

# POOJA GHAI THEATRE DIRECTOR

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**2018 - present:** Freelance Theatre Director: (detailed below)

**2018 - present:** Associate Artist, Kali Theatre; A company dedicated to developing ground-breaking, thought provoking contemporary theatre by female South Asian writers. <http://kalitheatre.co.uk>

**2015 - 2018:** Associate Director and Senior Management Team at Theatre Royal Stratford East: (detailed below)

**2014 - 2015:** Freelance Theatre Director: (detailed below)

**2003 - present:** Corporate Actor/Facilitator/Coach:

- Steps Drama, Interact, Professional Role Players, Roleplay UK; this work involved using drama-based training solutions for corporate clients. It placed me at the heart of conversations regarding corporate structures, strategies, finance and accountability with businesses in both the private and public sector. Training, role-playing and coaching clients on various issues, including but not limited to – leadership & management, team building, employee relationships, diversity inclusion & unconscious bias.

**1999 - present:** Professional actor:

- Working as an actor fueled my passion for creativity, collaboration and storytelling. I have worked extensively across TV, Radio and Theatre – touring productions both nationally and internationally. Being a good communicator, remaining open to diverse emotional and physical situations, being compassionate, empathetic and adaptable have allowed me to keep learning and evolving, to keep finding my voice as an artistic leader and game-changer. My experience has highlighted the barriers within the sector. We have more work to do when it comes to race, class, gender and disability. These demographics are still grossly underrepresented, and as an artist and cultural leader, I am committed to re-dressing the balance.

## Achievements:

- **2018: Winner, Best Director, Lions and Tigers, Eastern Eye Arts, Culture and Theatre Awards (ACTA)**
- **2016 - 2020: Trustee for Artistic Directors of the Future (ADF); 2020: Appointed Co-Chair for ADF** an organisation dedicated to creating change at the leadership level within the creative industries. <https://adofthefuture.com>
- **2017 - present; Trustee for Pop-Up Projects;** an organisation which facilitates access to rich and meaningful literary experiences for children and young people, schools (primary, secondary, SEN) and families, especially in diverse, deprived, isolated and otherwise challenged communities. <https://pop-up.org.uk>
- **2018/19: Project leader/Creative producer for Up Next with ADF/ Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) & The Bush Theatre (TBT);** UP NEXT is a takeover initiative designed to catapult visionary culturally diverse artists into leadership roles in the UK's theatre industry. This was funded by the arts council sustained theatre fund for £295k. An additional £160k of funding was secured from Esmée Fairbairn, Foyle Foundation and Garfield Weston to support the programming at the BAC & TBT. <https://upnext.adofthefuture.com>
- **2019: Mentor for the Old Vic Bayliss Director Scheme**
- **2018, 2019, 2020: Judge for James Tait Black Prize for Drama.** Celebrating innovative drama produced worldwide. Plays that challenge structure, content and form. The prize of £10k is awarded to the winning playwright.
- **2018: Judge for Pitch your Play - Haymarket Theatre.** Winning pitches are given a year mentorship and a staged reading of their play on the Haymarket stage.
- **2015 - 2018:** Judge for the BBC Norman Beaton Radio Prize

## **May 2015 - Dec 2017 Associate Director & Senior Management Team Theatre Royal Stratford East (TRSE)**

As Associate Director and part of the senior management team, I contributed to the organisational and developmental structure of the company. I was a key contributor in establishing annual budgets, specifically collaborating with the Artistic Director, Executive Director, Producer and Head of Finance to build the artistic programme within the allocations. The programming reflected the artistic vision of the organisation to develop new work and to provide a platform for underrepresented voices in the evolving communities of Newham, London and beyond.

NPO funding 2018-2022 - £1.2 million a year.

- **Fundraising target of £400K a year.** Collaborated with the Development team on the artistic narrative for funding applications; led on cultivating individual donors, and new supporters of the theatre. Represented TRSE in generating corporate partnerships and private funding. Maintained and built relationships with trust and foundations, local council and Arts Council England.
- **Deputising for the Artistic Director.** Led and attended meetings with the Board, Artistic Directors, Funders, The London Theatre Consortium, Ramps on the Moon, Producers, Arts Council Relationship managers, Artists and internal teams.
- Involved in delivering quarterly statistics of engagement and reports for ACE. Writing the artistic section for the **NPO bid 2018-2022**
- 2017 Pantomime - TRSE's Pantomimes have a reputation of being one of the best in the City. In **2017, Rapunzel** - which I directed - broke all box office records with the **highest income and attendance for any show in the theatre's history.**

