

poet in the city

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St Pancras
INTERNATIONAL

BETJEMAN
POETRY
PRIZE

PRESS RELEASE
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NATIONAL POETRY DAY AT ST PANCRAS

HEAR EXTRAORDINARY PERSONAL JOURNEYS AND DISCOVER SOME OF THE NEWEST AND
BRIGHTEST POETS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE

St Pancras International is to host a suite of exclusive, free events in partnership with the **Betjeman Poetry Prize** and **Poet in the City** as part of its **National Poetry Day (NPD)** celebrations on **Thursday, 6th October 2016**.

The station's position as a cultural hub is ever-growing thanks to public art and music programmes including [Terrace Wires](#) and [Sound Connections](#), and it is already considered a historic poetry site having been saved from demolition by John Betjeman. The bronze statue of Betjeman by Martin Jennings which was commissioned for the newly renovated station will also serve as a fitting location for the day's celebrations.

Working together with **Poet in the City** and **Maslaha**, this year's common theme of 'messages' will be told through the lens of the Landai – a form of female poetry written in Afghanistan. Designed to be recited or sung aloud, and frequently anonymous, the Landai is formed of a couplet comprised of 22 syllables. Landais are a traditional form of poetry which in addition to featuring at weddings, special occasions and in everyday speech, have a long history of female resistance and solidarity, passed between women over the telephone or in secret poetry groups. Often satirical, cutting or openly romantic, this inspiring use of poetry demonstrates its currency as a means of harnessing change and as an emblem of freedom of speech, both nationally and globally.

'Poet storytellers' will be stationed throughout St Pancras all day engaging passing commuters and visitors in immersive poetry experiences using new and old Landais and asking the question *'if you could say anything, what would it be?'*. This question is inspired by the way Landais provide a chance to send a truthful, personal and free message without censorship.

Betjeman Poetry Prize, a leading young poets' competition for 10-13 year olds, will lead the afternoon events with their winners' ceremony, hosted by one of this year's judges, **Imtiaz Dharker**. Alongside co-judge **Carol Ann Duffy**, thousands of entries were whittled down to a shortlist of six young hopefuls who will read aloud their work along with a guest recital from prize patron, **Joanna Lumley**. The 2016 winner will also become the second annual **St Pancras Laureate** and will be commissioned to write three further poems marking key calendar dates in the station.

As evening approaches, St Pancras will hand over to **Poet in the City** for an evening of poetry and music centred on the theme of 'personal journeys' inspired by the idea of access to identity which Landais represent. Performers including **Bridget Minamore**, **Sabrina Mahfouz** and **Benin City** have been hand-selected to perform work which explores the fundamental right of self-expression.



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All events are free, however, [reserving a seat](#) for the evening event is strongly advised.

National Poetry Day at St Pancras:

All day: poet storytellers – *positioned throughout the station*

12.30-2.00pm: Betjeman Poetry Prize with Joanna Lumley and Imtiaz Dharker – *Grand Terrace (upstairs opposite Benugo)*

6.00-7.30pm Poet in the City with Bridget Minamore, Sabrina Mahfouz and Benin City – *Grand Terrace (upstairs opposite Benugo)*

Wendy Spinks, Commercial Director, HS1 Ltd (owners of St Pancras International): “As both a travel and cultural hub, St Pancras is uniquely placed to introduce thought-provoking art to a huge and varied audience. The station has been a proud host of the Betjeman Poetry Prize for many years and we were delighted to appoint our inaugural St Pancras Laureate as part of the winner’s prize last year. Our plans for National Poetry Day, from showcasing the young poetic talent to unexpected, immersive experiences in the station throughout the day, mark another exciting development in St Pancras’ ever growing arts and culture program.”

Imtiaz Dharker says: "It was exciting to read the entries for this competition, to watch these young people open their own doors into poetry, and see the world through poetry. They have made brave and very individual choices, with unexpected subject matter, strong images and confident use of language, rhythm, form. And the real joy for me, not just in judging but in reading poetry at any level, is coming across the line that sings, that stays in the mind and makes me want to come back to it again and again."

Raheel Mohammed, Director, Maslaha: “We are delighted to be working with Poet in the City and St Pancras to raise the profile of the Landai. This poetic form represents the courage of women who have made themselves “available to their own imaginations” rather than being cowed by the stories of others. To be able to harness the power of this message to encourage people to reflect and express themselves in new ways will be exciting and powerful.”

Isobel Colchester, Chief Executive, Poet in the City: “To be able to put poetry on such a large platform and to engage with people who wouldn’t normally encounter poetry is incredibly important, and we are delighted, and thankful to St Pancras International for their collaboration on this project. We are excited about giving Landai poetry such a prominent stage, and to have this opportunity to share the form and encourage engagement with its powerful message as part of a wider project with our brilliant partners Maslaha.”

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

For further information, please contact **Blue Rubicon** on 020 7260 2700 or email stpancras@bluerubicon.com





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About St Pancras International

Designed by William Barlow, St Pancras International originally opened in 1868 and for its time was an engineering marvel - it was the largest enclosed space in the world and provided the grandest entrance into London. The station has become a destination in its own right, boasting more shops than any other railway station, its own fresh produce market, the longest Champagne Bar in Europe and a Gastro Pub. This year will see St Pancras International's retail offering develop with a number of significant new store openings including products in technology, fashion and food & beverage.

About Betjeman Poetry Prize

Founded in 2006 to mark the centenary of the former Poet Laureate John Betjeman's birth, the Betjeman Poetry Prize for young poets ages between 10-13 years attracts thousands of entries each year from across the UK. The competition aims to foster creativity in young people whilst discovering and encouraging the next generation of British poets.

About Poet in the City

Poet in the City provides a dynamic platform for contemporary and classic poetry, curating imaginative events which bring poetry to life for a twenty-first century audience. Through our work, we have fostered a genuine and growing appetite for accessible, challenging and inspiring poetry performances. www.poetinthe.city.co.uk

About National Poetry Day

National Poetry Day, the annual mass celebration of poetry and all things poetical, takes place on Thursday 6 October 2016. It is an initiative of the Forward Arts Foundation, a charity that celebrates excellence in poetry and widens its audience. National Poetry Day brings together leading poetry, literacy and literary organisations around a shared purpose: promoting the enjoyment, discovery and sharing of poetry. Each year there is a new theme and this year it's messages, with a call to action, 'Say it With a Poem'. A major national and international celebration: last year, National Poetry Day's campaign reach exceeded 522 million, with 182,000 actively engaged participants sharing poetry across social media. For details, visit www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk

