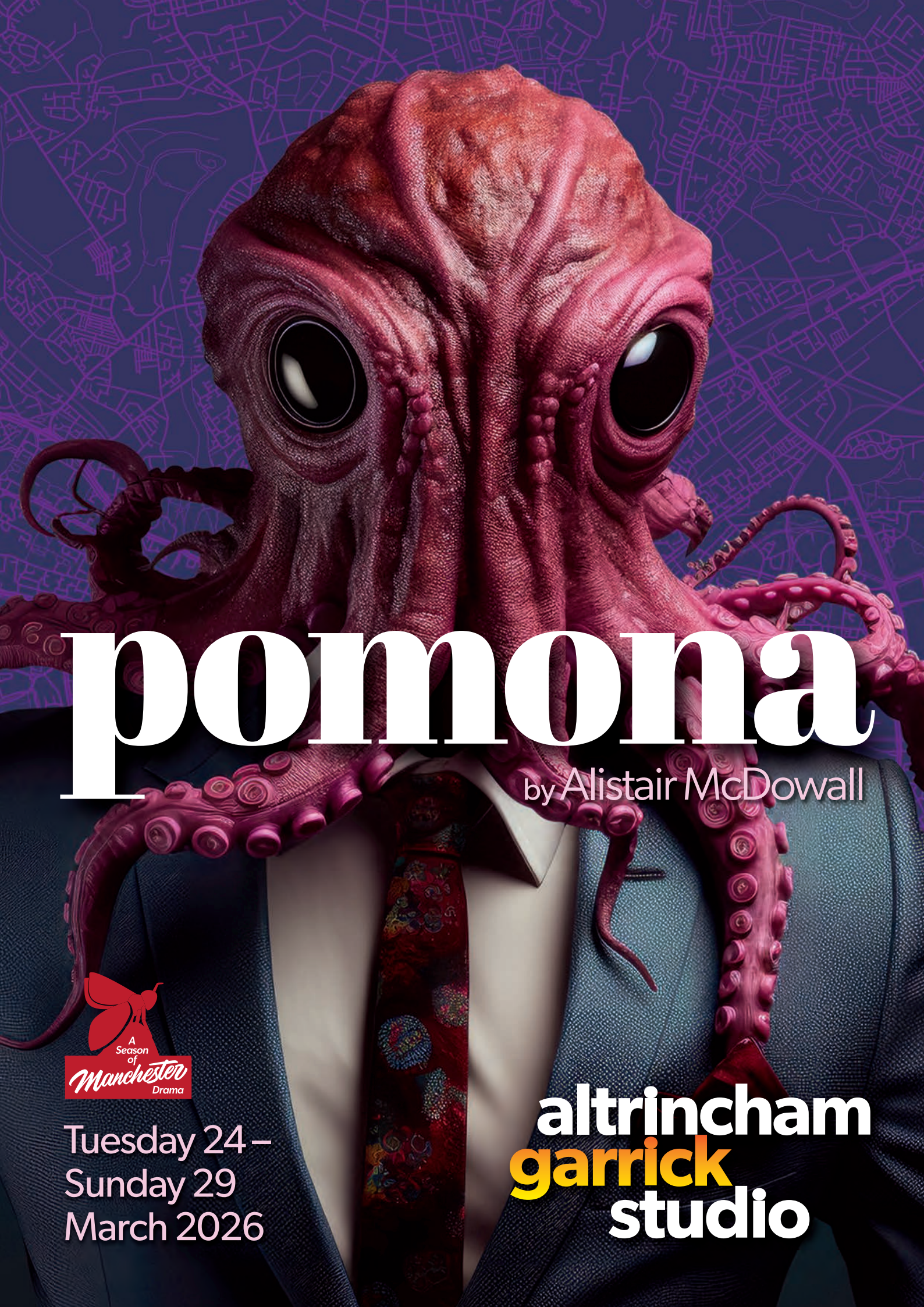




pomona

by Alistair McDowall



Tuesday 24 –
Sunday 29
March 2026

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Into the hole in the city: Welcome to **Pomona**.

Alistair McDowall's *Pomona* can be understood not only as an individual theatrical achievement but also as a marker of broader shifts in British theatre during the 2010s.

Emerging in a period when new writing was experimenting with form, genre, and audience expectation, the play exemplifies how contemporary dramatists began moving beyond the dominant traditions of naturalism and social realism toward hybrid theatrical languages that reflect a fragmented cultural landscape.

For much of the late twentieth century, British theatre had been shaped by two major traditions. One was the socially engaged realism associated with writers such as David Hare and Caryl Churchill, which examined political and social systems through recognisable settings and characters. The other was the "in-yer-face" theatre of the 1990s, exemplified by writers such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, which used confrontational imagery and extreme situations to provoke audiences into moral reflection.

By the early 2010s, however, a new generation of playwrights had begun to adapt these traditions to a different cultural moment. Rather than relying on shock or overt political argument, many writers turned to genre experimentation, drawing from horror, science fiction, gaming culture, and speculative storytelling. Within this landscape, *Pomona* sits alongside works like *The Nether* and *Game* – plays that explore systems of power through dystopian or technologically mediated worlds.

One notable feature of this theatrical moment was the increasing influence of digital culture and internet aesthetics. Storytelling in the twenty-first century increasingly resembles the fragmented experience of online media: narratives are nonlinear, information is incomplete, and audiences assemble meaning from scattered clues. McDowall's dramaturgy reflects

this environment. Scenes jump between time-lines and perspectives, motifs repeat like looping threads in a forum discussion, and characters behave as though they are navigating rules they cannot fully see. In this sense, *Pomona* captures the epistemological uncertainty of the digital age – the feeling that reality itself may be composed of competing narratives.

Another key development in post-2010 British theatre was the renewed importance of immersive and visually driven staging, often emerging from smaller venues and experimental companies before transferring to major institutions. Productions of *Pomona* exemplified this shift. The original staging emphasised atmosphere, sound design, and spatial tension, creating a claustrophobic environment that blurred the boundaries between psychological thriller and theatrical ritual. Such approaches reflected a growing recognition that contemporary audiences, accustomed to cinematic storytelling and digital media, respond strongly to theatre that engages the senses as well as the intellect.

The play also illustrates another defining characteristic of the period: the migration of bold new writing from fringe venues to major stages. After early performances in smaller settings, *Pomona* transferred to prominent institutions such as Royal Exchange Theatre and National Theatre. This trajectory demonstrates how the British theatre ecosystem increasingly relied on smaller spaces as laboratories for experimentation, with larger venues adopting successful works once their artistic identity had been established.



Finally, *Pomona* reflects a broader cultural shift in how theatre engages with politics. Unlike the explicitly polemical plays of earlier decades, McDowall's drama rarely offers direct statements about contemporary issues. Instead, it presents systems of exploitation and control that remain deliberately opaque. The island of *Pomona* becomes a metaphor for hidden networks of power – economic, criminal, or institutional – that operate beneath the visible surface of society. In doing so, the play aligns with a generation of theatre-makers interested less in delivering arguments than in staging environments where audiences must grapple with ambiguity.

Seen in this context, *Pomona* represents a distinctive synthesis of earlier traditions and emerging theatrical languages. It inherits the moral seriousness of British political drama and the unsettling intensity of the 1990s avant-garde, but re-frames them through the fragmented, genre-blending sensibility of the twenty-first century. The result is a work that feels uniquely attuned to contemporary anxieties: a play in which the city becomes a labyrinth, stories loop endlessly, and the truth – like the island at the centre of the narrative – remains just out of reach.

Joe

Joseph Meighan

Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.

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Introduction

Alistair McDowall's ***Pomona*** arrives wearing the clothes of a missing-person thriller – then keeps changing outfit mid-scene: urban noir, body-horror, dystopian satire, conspiracy yarn, even the rule-bound dream-logic of a tabletop role-playing game. First staged in 2014, it has become one of the defining British “cult hits” of the 2010s: a play that rewards obsession, encourages argument, and leaves many audiences walking out into the night feeling as if the streetlights are suddenly less trustworthy.

Genesis and sources: ring-roads, urban anxiety, and “detritus”

McDowall has repeatedly framed the play's starting-point as practical and atmospheric rather than programmatic: a late-night drive back to Manchester that turned, through bad navigation, into an extended loop around the M60 ring road. That empty, multi-lane circuit at 3:00 a.m. – unsettling in its scale and purposelessness – seeded the tone and structure: a narrative that circles, doubles back, and returns to familiar junctions in a slightly altered state. In an interview conducted around the Orange Tree Theatre run in 2014, he described the piece as building itself “organically” out of anxieties accumulated over years of living in one city (Manchester) while frequently commuting to another (London), calling it “a play about a particular kind of urban anxiety.”

McDowall has also been explicit about literary and formal influences. In that same interview he names David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* – not because *Pomona* is a direct adaptation, but because of what he learned from them: fractured view-points, non-linear disclosure, and the sense that contemporary life is made from chaotic “detritus” that can be assembled into a story if you're willing to tolerate mess and ambiguity.

That tolerance for ambiguity is amplified by another core ingredient: the internet as both research tool and mental environment. In a later conversation with *Exeunt*, McDowall talks about the “initial practical impulses” behind the play, beginning with “I want to write about the M60”, and only afterwards recognising how those impulses connected to his relationship with cities and the strange ways modern life is mediated through networks, information and half-known narratives.

A brief production history

Pomona was commissioned for the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and appeared in London at the Gate Theatre as part of the NEW festival, before transferring to the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond in late 2014.

The Orange Tree staging – directed by Ned Bennett, with design by Georgia Lowe – became the template for the play's early life: in-the-



Above: Guy Rhys as “Zeppo” in the Orange Tree Theatre's 2014 production

round pressure, a sense of enclosure, and a visual world that could pivot from grubby realism to nightmare ritual in seconds.

In 2015, the production transferred to the National Theatre and to Manchester's Royal Exchange, cementing *Pomona* as that rare thing: a fringe-originating new play that successfully scaled up without losing its nasty intimacy. Reporting the transfer, ***The Guardian*** emphasised the play's ingredients – missing twin, M60, role-playing games, a Lovecraftian “octopus head” mask – and noted how the Orange Tree Theatre's run had drawn a notably young, new audience.

The play has continued to have a life with professional and semi-professional companies internationally. For instance, it was staged in Sydney in 2020, a reminder that its Manchester specificity travels well: the “hole in the city” can open anywhere.

Plot outline: a missing sister, a concrete island, and a story that keeps re-rolling the dice

At its most straightforward, *Pomona* follows Ollie, who arrives in Manchester searching for her missing twin sister. Her enquiries keep pointing toward Pomona – an eerie, largely abandoned concrete island within the city – imagined as a place where ordinary rules weaken and hidden economies thrive.

But McDowall doesn't tell the story straightforwardly. Scenes snap between different groups of characters, sometimes seeming to replay or reframe events. A swaggering local power figure, *Zeppo*, narrates and manipulates; a masked presence suggests something monstrous or ceremonial; and the play repeatedly gestures toward role-playing logic – choices, turns, and outcomes that feel “decided” by forces outside the characters' control. Reviewers often describe the experience as puzzle-like: you're given fragments, echoes, motifs (dice, masks, tunnels), and you build your own map of what's “really” happening.

A key strand involves *Charlie*, a security guard connected to Pomona, and *Moe*, who is tied into the same bleak orbit. Running alongside is *Fay*, a woman living under threat and finding precarious refuge in a brothel. As the play accelerates, these narratives begin to rhyme with one another: characters appear doubled, stories feel “played,” and the question becomes less “Who did what?” than “What layer of the game are we in—and who benefits from our confusion?”

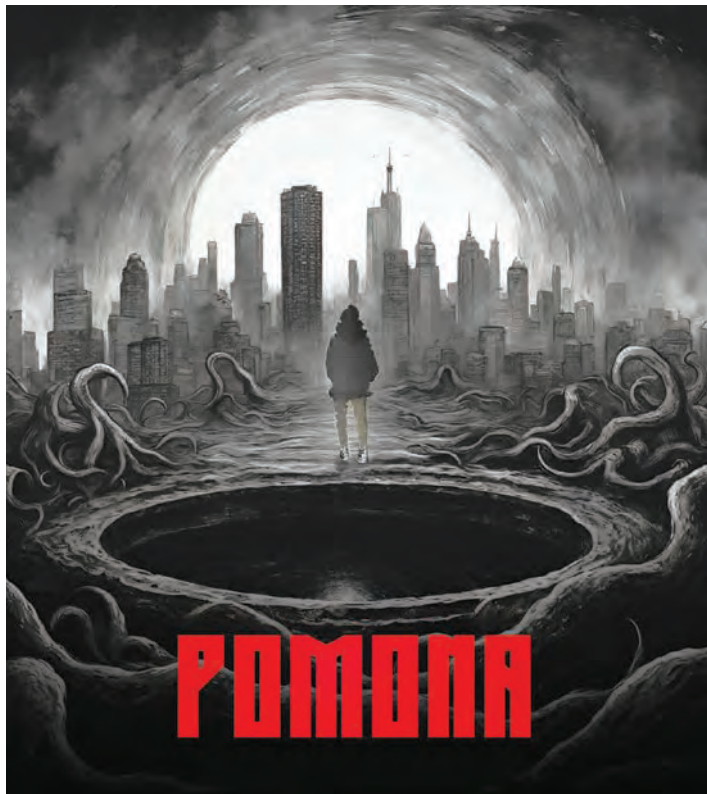


McDowall is careful – sometimes infuriatingly so – about explanations. Even critics sceptical of the piece have noted that it behaves less like a solved mystery than like a campaign setting: atmosphere first, causality second, dread always.

Notable stagings and critical response: acclaim, pushback, and the “weapon” label

The early Orange Tree production generated strong notices and helped define how *Pomona* is talked about. Susannah Clapp’s review in *The Guardian/Observer* praised its “‘fierce dystopian’ energy and the way it ‘flashes between naturalism and horror’, noting Georgia Lowe’s ‘sunken pit’ design and the play’s ‘grimly comic tonal agility.’”

When the show moved to the National’s Temporary Theatre, critics frequently returned to its ambition. *The Evening Standard* called attention to the “‘creative brio’ required to sustain such a spiralling narrative world – one that blends gritty Manchester detail with role-play fantasy and nightmare logic.” Other responses were rapturous about its genre literacy: *Exeunt* described it as “a parable of surfaces and buried violence, a collage of noir, dystopia, and Lovecraftian dread, with a form that behaves like an ‘exploded puzzle board.’”



But *Pomona* has also always had detractors, and the criticism tends to be consistent: that the piece can feel like an elaborate mood-machine whose meaning is “elusive,” or like an attempt to mimic role-playing experience without delivering the satisfactions of either conventional drama or a playable game. A review for the *British Theatre Guide*, for example, argued that the play “resembles a fantasy game more than a ‘standard theatre piece,’” and that “its circling fragments can make coherence hard-won or intentionally withheld”. (This split, between those exhilarated by the confusion and those irritated by it, is arguably part of the play’s identity.)

The Manchester homecoming at the Royal Exchange prompted reviewers to remark on how well the play’s urban rot fits the city it depicts. One local review praised the “dense weave of interlocking scenes” and the way links emerge at speed, concluding that “the final moments do what good dystopias do: leave you with questions that linger.” More broadly, reporting the transfers, *The Guardian* quoted Lyn Gardner’s description of the play as a “deeply unsettling theatrical weapon,” capturing both its shock-value and its sense of formal attack.

Character breakdown: **The seven figures orbiting the island**

Different productions cast and shade the roles in varying ways, but the play’s principal characters are commonly listed as seven: **Ollie, Fay, Gale, Keaton, Zeppo, Charlie, and Moe**.

Ollie – the play’s questing engine: she arrives searching for her missing twin, pushing into spaces others avoid. Her determination gives the play its apparent “plot,” even as that plot fractures.

Fay – connected to the brothel and to the play’s themes of exploitation and survival; she is often the character through whom the cost of violence is felt most directly.

Gale – a figure tied to the sex-work plotline and the sense of people being traded, used, and made to disappear; often read as one of the play’s human mirrors (someone who makes you question what you’ve assumed about “victims” and “agents”).

Keaton – associated with the role-play strand: the lure of invented story, and the way imagination can become both refuge and trap.

Zeppo – the charismatic controller: part property magnate, part ringmaster, part storyteller. He frames the world in pop-culture monologues and exerts a slippery power over outcomes.

Charlie – a security guard whose proximity to Pomona makes him both witness and accomplice; his need for narrative (and the games he runs) becomes structurally important.

Moe – bound to Charlie and to the darker physicality of the play; often the role that makes the atmosphere feel most immediately dangerous.

Why it endures

Strip away the mask and the meta-structure, and *Pomona* is still recognisably about power: who gets to disappear people, who gets to decide what counts as truth, and how easily a city can hide a second city underneath. Its enduring pull may lie in the way it dramatises modern anxiety as architecture: ring roads that loop you back to yourself, information that multiplies without clarifying, and stories that feel “played” by unseen hands.

It’s also, crucially, entertaining in a pulpy, propulsive way – full of jokes, pop references, and sudden turns – while refusing to let that entertainment feel innocent. McDowall takes the “cultural detritus” of late-20th/early-21st-century life (fast food, blockbuster myths, internet creepiness, game systems) and uses it as both texture and trapdoor. Whether you experience that as thrilling or exasperating is the gamble *Pomona* keeps asking you to take.

pomona

The Cast

Ollie.....	Natalia Leaper
Fay.....	Emma Holtom
Gale.....	Aimee Olivia Brown
Keaton.....	Rachel Jacquest
Zeppo.....	Pete Brassington
Charlie.....	Jay Wise-Martin
Moe.....	Mason Gee

The Production Team

Director.....	Mark Goggins
Original Music Composition.....	Mark Goggins
ASM / Production Assistant	Dave Jones
.....	Kerry Edwards
Sound Design	Mark Goggins
Lighting & Sound Operation	Jo Myers
Props	Christine Chrystal
Chuthulhu Mask made by	Charlotte Leigh
.....	Rosie Clearly
Costumes.....	Mike Shaw & Team
Set Design & Construction	Paul Simpson
.....	Mark Goggins, Steve Cox
Set Painting	Mandy Cooke
Workshop.....	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!

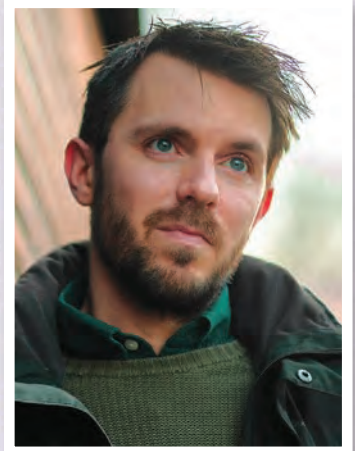
The Playwright

Alistair McDowall was born in 1987 and grew up in the village of Great Broughton in North Yorkshire. He attended Stokesley School before studying Drama at the University of Manchester, graduating in 2008.

His upbringing in a rural part of the North East and early exposure to storytelling and pop culture have informed the imaginative and often genre-bending nature of his work.

McDowall first came to prominence in the early 2010s with a series of original and boundary-pushing plays, quickly establishing himself as one of the most exciting voices in contemporary British theatre.

His play *Brilliant Adventures* won the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting (Judge's Award) in 2011, which helped secure productions at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester and Live Theatre in Newcastle in 2013.



That same year he also premiered *Captain Amazing* and *Talk Show*, expanding his reputation for bold, genre-flexible writing.

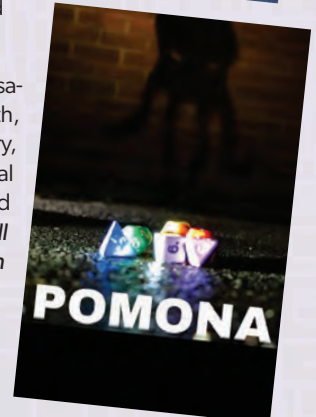
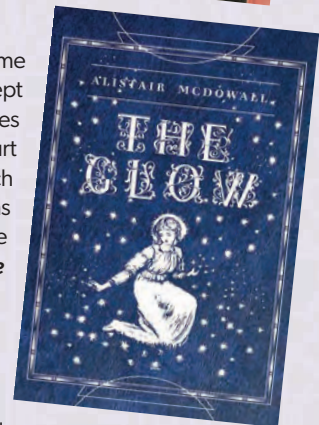
Pomona premiered in 2014 after being commissioned for the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama and first staged at the Gate Theatre's NEW Festival in London. The production transferred from the Orange Tree Theatre (London) to the National Theatre and Royal Exchange Theatre in 2015, and secured widespread critical attention for its atmospheric tension and genre-blending structure.

McDowall's body of work is diverse in theme and form. His plays include *X* – a high-concept play set with cosmic, psychological stakes which premiered in 2016 at the Royal Court Theatre; *Zero for the Young Dudes!*, which was part of the National Theatre Connections programme in 2017; *all of it*, a 45-minute theatrical journey through life, and *The Glow*, set in the 1860s and blending historical and supernatural elements.

Other early works include titles like *Daisies*, *Nettles*, *Plain Jane*, and *Home Sweet Home*, illustrating McDowall's varied interests and experimental beginnings.

McDowall's plays often defy easy categorisation, drawing from popular culture, myth, science fiction tropes, and surreal imagery, while remaining rooted in theatrical innovation. He has received fellowships and commissions – including a *MacDowell Fellowship* and a *Harold Pinter Commission* – and his work continues to be translated and produced internationally.

Alistair McDowall lives in Manchester with his family, continuing to write and contribute to contemporary theatre.



The Company



Natalia Leaper – Ollie

Natalia is delighted to be returning to the Studio Theatre to play *Ollie* in *Pomona*. She first appeared at the Altrincham Garrick Playhouse in *All The Little Lights* (2024) as part of the “Female Stories” Studio Season. She holds a Drama and Film degree from the University of Manchester, where she was awarded the MIFTA for Best Supporting Actor. Her performance highlights also include appearing in *Be Home Soon* and *Death of an Author* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2022/23.

Originally from York, Natalia grew up immersed in musical theatre from a young age and later went on to compete in collegiate A cappella during her time at university.

She is thrilled to be back at the Garrick with this very strange play!



Emma Holtom – Fay

Emma Holtom is a Manchester-based actor with a love of both stage and screen. Emma studied Scriptwriting, Directing and Performance at the University of York, going on to develop her love of writing by making short films. She is passionate about telling queer and neurodivergent stories, and is currently in development for a new play about imposter syndrome for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. When not acting/writing, Emma enjoys playing netball, cricket, and loves to crochet!



Aimee Olivia Brown – Gale

Aimee Olivia Brown is an Alumni from Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, and loves playing really gritty roles like *Gale*.

Her Theatre Credits include *Elizabeth Bennet* in ‘*Pride & Prejudice*’, *Hume* in ‘*Queen Margaret*’, *Elvira* in ‘*Blithe Spirit*’, *Izzy* in ‘*Rabbit Hole*’, *King Lear* in ‘*King Lear*’, *Liz* in ‘*Dumbshow*’, *Mrs Smith* in ‘*Persuasion*’, *Gen* in ‘*LovePuke*’ *The Wild One* in ‘*Cagedbirds*’ and *Puck* in ‘*Return to the Amazons*’ (A Feminist Retelling of A Midsummer Night’s Dream).

Aimee’s Scene credits include *Maggie* in ‘*Home For Christmas*’ (Amanda Holden Music Video), *Byrani* in ‘*We’re F*cked*’ (Short Film), *Elizabeth* in ‘*Pub People*’ (Short Film), and *Emily* in ‘*What We Sacrificed*’ (Short Film) which were made by Good Eggs Films which she started with her friends.

This is Aimee’s first production with the Garrick Playhouse and she has really loved working with a wonderful Director, and a very talented cast of people that are really inspiring to perform alongside with.



