Classic Story Of Working Life Comes To Horden

Friday 21 August, 2026

A story about work, poverty and standing together will become the third major production to take to the stage at Horden's new Playhouse this year.

Following the success of The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet and the return of the musical documentary Pits, People and Players, Ensemble '84 will present its own adaptation of Robert Tressell's The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists this autumn.

Set in the early part of the twentieth century, the story follows a group of painters and decorators who spend their days making beautiful homes for wealthy people while struggling to heat and feed their own families. The work is hard, the pay is poor, and unemployment is never far away.

Among them is Frank Owen, a worker who begins to question why the people who create the wealth are the ones living in poverty. As he challenges his workmates to see the system differently, he discovers that fear, insecurity and the need to earn a wage can make solidarity difficult.

Funny, moving and sharply political, the production explores work, friendship and what it means to build a fairer society.

Directed by internationally acclaimed theatre-maker Mark Dornford-May, Ensemble '84's adaptation brings Tressell's story to a modern audience through the company's distinctive style of theatre, combining powerful storytelling, movement and music.

Mark Dornford-May, Artistic Director of Ensemble '84, said:

"The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists was written more than 100 years ago, but it still speaks directly to the world we live in today. It asks who creates wealth, who benefits from it and why so many people who work the hardest continue to struggle. These are conversations that belong everywhere, but especially in communities with proud industrial histories like East Durham."

The production continues an ambitious first year for The Playhouse in Horden.

Since opening the venue with Sir Ian McKellen earlier this year, Ensemble '84 has welcomed thousands of audience members through its doors. Many visited Horden for the first time to see The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, which received a string of four and five-star reviews and introduced many people to Shakespeare for the first time.

With The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists, the company continues its commitment to producing world-class theatre in East Durham while telling stories that resonate with the communities around it.

Ensemble ‘84 is one of the original partners of the flagship Into the Light programme - a county-wide creative and cultural partnership, designed to drive long-lasting growth in County Durham. Julia Handelman-Smith, Into the Light Director, said:

"East Durham has always been shaped by hard work, solidarity and creativity. Ensemble ’84 is showing what happens when we invest in that spirit today: ambitious theatre, creative opportunities and a new sense of possibility rooted in Horden itself. At Into the Light, we believe that culture has a key role to play in how communities build confidence and create opportunities for local talent to shine. Ensemble '84 is a brilliant example of culture-led regeneration in action, and The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists feels a particularly fitting story to tell. We are very much looking forward to seeing the show when it opens next month and commend the team on their incredible success to date."

The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists will be performed at The Playhouse, Horden, from 30 September. Tickets are available now at https://www.ensemble84.com/the-ragged-trousered-philanthropists

Media:



Related Sectors:

Entertainment & Arts ::

Related Keywords:

Theatre :: The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists :: Arts :: Robert Tressell ::

Scan Me:

Company Contact: