



## **UK's leading theatre company moves to Maldon to contribute to the vibrant cultural arts scene in the South East**

Established in 2003, **The Paper Birds is a socially and politically engaged theatre company with a vision to provoke change** – one encounter at a time – and an impressive national and international reach thanks to its high-quality digital offer.

Following years of producing work, collaborating with venues, delivering mentoring sessions as well as workshops to schools, young people and audiences in the South East region of England, **the Company is moving its base. The relocation from Leeds to Maldon will deepen the roots the company has established in the South East**, allowing them to cultivate the already existing relationships further and establish new and deeper creative connections.

Notwithstanding its impressive national and international reach, the Company has a strong affinity and long-term connection with the region, on both personal and professional level - since establishing themselves within the region The Paper Birds has collaborated with the majority of the South East's cultural hubs including The Gulbenkian, Marlowe Theatre, Oxford Playhouse, Cambridge Junction, Mercury Theatre or Chichester Festival Theatre.

Apart from regular touring in the region, The Paper Birds has delivered workshops, masterclasses and mentoring sessions at various venues and received commissions for a number of theatre productions, including ***Thirsty*** in 2011 which explored the nation's love affair with alcohol, based on real booze-based confessions collected from a 'drunken hotline' and hundreds of questionnaires and ***Mobile*** in 2016, an intimate show set in a caravan and exploring our sense of home and belonging.

The Paper Birds is renowned for their verbatim work - suffice to say that since 2008 all Paper Birds productions have utilised interviews and workshops with communities from across the UK, including the South East, as a way of informing and shaping its shows. This included conversations with a refugee charity, the military army base community, parents of children with additional needs and residents who moved from London to Kent due to lack of housing which will inform ***Estate***, the R&D for a future show about the housing crisis, displaced families and empty luxury apartments.

**Studied as part of GCSE and A Levels**, The Paper Birds is a Company well-experienced in working with schools and teachers and **reaches around 20,000 young people a year throughout the world** through its engagement work.

In recent years, The Paper Birds continued its commitment to producing work for and with young people. Following the success of ***Ask Me Anything*** – a loud love song to not having it all figured out, based on 100 letters from young people – and the international project about empathy, ***The School of Hope***, **The Paper Birds will be working with young people in the South East region at Mercury Theatre, Colchester and Queens Theatre, Hornchurch as part of the R&D for its new show, *Feel Me*.**

**Jemma McDonnell, Artistic Director at The Paper Birds said:** "We are proud to be a small but mighty team with a great national and international reach – something that was perfectly

embodied in our most recent project, ***The School of Hope***, which empowered hundreds of young people in the UK and around the world.

“Now that we are moving to Maldon, I am so excited to continue to expand our reach nationally and internationally but also to bring the work of The Paper Birds to the South East region. We have brilliant partnerships, friendships and support in the region and look forward to making more in the coming months and years.”

**Raidene Carter, Trustee of the Paper Birds and Executive Producer for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Festival** said: “Never has it been so important to recognise the creativity of our towns and small cities across the UK. We know that the South East enjoys a good proportion of public investment in the arts but also that there are many underserved communities in places that are ignored because of their proximity to areas such as London. I’m delighted that we are making this positive move to base ourselves in Essex, where the company has authentic roots and exciting artistic partners, and where we can share the Paper Birds’ national and international expertise in theatre making with, and for, schools and young people.”

**Ryan McBryde, Creative Director of The Mercury** said: “The Mercury has been fortunate to collaborate on several projects with the inspiring team at The Paper Birds - most notably their hugely successful international R&D activity, The School Of Hope - and we are delighted that they have taken up residency in the South East of England.

“The pandemic demonstrated how adept The Paper Birds were at pivoting and their use of innovative digital technology to reach new audiences and tell fresh stories in pioneering ways also makes them an exciting company to partner with as we move into our 50th year at the Mercury.”

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**The Paper Birds** theatre company has been making work with and for communities since 2003. They make theatre using themes that feel important in the here and now and believe that process is as significant and empowering as product. They are known for their use of verbatim and bringing multiple, diverse voices to the fore. They believe people have more in common than that which divides them, and they seek to unite and bring about dialogue in society through our work. Each year up to 20,000 young people around the world engage with their work as participants, audiences or co-authors. Their digital impact has doubled during 2020-21, and continues to grow. They strive to encourage change one encounter at a time; they want people’s lives to be improved by the arts and to encourage agency through the workshops, performances and conversations that they lead.

[www.thepaperbirds.com](http://www.thepaperbirds.com)