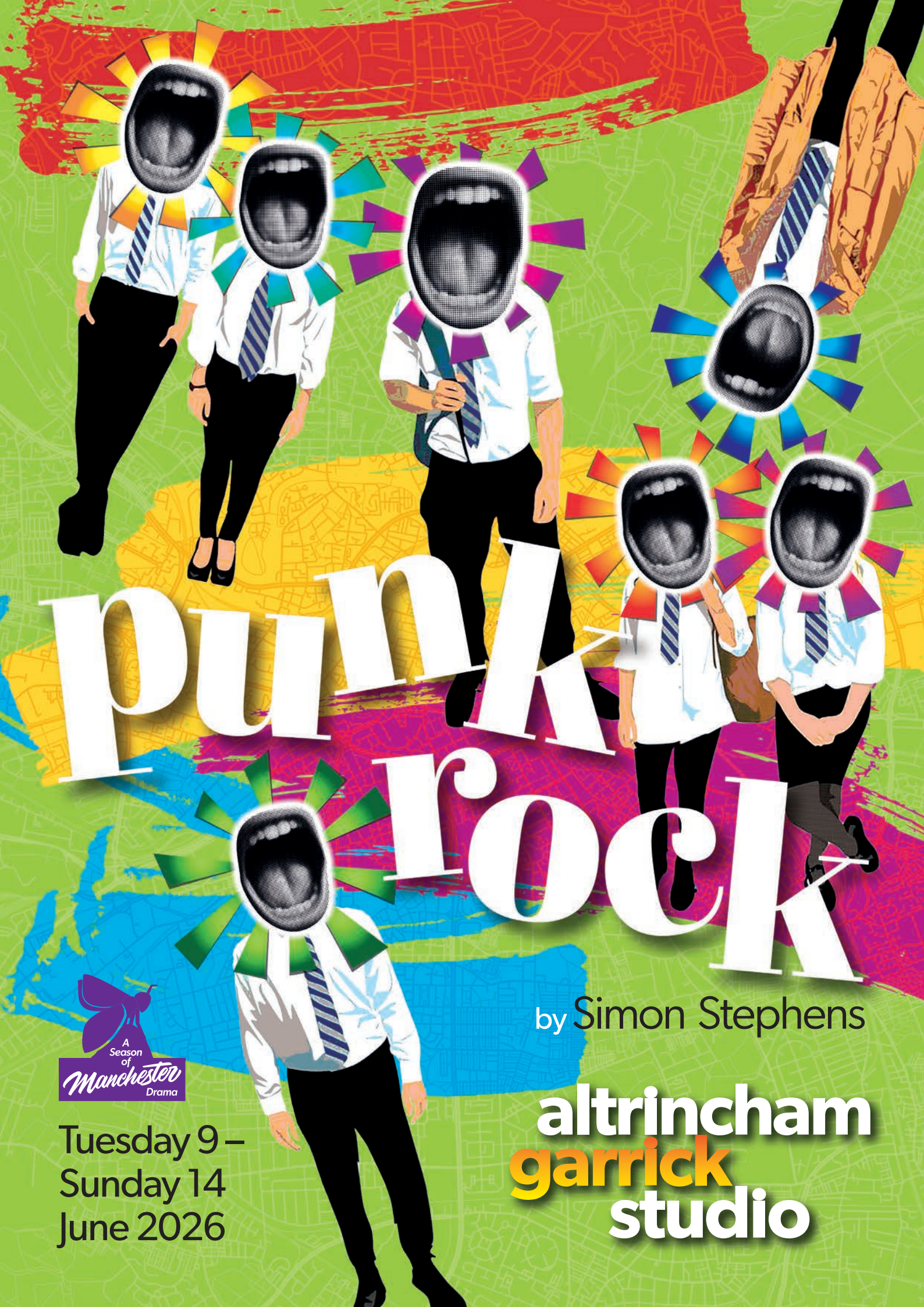




punk rock

by Simon Stephens

altrincham
garrick
studio



Tuesday 9 –
Sunday 14
June 2026

A play born of Pressure and Observation

Punk Rock (2009) is one of the most unsettling and incisive British plays of the early 21st century. Written by Simon Stephens, it explores the emotional, intellectual, and psychological lives of a group of sixth-form students in an English grammar school as they approach their A-level mock exams. Premiering at the Royal Exchange Theatre in 2009, the play quickly established itself as a powerful portrait of contemporary youth under pressure. **Punk Rock** was nominated for the 2010 TMA Award for Best New Play and has since been widely produced internationally, particularly in educational settings.

The origins of **Punk Rock** lie deep in Stephens' own biography. Before becoming a full-time playwright, he worked as a teacher, an experience that profoundly shaped his understanding of young people. The play is explicitly "inspired by his time as a schoolteacher," and seeks to dramatise "the inner workings of a teenager's mind." This autobiographical grounding lends the play its authenticity: the rhythms of speech, the casual cruelty, and the social hierarchies all feel acutely observed rather than invented.

Critics have also noted a range of artistic influences. The play has been compared to works such as **The History Boys**, **Lord of the Flies**, and even **The Catcher in the Rye**, all of which explore youth in states of moral or psychological crisis. However, Stephens' work is distinctly contemporary, shaped by the anxieties of the 2000s: exam pressure, mental health struggles, and a pervasive sense of uncertainty about the future.

The title itself is suggestive. While not about punk music directly, it evokes the ethos of punk: rebellion, alienation, noise, and a breakdown of order. The characters, like punk musicians, are caught between a desire for expression and a lack of direction.

At its core, **Punk Rock** is about pressure – academic, social, and psychological. The play suggests that this pressure can be destructive. As one critic notes, the characters are "bright but tortured adolescents" who impose stress on themselves and each other. Their environment becomes a "pressure cooker," where minor conflicts escalate into major crises.

Stephens portrays a generation caught in what might be called an "exam factory" culture, where achievement is paramount and failure feels catastrophic. The characters are expected to excel, to secure places at prestigious universities, and to construct successful futures – all while navigating adolescence.

Stephens also critiques the British class system. These students are aware of their privilege and define themselves in opposition to those they consider less successful. Yet this awareness breeds insecurity rather than confidence. They fear falling from their elite status, and this fear fuels competition, cruelty, and self-loathing.

Perhaps most strikingly, the play addresses mental health. Several characters exhibit signs of psychological distress – self-harm,



anxiety, delusion, and depression. Rather than presenting these issues as isolated, Stephens suggests they are systemic, arising from the pressures and contradictions of modern life.

Since its premiere, **Punk Rock** has become a staple of contemporary theatre, particularly in educational contexts. Its themes remain highly relevant, perhaps even more so in an era of increasing concern about youth mental health and academic pressure. It does not offer easy answers or moral resolutions. Instead, it presents a stark portrait of adolescence as a time of confusion, cruelty, and vulnerability.

Punk Rock is the final production in what has proved to be an exceptionally successful season of productions with a 'Manchester' theme – both artistically, and in terms of audience numbers. We'd like to offer our sincere thanks for your continuing support, and we hope to see you again for our 2026-27 season of Studio productions – a season of six plays about 'Connection'.

Joe

Joseph Meighan

Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.

**altrincham
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playhouse**

Barrington Rd, Altrincham WA14 1HZ

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Drama in the Classroom

Few settings have proved as fertile for British dramatists as the classroom. Schools are places of hierarchy, repression, aspiration, cruelty and idealism all at once — miniature societies in which the tensions of Britain itself are often painfully visible. From the rebellious anarchism of *If....* to the bittersweet intellectual nostalgia of *The History Boys* and the terrifying realism of *Punk Rock*, British drama has repeatedly returned to education as a battleground where young people test themselves against authority, class structures and emotional pressure.

