and Durham Book Festival.

New Writing North specialises in developing and investing in writers of all ages and act as a dynamic broker between writers, producers, publishers and broadcasters across the creative industries. Current partners include BBC Radio 3, Channel 4 Drama, Faber and Faber, Hachette Children's Group, Northumbria University and Durham University.

As a producer of new work, New Writing North commissions a wide range of writing from topical essays and publications to award-winning dance theatre productions, short films, live literature and broadcast projects.

New Writing North's extensive and award-winning Young Writers programme develops the creativity and skills of young people. Work in schools with children and their teachers is complemented by a large and diverse out-of-school programme that is open to all, with a special focus on areas with fewer opportunities.

As a promoter and producer of festivals and literary events and through its partnerships with schools, libraries, universities and prisons, New Writing North engages audiences with enriching and creative reading experiences.

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