

PRESS RELEASE: NORTON PRIORY – 16 March 2021

## **NORTON PRIORY LAUNCHES NEW OUTDOOR THEATRE PROJECT**

An exciting programme of outdoor theatre is coming to Runcorn's historic Norton Priory, thanks to the launch of a major new partnership with A Place for Us performing arts community interest company.

The Priory's beautiful grounds, walled garden, monastic ruins and woodlands will be settings for a diverse programme of theatrical and musical productions delivered by new artistic directors Kate Allerston and Chris Bastock.

Celebrating Halton's role as the city region's 2021 Borough of Culture and the UK's emergence from coronavirus lockdown, Norton Priory will provide fantastic new opportunities for both professional and community groups to perform in this magical setting.

The first production will be *'Electric Dreams'*, a professional 80s musical adaptation of Shakespeare's *'A Midsummer Night's Dream'*, which will be performed in the atmospheric setting of Norton's medieval ruins from Thursday 17 – Saturday 19 June.

Other productions will follow and there are plans to develop The Priory Open Air Theatre into a more permanent physical outdoor theatre, nestled within Norton's woodland glades.

Rob Sanderson-Thomas, chief executive of Norton Priory and Gardens, welcomed the new cultural partnership. He said: "Norton Priory and its beautiful grounds will provide the perfect setting for theatrical performances in the summer months. Every year our unique museum and grounds attract thousands of visitors and we hope this will give them a reason to keep returning again and again.

"Norton Priory enjoys long-standing links with culture and the arts. As Halton celebrates as Borough of Culture this year, it seems the perfect time to launch a major new initiative establishing it as a permanent venue for high quality professional and community theatre."

Kate Allerston and Chris Bastock bring a wealth of professional experience to their new roles as artistic directors. They are hoping to curate a diverse range of productions at Norton Priory and would love to hear from professional producers and community performance groups who might want to get involved.

Kate is a professional actor and director and former producer of the national Shakespeare Festival. Chris is an experienced professional musician and former head of the Cheshire East Music Service.

Kate said: "Ever since working on a short creative project at Norton Priory many years ago, I knew how special a place it was, and I harboured a desire to produce and develop theatre here. The stunning grounds and identified performance spaces are the perfect settings which will inspire innovative and engaging theatre programmes going forward. We feel very honoured to be working alongside Norton Priory CEO Rob Sanderson-Thomas and the wonderful team, as the new artistic directors of a brand new venture here."

Chris added: “It is thrilling to start to plan and create a programme of events, whilst developing the outdoor theatre spaces at Norton Priory. We want to produce and provide world class theatre for a wide range of audiences and develop talent from across the borough and beyond. We also welcome other theatre makers and artists who are interested in bringing their projects to the Priory, and would encourage them to contact us for further discussion. We want to celebrate theatre and the arts in all their forms, particularly during the Halton Borough of Culture year and emerging out of lockdown restrictions. We can’t wait to get started!”

Norton Priory and Gardens is hoping to open its doors again to visitors from Friday 16 April for the grounds and walled gardens, and from 21 May for the indoor museum. Tickets for the new production of ‘Electric Dreams’ are now on sale via the Norton Priory website. For more details go to [www.nortonpriory.org](http://www.nortonpriory.org).

#### **Note to Editors.**

**To arrange a media interview with Norton Priory chief executive Rob Sanderson-Thomas, please ring 01928 242022 or email: [rsanderson@nortonpriory.org](mailto:rsanderson@nortonpriory.org).**

**To contact A Place for Us CIC, please ring 07771 862632 or email Kate and Chris at [enquiries@placeforus.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@placeforus.org.uk) . Website [www.placeforus.org.uk](http://www.placeforus.org.uk) . Follow them on Facebook, Instagram @aplaceforuscic and Twitter @aplaceforus2**

#### **About Norton Priory**

Norton Priory enjoys an international reputation as the most excavated monastic site in Europe. Boasting medieval ruins, a 12<sup>th</sup> century undercroft and a beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century walled garden, the visitor attraction is located in an oasis of tranquil woodland and wildflower meadows on the edge of Runcorn. A new museum displays thousands of artefacts from Norton’s 900 year history, including a rare 14<sup>th</sup> century statue of St. Christopher.

#### **About A Place for Us**

Kate trained at the London Academy of Music and Drama (LAMDA) and has worked as a professional actor and director in TV, Theatre and Film for over 25 years. She has been a theatre-in-education professional since 2000, working extensively through the UK and co – produced the national Shakespeare Festival from 2000-2005, before moving back to her northern routes.

She has worked as an arts education and theatre professional in Halton since 2005, alongside running the Heath Perform/LIPA 4:19 performing arts academy & theatre company for over 10 years, producing numerous projects and several large scale acclaimed young people’s theatre productions.

Chris Bastock, a graduate of The Birmingham Conservatoire, has had a varied career as a performer and educator. He has performed extensively throughout the UK, Europe and Asia

as part of 'BackBeat Percussion Quartet', orchestras, brass bands and touring shows. Chris was the Head of the Cheshire East Music Service and oversaw its conversion to a charitable trust, successfully becoming the Love Music Trust and the lead organisation for the borough's Music Education Hub. Between 2015 and 2020 Chris was the Strategic Director for the Halton & Warrington Music Support Service.

In 2017 Chris formed a partnership with Kate Allerston and the Heath Perform Theatre Company debuting as Musical Director for their acclaimed production of Les Miserables. Since then they have produced several full scale musicals which have achieved great success, leading to the recent formation of A Place For Us CIC to enable their theatre work to reach a wider audience and achieve greater participation. Being an integral member of Cultivate, the Halton LCEP (Local Cultural Education Partnership), has seen their collaborations grow from strength to strength in the past year.

**Issued by Pegler Communications on behalf of Norton Priory.**

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