- Worked closely with **the learning and participation department to ensure outreach and collaboration alongside main house programming**, resulting in the delivery of workshops, skills-based initiatives and supporting events. Creating access and pathways for young people. Professional mentorship and developmental support.
- Commissioning projects for programming and development:
  - Writers including: Tanika Gupta, Bonnie Greer, Kirstin Childs, Paul Siret, Trish Cooke, Clint Dyer, Roy Williams.
  - **Room** a bestselling novel and Oscar-winning film was adapted for the stage by Emma Donoghue. This is the harrowing, intimate, tense yet beautiful story of a mother and son imprisoned in a shed for seven years by a systemic rapist seen through the eyes of the little boy. Co-produced with the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.
  - **Summer in London** saw the first play written in mainstream British theatre led by an all trans cast. Written and directed by award-winning filmmaker and LGBTQ activist Rikki Beadle-Blair.
- Represented TRSE's artistic department for **Ramps on the Moon** - an initiative that is committed to putting more actors and creatives with disabilities in the heart of the production. Ramps on the Moon brings together a collaborative network of six National Portfolio Organisation theatres including New Wolsey Theatre Ipswich, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Nottingham Playhouse, Leeds Playhouse, Sheffield Theatres and strategic partner Graeae Theatre. The consortium applied for a Strategic Touring Fund to undertake a six-year programme of work. £4.6 million was awarded through the strategic touring fund, and will fund 6 years of the project. <https://www.rampsonthemoon.co.uk/about/>
- In 2016, the theatre launched **Gerry's, an 80-seat studio theatre and cafe**. This space allowed TRSE to undertake cutting-edge shows, as well as provide a variety of workshops for members of the public, and a rolling programme of events including networking, poets, artists, cabaret artists, singers and musicians.
- **Oversaw and managed Gerry's** including but not limited to budgets, negotiation of contracts, programming, access and support for artists.
- Researched and developed self-directed projects for the main house and studio spaces.
- Script reading, dramaturgy, artist support, mentorship and development.
- Directing outside the building for other organisations. Lions and Tigers at the Sam Wanamaker, Approaching Empty at the Kiln Theatre.
- Developed, implemented and facilitated a one - week directors' course at the National Theatre Studio for established theatre makers interested in transitioning into directing. Visiting directors included Lindsay Turner, Paulette Randell, Nick Bagnall, Nadia Fall, and Ian Rickson
- Oversaw and mentored artists' applications for various funding grants.

#### Education:

- 2012 - Wine Spirit & Education Trust (WSET): Level 2- Honours; Level 3- Distinction.
- 1998-1999 - London Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA): Postgraduate Diploma-Classical Acting; Distinction.
- 1997-1998 - St Aldates College: Media Management Diploma; Distinction.
- 1994-1997 - Oxford Brookes University: Psychology & Sociology BSc; 2:1.

#### Freelance Theatre Director – 2014 – present

Storytelling provides a view of the world through a multitude of lenses. I am passionate about new writing as well as how a retelling/revival of the classics reflect and comment on the world that we are living in today. I aspire to discover and explore the unheard voice and bring those stories to our audiences, provoking debate and reflection.

<u>In Development:</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Writer</u>	<u>Theatre</u>
• Lotus Beauty	Director	Satinder Chohan	TBA
• The Hakawatis	Director	Hannah Khalil	TBA
• My Homemade Kite	Director	Nimmi Harasagama	TBA

These productions have been impacted by Covid-19. The Globe and Hampstead Theatre are committed to programming Lotus Beauty and The Hakawatis once our theatres open their doors. I am continuing to work on the scripts as director/dramaturge with the writer and creatives who are attached to the respective projects. My Homemade Kite will be programmed at Hypokrit Theatre. We are currently in conversations around funding and possible production dates.