When Simon Stephens wrote *Punk Rock* in 2009, he was entering an already rich tradition of school-based drama. Yet his play also marked a significant evolution of the form. Earlier works often explored institutions through satire, politics or nostalgia; Stephens brought the genre into the psychological anxieties of the twenty-first century, creating a work that feels brutally contemporary while still echoing what came before.

The most obvious precursor is Lindsay Anderson's landmark film *If....*, written by David Sherwin and released in 1968. Set in a traditional English public school, the film follows a rebellion led by the charismatic Mick Travis, played by Malcolm McDowell. The school is presented almost as a military dictatorship: prefects brutalise younger boys, conformity is enforced, and individuality is crushed beneath ritual and discipline. The film's surreal climax — in which the pupils launch an armed revolt against the establishment — transformed the school story into an allegory for wider social upheaval during the late 1960s.



The influence of *If....* on later British educational dramas is immense. It established the school not merely as a backdrop but as a symbolic arena where social violence and power structures are exposed. *Punk Rock* inherits this idea directly, although Stephens replaces overt institutional tyranny with something more internal and diffuse. There are no sadistic prefects or cane-wielding masters in Stephens' grammar-school common room. Instead, the pressure comes from relentless competition, emotional isolation and the hidden mental collapse of a pupil unable to cope with modern expectations.

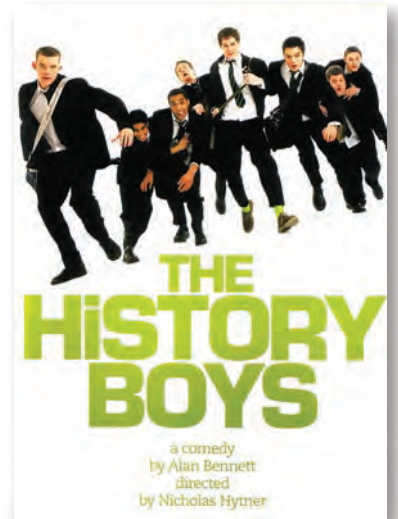
Where *If....* externalises violence through rebellion, *Punk Rock* internalises it. Stephens presents a world where students police

one another through cruelty, insecurity and social games. The adults are almost entirely absent. This absence is crucial: unlike earlier school dramas in which authority figures dominate, *Punk Rock* suggests a generation left emotionally unsupervised. The result is not revolution but implosion.

Another key antecedent is Alan Bennett's *The History Boys*. Bennett's play, set in a Yorkshire grammar school in the 1980s, explores a group of gifted boys preparing for Oxford and Cambridge entrance examinations. Like *Punk Rock*, it examines academic pressure, adolescence and the emotional lives hidden beneath educational achievement. Yet Bennett's tone is vastly different. His school is warm, funny and humane despite its tensions. The boys quote poetry, discuss film and history, and spar intellectually with their eccentric teachers. Education is portrayed as liberating even while the system remains flawed.

Stephens appears almost to answer Bennett with a darker rejoinder. In *The History Boys*, intellectual life creates connection; in *Punk Rock*, intelligence becomes another source of anxiety. Bennett's pupils worry about their futures, but Stephens' students seem terrified by them. The grammar-school environment in *Punk Rock* is intensely competitive, reflecting the heightened exam culture and mental-health pressures of modern Britain. Stephens updates the educational drama for an age shaped by league tables, performance targets and emotional alienation.

There are also similarities in structure. Both plays focus on a contained group of students whose personalities slowly emerge through conversation, humour and conflict. Both writers possess an acute ear for how intelligent teenagers speak — self-conscious, witty, vulnerable



Above: The Quad poster for *If....* Top left: The original line up for *The History Boys* at the National Theatre. Right: A young Colin Firth starred in *Another Country*.

and often cruel. Yet where Bennett ultimately offers affection and melancholy, Stephens drives inexorably toward catastrophe.

Other important British works set in schools helped build this dramatic lineage. **Another Country** uses the public-school setting of the 1930s to explore repression, homosexuality and political radicalisation. Based loosely on the early life of the spy Guy Burgess, the play shows how elite institutions manufacture conformity while simultaneously breeding rebellion. Like *If....*, it portrays schools as incubators of social power and hypocrisy.



Meanwhile, Willy Russell's **Educating Rita** approached education from outside the elite tradition. Although not set primarily within a school, it examined class mobility and intellectual aspiration through Rita's Open University studies. Russell's work broadened the educational drama beyond privileged institutions and emphasised learning as personal transformation.

Television also played a major role in shaping the genre. Series such as **Grange Hill** and later **Skins** explored bullying, mental health, drugs and identity among British teenagers with increasing realism. Stephens' **Punk Rock** shares the emotional honesty and rawness of these television dramas while elevating them through theatrical intensity and concentrated language.

What distinguishes **Punk Rock** most clearly from its predecessors is its realism regarding adolescent mental fragility. Earlier school dramas often framed violence politically or institutionally; Stephens treats it psychologically. The play was inspired partly

Director's Introduction

"I'm thrilled to be returning to directing for my third consecutive season in the Garrick Studio with Punk Rock, closing out a Studio season packed with moving Mancunian drama.

I first saw this play during its debut run at the Royal Exchange in 2009 when I was the same age as the characters on stage. The nature of the play and the topics addressed within it was nothing like anything I'd seen on stage before and I remember walking out of the theatre feeling like I'd just watched something truly transformative.

Simon Stephens' writing feels just as painfully relevant today as it did two decades ago with the ever-present themes of impressionable young people navigating social and educational life under the crushing pressures put upon them by their school, their parents and their peers.

Directing such a talented cast of actors in a play that I've loved for so long is something that I'm sure 17-year-old Meg would be just as buzzing about as I am now!"

Meg Brassington Director, *Punk Rock*

by real-life school shootings and by Stephens' own observations of teenage pressure and loneliness. The influence of events such as the Columbine massacre lingers over the work, giving it a global resonance beyond specifically British educational traditions.

Yet despite these modern influences, **Punk Rock** remains deeply rooted in the long tradition of British school drama. Like *If....*, it exposes violence simmering beneath respectable institutions. Like **The History Boys**, it captures the wit and vulnerability of highly intelligent students facing adulthood. Like **Another Country**, it reveals schools as systems that shape identity and social behaviour.

The enduring fascination of educational settings in British drama lies in their universality. Everyone understands the emotional intensity of youth, the pressure to conform and the fear of failure. Schools compress these experiences into a confined environment where personalities collide and futures are decided. In **Punk Rock**, Simon Stephens took that familiar dramatic territory and infused it with the anxieties of contemporary Britain – creating a play that feels both part of a tradition and a disturbing new chapter within it.



punk rock

The Cast

<i>Lilly Cahill</i>	Portia Dodds
<i>William Carlisle</i>	Kieran Rea
<i>Chadwick Meade</i>	Lucas Moore
<i>Bennett Francis</i>	Aidan Burgess
<i>Cissy Franks</i>	Faye Alexandra
<i>Tanya Gleason</i>	Ellie Mae Smythe
<i>Nicholas Chatman</i>	Mason Gee
<i>Dr. Kelly</i>	Helen Horridge

The Production Team

<i>Director</i>	Meg Brassington
<i>ASM / Production Assistant</i>	Vi Pope
<i>Set Design</i>	Meg Brassington
<i>Heads of Stage</i>	Paul Simpson
.....	Mark McEwan
<i>Lighting & Sound Design</i>	Geoff Scullard
<i>Lighting & Sound Operation</i>	Jo Myers
<i>Props</i>	Christine Chrystal
.....	Claire Eddleston-Rose
<i>Costumes</i>	Mike Shaw & Team
<i>Set Construction</i>	Paul Simpson & Team
<i>Set Painting</i>	Mandy Cooke
<i>Workshop</i>	Steve Cox & Team

Information believed to be correct at time of going to press...