## CREDITS

Show	Role	Writer	Theatre/Year/Reviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underlying Conditions</li> </ul> <p><i>This will be a directed live via Zoom for Stream On - Live 10 minute plays from around the globe. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/streamonplays/">https://www.facebook.com/streamonplays/</a></i></p>	Director	Rani Moorthy	World Theatre Lab (June 2020)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hobson's Choice</li> </ul> <p><i>Due to personal reasons, I had to step away as director from this production just before rehearsals. My role as director began as dramaturge for a year on the script with Tanika Gupta. I then assembled the entire creative team to execute the vision for the production. Vicky Richardson and I auditioned and hired the cast. The blueprint and foundation of the set, costume, light and sound design were all established and ready for implementation enabling a seamless handover for the incoming director. The show went on to receive rave reviews and multiple awards/nominations.</i></p> <p>★★★★★ What's on Stage, Morning Star, North West End ★★★★★ The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Stage, A Younger Theatre, Quays Life</p>	Director/Creative Producer	Harold Brighouse adapted by Tanika Gupta	Royal Exchange Manchester (2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approaching Empty</li> </ul> <p>★★★★★ The Scotsman, The Stage, London Theatre, Britishtheatre.com, The Skinny</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>In Pooja Ghai's superbly paced production, the argument is handled with a rare combination of light-touch theatrical energy and dramatic weight.</i> The Scotsman</li> <li><i>Strongly-performed portrait or post-Thatcher Britain.</i> The Stage</li> <li><i>A Skilful, engaging drama.</i> Financial Times</li> <li><i>There is a lot of action demanding resolution and Pooja Ghai's direction brings it to life with a mixture of joy and sadness.</i> Broadway World</li> </ul>	Director	Ishy Din	Tamasha, Kiln, Live Theatre (2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rapunzel</li> </ul> <p>★★★★★ The Stage, London box office, Theatre Bubble Plays to See ★★★★★ The Sunday Times, Rewrite this Story, The Londonist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>A pantomime bursting with love...innovative adaptation featuring an uplifting score, entertaining performances and utterly enchanting design.</i> The Stage</li> <li><i>A wonderful modern, vibrant pantomime that's shaken things up, added a splash of colour and most importantly-obviously given both those in the audience and onstage the best time.</i> Theatre Bubble.</li> </ul>	Director	Trish Cooke and Rob Hyman (Book and Lyrics)	Theatre Royal Stratford East (2017)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lions and Tigers</li> </ul> <p>★★★★★ The Times, The Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Evening Standard, The Upcoming, Whats on Stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Pooja Ghai's beautifully judged production...an impressive piece – warm, humorous, stirring and deeply sad.</i> The Independent.</li> <li><i>The storytelling is clear, bright, compelling and often witty.</i> Financial Times</li> <li><i>An ambitious driving play...a political history as much as it is a personal one.</i> The Guardian.</li> <li><i>This is a moving and intelligent political play whose subject of sacrificial violence remains immensely relevant and whose central characters are wonderfully evoked.</i> The Theatre Times</li> </ul>	Director	Tanika Gupta	Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (2017)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Counting Stars</li> </ul> <p>★★★★★ Afridiziak.com ★★★★★ The Times, The Stage, Stagerewiew.co.uk, westend wilma.com</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Pooja Ghai's economic direction leads with Gupta's text but thrives on two superlative performances...a neatly-constructed two-hander that combines delicate romance with tragedy.</i> The Stage</li> <li><i>This witty, scrumptious writing, alive to the possibilities of the moment...Estella Daniels enchants us as Sophie...Lanre Malaolu is a dynamo as Abiodun.</i> The Times</li> <li><i>Counting Stars does not patronise or alienate, instead it is inviting, gripping and heartfelt. This is an important piece of theatre.</i> Afridiziak.com</li> </ul>	Director	Atiha Sen Gupta	Theatre Royal Stratford East (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The House of In Between</li> </ul> <p>★★★★★ Grumpy Gay Critic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Thrilling, brilliantly written and produced piece of theatre... Drama, sass, and striking production, The House of In Between is a crucial and sensational show.</i> Grumpy Gay Critic</li> <li><i>An engaging play with a thrilling storyline, bursting with Indian music, song and dance...a real insight into the hidden lives of the Hijra community in modern day India.</i> livejournal.com</li> </ul>	Director	Sevan K Greene	Theatre Royal Stratford East (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Accordion Shop</li> <li>The Difference</li> <li>Bobby &amp; Gina</li> </ul>	Director (NT Connections) Director Director	Cush Jumbo Rex Obano Rina Fatania/Ankur Bahl	Leicester Curve (2015) Rich Mix/ Soho Theatre (2015) Pavilion (2014)

• Female of the Species	Director	Pooja Ghai/Kelly Frost	Global Café, London (2014)
• Top Girls	Director	Caryl Churchill	Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2000)
• Metamorphosis	Director	Steven Berkoff	Burton-Taylor Theatre (1999)
• Getting On	Director	Alan Bennett	Burton-Taylor Theatre (1998)

<b>Dance</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Choreographer</b>	<b>Theatre</b>
• Out Late	Dramaturg	Wayne Parsons	National Tour (2019/2020)
• Meeting	Dramaturg	Wayne Parsons	The Place (2018)
• Vestige	Dramaturg	Wayne Parsons	National Tour (2017/2018)
• A Vestige	Dramaturg	Wayne Parsons	Wiltons Music Hall (2017)

<b>Drama School Final Yr. Show</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Writer</b>	<b>Drama School</b>
• Much Ado About Nothing	Director	William Shakespeare	Rose Bruford (2018)
• Blue Stockings	Director	Jessica Swale	East 15 (2018)
• The Empress	Director	Tanika Gupta	Central (CSSD) (2017)
• As You Like It	Director	William Shakespeare	East 15 (2014)
• 13	Director	Mike Bartlett	East 15 (2014)

<b>Masterclasses/Workshops</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Venue</b>
• Decolonizing Shakespeare Guthrie Seminar Series	Tutor	4 days exploring The Tempest MA/PHD students	University of Edinburgh (2019)
• Directing	Tutor	11-week module for MA Final year students	Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) (2019)
• Acting, directing & auditions	Tutor	1 week exploring Acting Directing and audition Techniques 3 <sup>rd</sup> year BA acting	University of Creative Arts (2018)
• New writing workshop	Tutor	Working with writers, dramaturg Scene structure, character, plot Themes and motivations	Kali Theatre Company (2018)
• Directing techniques	Tutor	3 days - 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr. BA acting	University of East Anglia (2017)
• Introduction to directing	Tutor	2 days - 14-18 yr. Olds	TRSE summer school (2017)
• Acting and directing techniques	Tutor	1 day for sixth form students	Havering College (2017)
• Working in the industry	Tutor	Question and Answer Sessions	Studio Stratford East (2015-17)
• Artists Labs	Facilitator	Open sessions for anyone who wanted advice. These were run on a fortnightly basis.	Studio Stratford East (2015-17)