Without our incredibly dedicated, enthusiastic team of **Volunteers and Staff**, whose sheer hard work often goes unnoticed, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse would simply be unable to continue providing such a range of top-quality productions for everyone enjoy.

Thank You!

With their continuous commitment to excellence, we owe them all a huge debt of gratitude. Thank You!

The Playwright

Simon Stephens is a prolific playwright who has continued the tradition of theatre into the 21st Century with a run of gritty tragedies. Working in the UK and Europe, Stephens has been a significant champion of new work, and has written over 20 works – including adaptations of novels and classics – since his first play *Bluebird* premiered at the Royal Court in 1998. His work is a mainstay of modern British theatre, with his plays being staged at iconic venues in the UK such as the National Theatre, The Royal Court and the Young Vic.

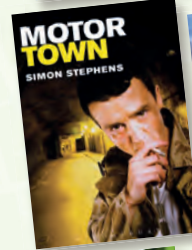
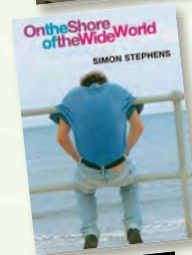


Stephens has a large portfolio of plays, staged over the last two decades. They include the critically acclaimed *Pornography* (2007), *Punk Rock* (2009) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2012), which premièred at the National Theatre and later toured on the West End and Broadway. Despite neither director

Marianne Elliot or NT supremo Nick Hytner initially liking the play, it went on to win seven Olivier Awards, then the equal record for a single play. Other accolades include the Olivier Award for best new play for *On the Shore of the Wide World* in 2006 and the Theatre Heute Award for *Motortown* in 2007, *Pornography* in 2008 and *Wastwater* in 2011.

Through his impressive catalogue of works, Stephens' writing has evolved and shifted constantly throughout his career. His works range from dirty realism (*Motor Town*, *Herons*) to poetic fragmentation (*Pornography*) to storytelling (*Sea Wall*) and even dream-like (or more appropriately nightmare-like) neo-noir in *Three Kingdoms*.

Simon joined Manchester Metropolitan University as Professor of Scriptwriting in 2017. Many recent works, including *The Funfair* (2015) and *Fatherland* (2017) have premiered in Manchester theatres. Recently, his radical adaptation of Chekov's (Uncle) *Vanya*, with all the roles being performed by one actor (long-time collaborator Andrew Scott), won the Olivier Award for "Best Revival".



The Company



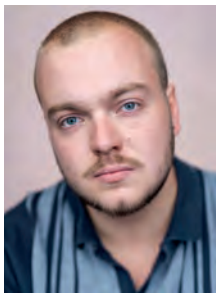
Faye Alexandra – Cissy

Faye Alexandra is an actor and singer originally from Bury St Edmunds, now living in Manchester. She trained on the BA Acting course at East 15 Acting School. Faye has since appeared in Harlan Coben's *Missing You* on Netflix, has additional credits in theatre, short films and advertisements as well as writing, recording and releasing her own music.

As co-director of theatre company Stoyhaus productions, she wrote and directed *Mrs Smith* and played *Nellie*; in 2026 she played *Lady Macbeth* in

Macbeth as well as designing the set and costumes. In October 2026, she will be directing *The Modern Prometheus*, a modern adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for which she has also written the script.

Punk Rock is her fourth show at the Garrick, having played *Kitty* in *Oppenheimer*, *Marilyn Ward* in *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical*, and she featured as *Alice Hobson* in the last production in the Garrick Studio, *Hobson's Choice*.



Aidan Burgess – Bennett

Mancunian born and bred, Aidan is an Actor, Director & Writer who trained at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and East 15 Acting School. Aidan graduated from East 15 in July 2024 and is represented by Beccy Kilgarriff at VSA.

Credits whilst in training include *Barry* in *Motor Town*, *Frank* in *All My Sons*, *Firs* in *The Cherry Orchard*, *Leonato* in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Barry* in *Saved* and *Timothy West* in the premiere production of *O'Toole's Macbeth*.

Aidan first began his time at the Garrick back in 2014 as a member of the cast in *Oh, What A Lovely War!* Other credits at the Garrick include: *Philip* in *Orphans* (2017), *Beadle Bamford* in *Sweeney Todd* (2016), *Abram* in *Romeo and Juliet* (2016), *The Secret Garden* (2017) and *Joseph Buquet* in *The Phantom of the Opera* (2014) and, more recently, *Bob Serber* in *Oppenheimer* (2025), *Whit* in *Of Mice And Men* (2025) and *Barry Mann* in *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical* (2025) and, most recently, *Albert Prosser* in *Hobson's Choice*.

Aidan is also the Artistic Director of StoryHaus Productions with which he directed/produced & played *Macbeth*. He is currently producing their next production, the UK premiere of *The Modern Prometheus*, a modern re-telling of *Frankenstein*, which he will also be playing the role of *Victor Frank*.



Portia Dodds – Lilly

Portia has been an active Garrick member for many years and is thrilled to have been cast as *Lilly*, having recently played *Phyllis* in *The Railway Children* (April 2026): a rather different production to *Punk Rock*!

In 2019, Portia was cast in the Main Stage production of *Bronte* (*Anne Bronte*, March) and then in the Studio production *Swallow* (*Anna*, September). In 2023 she played *Dean* in *Pronoun*. Portia has also been active with sound

and lighting for *Fatal Attraction* (January 2020) as well as being 'in the box' for various film productions.

Elsewhere Portia has been in productions at the Altrincham Little Theatre: *Hysteria* (*Jessica*, March 2022), *Funny About Love* (*Lara*, September 2022) and *A Month of Sundays* (*Nurse Wilson*, February 2023). She has also performed with Sale and Altrincham Musical Theatre in *'Allo 'Allo* (*Mimi la Bonq*, March 2026).

Outside of the theatre, Portia enjoys wildlife photography, walking along canals and rivers and reading, sometimes simultaneously!

She would like to dedicate her performance to a very important and darling friend.



Mason Gee – Nicholas

Mason is thrilled to return to the studio theatre to play the role of *Nicholas*. Having recently made his stage debut as *Moe* in *Pomona*, he has thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of bringing a very different character to life. Mason has always had a passion for acting and away from the stage, works as a drama teacher. He has enjoyed working with such a talented director in Meg Brassington and alongside a wonderful cast.



Helen Horridge – Dr. Kelly

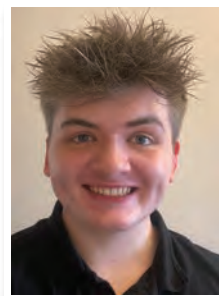
Helen trained at LAMDA and has worked in TV and theatre for many years including roles in *Where The Heart Is*, *Harold Shipman: Doctor Death*, *Always and Everyone*, *Little Bird* and *Dalziel and Pascoe*. Theatre roles include *The Baker's Wife* in *Into The Woods*, *Lynda* in *Blood Brothers*, *Helene* in *Sweet Charity*, *Mistress Quickly* in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Miranda* in *The Tempest*.

Helen is the founder and principal of *The Helen Donohue School of Speech and Drama* which she established 25 years ago here in Manchester.

Helen has been directing both children and adults for the past 25 years. She has also trained many professionals in public speaking and presentation work including nurses, doctors and head teachers.

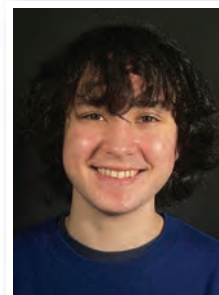
Helen grew up performing on the Garrick stage and after a very long break returned to the stage in the *The Laramie Project* in the Garrick Studio, followed by directing *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*. Helen also performed in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Treasure Island*, *The Worst Witch* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Helen is thrilled to be playing a small part in *Punk Rock* and has thoroughly enjoyed working with such a talented cast and production team.



Lucas Moore – Chadwick

Making his Garrick debut in *Punk Rock*, 23 year old Lucas primarily trained in Musical Theatre with The Stagecoach Company. More recently, during his 3 years at Edge Hill University, Lucas performed a play each year, with roles including *Young Mickey* in *Blood Brothers* and *Melchior* in *Spring Awakening*. Lucas is excited to be performing again, especially alongside such a talented cast and production team.



Kieran Rea – William

18 year old Kieran is making his Altrincham Garrick debut with *Punk Rock*. His previous experience has mostly been in student projects.

Kieran has appeared in three short films while at college, playing *Derek* in *No Such Thing* (directed by Sebastian Whittingham), *Red/Wrath* in *Sinners' Delight* (directed by Kyle Garner), and *Dr Holloway* in *Assimilation* (directed by Maria Teale).

Theatre Credits include: *Ringmaster* in *Show Me The Money*, a collaborative Royal Exchange Theatre Young Company project.



Ellie Mae Smythe – Tanya

Ellie has had a passion for performing for her whole life and is excited to be making her Altrincham Garrick debut in such an amazing show. She has a background in musical theatre and is currently a student training at P3 Performing Arts. Some of her past roles include *Gretchen* in *Mean Girls the Musical* and *Fiona* in *Shrek the Musical*. Ellie hopes that you enjoy the show as much as she and the team enjoyed creating it!

Friday 4 September



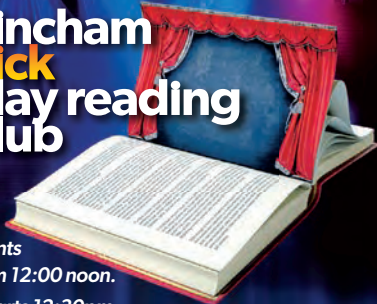
WITNESS
to the PROSECUTION

Friday 13 July



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST
OSCAR WILDE

altrincham garrick play reading club



Refreshments served from 12:00 noon.

Reading starts 12:30pm.

Duration: Approx 3 hours. Age Guidance: 16 +

Tickets: £7.00



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- ★ **Radio Alty**
- ★ **Refreshments**

a season of plays about CONNECTION

"What's bred in the bone will not go out of the flesh"



The Son
by Florian Zeller
Translated by Christopher Hampton

Directed by Jonathan Barker

Tuesday 22 – Sunday 27
September 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 27 Sept

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A raw, touching and funny portrait of a 21st Century marriage



Middle
by David Eldridge

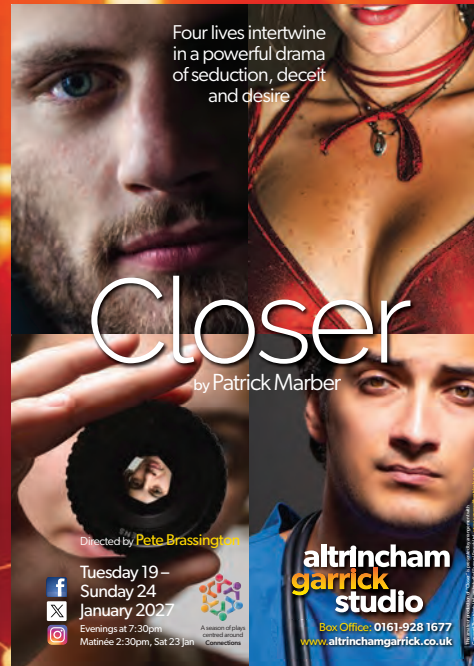
Directed by Lou Kershaw

Tuesday 24 – Sunday 29
November 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 28 Nov

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Four lives intertwine in a powerful drama of seduction, deceit and desire



Closer
by Patrick Marber

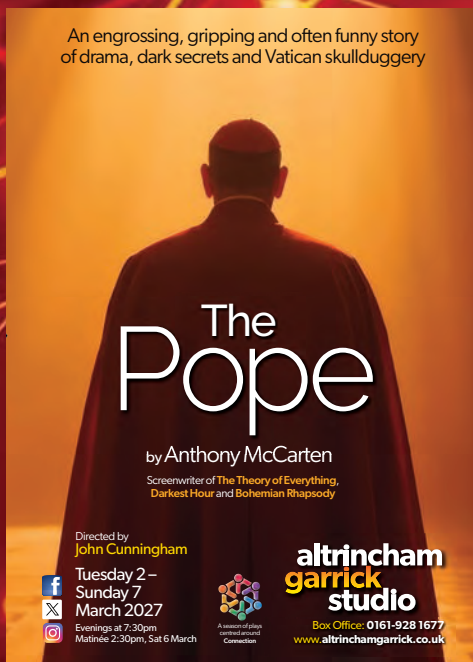
Directed by Pete Brassington

Tuesday 19 – Sunday 24
January 2027

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 23 Jan

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An engrossing, gripping and often funny story of drama, dark secrets and Vatican skulduggery



The Pope
by Anthony McCarten

Screenwriter of The Theory of Everything, Darkest Hour and Bohemian Rhapsody

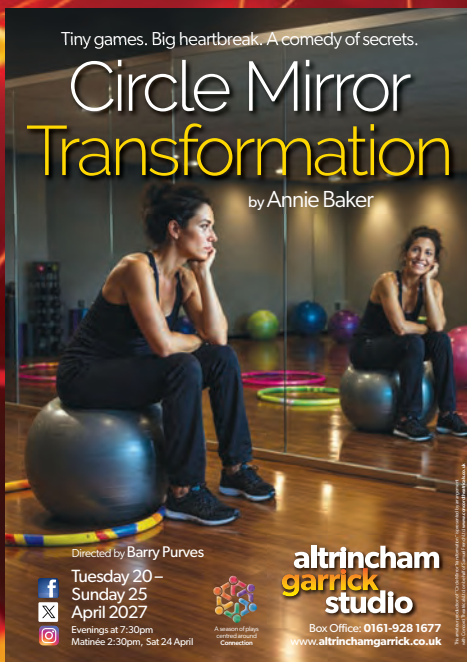
Directed by John Cunningham

Tuesday 2 – Sunday 7
March 2027

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 6 March

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Tiny games. Big heartbreak. A comedy of secrets.



Circle Mirror Transformation
by Annie Baker

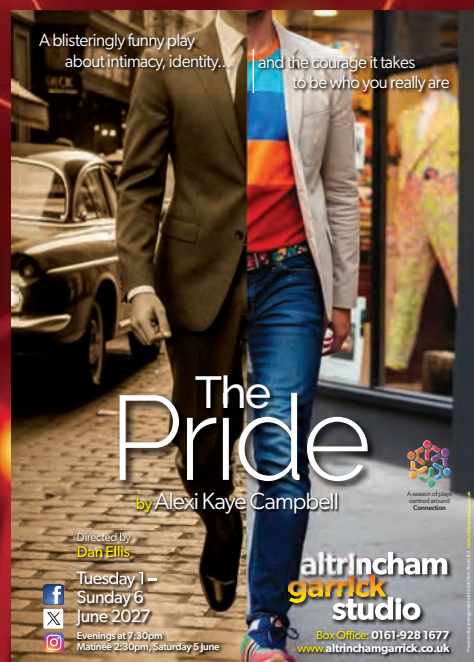
Directed by Barry Purves

Tuesday 20 – Sunday 25
April 2027

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Sat 24 April

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A blisteringly funny play about intimacy, identity... and the courage it takes to be who you really are



The Pride
by Alexi Kaye Campbell

Directed by Dan Ellis

Tuesday 1 – Sunday 6
June 2027

Evenings at 7:30pm
Matinee 2:30pm, Saturday 5 June

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2026-27 Season

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