Mason Gee – Moe

Mason is thrilled to be making his stage debut in *Pomona*. Although this is his first play, he works as a drama teacher at a local school and so is usually encouraging others to take to the stage rather than doing so himself. He has thoroughly enjoyed swapping roles for this production and experiencing the rehearsal process from the actor’s side.

Mason has loved being part of such a talented and supportive cast and has particularly enjoyed exploring a darker character. He has also found it a wonderful experience to work with Mark who has had wonderful insight into the script.



Rachel Jacquest – Keaton

This is Rachel’s sixth production at the Garrick, and her third in the Studio Theatre where she was most recently seen as *Siobhan* in Duncan Battman’s *Voices of Manchester*. Prior to that, Rachel played *Cynthia Weil* in last June’s smash hit production of *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical*, which came hot on the heels of her performance as *Judy* in the Garrick Ensemble’s unforgettable staging of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. She also played

Evelyn and was part of the *Ensemble* in *Merrily We Roll Along* (2024), and appeared in the Studio as *Amy* in *Pronoun* (2023).

Rachel studied theatre at Lancaster University, where she performed in numerous productions. Since graduating, Rachel has appeared in *The Winter’s Tale* and *Into the Silence* at the Bear Pit Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, and in productions of *Little Shop of Horrors* with Whitefield AODS and Farnworth PAC, most recently as *Ronette* in 2022. She has also appeared in Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd*. She is delighted to be back at the Garrick, working with such a talented and welcoming company.



Pete Brassington – Zeppo

Pete graduated from Trinity St David’s with a BA in Acting, and after moving to Manchester he made his debut at the Garrick in 2016 playing the over-the-top *Prince Regent* in *The Madness of George III*. Further notable main stage performances include a variety of roles in *The History Boys*, *Nightmare*, *Dick Whittington*, *The Sound of Music*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Of Mice and Men*, and the most recent pantomime

Goldilocks and the Three Bears, as well as Directing the sell-out shows *The Vicar of Dibley*, *A Vicar of Dibley Christmas: The Second Coming* and the recent hit comedy *Bleak Expectations*.

Pete has also performed in some brilliant plays in the Studio including *Orphans*, *The Truth About Blokes* and *Edith in the Dark*, as well as Directing *Constellations* and *Pronoun*. Pete recently won a variety of awards including Best Drama, Best Director and Best Lighting and Sound for his production of *Constellations* at Macclesfield Amateur Dramatic Society.

Pete is so thrilled to be back performing in the studio space for the first time since 2019, especially with such an incredibly talented Director in Mark Goggins, and the wonderful cast and crew. Hopefully some of you will be inspired to play a Dungeons and Dragons game with your friends, and he hopes you all enjoy the show!



Jay Wise-Martin – Charlie

Giacomo Jay Wise-Martin (known preferably as Jay - He/Him, 33 Years Old) has been trying his luck at Amateur Dramatics and Student Films since the end of Lockdown and has so far not yet managed to make a complete mess of things whilst simultaneously enjoying every moment!

Starting out with the Levenshulme Players, he has starred in several murder mysteries and the *Levy Square Fest* Street Performances, and went on to

star as *Buttons* in *Cinderella*, *Charley* in *Charley’s Aunt* and *Lloyd* in *Blue Stockings*, as well as helping out with the nearby Revue society for their production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* (playing the wholly unexpected character of *Robin Hood*!).

Having acquired a taste for the limelight, he decided to try out for the role of *Ben* in *Things I Know To Be True* at the Stockport Garrick and never looked back. He has since appeared in *Dracula*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *1984* at the Stockport Garrick (as *Renfield*, *Algernon* and *W2/Parsons* respectively). This last jaunt with fellow Altrincham Garrick members Tom Broughton and Melanie Beswick encouraged him to apply for the role of *Nicholas Hilliard Q.C.* in *Quiz*, and he subsequently made his debut at the Garrick Playhouse in this production last month.

Jay is delighted to be back so soon, and making his Studio debut, working alongside such a talented company and Director in *Pomona*.



Mark Goggins

Mark held the position of Reader in Music Theatre at The University of Central Lancashire until 2024. There he led the BA (Hons) Music Theatre programme, which he set up in 2003, as well as conducting the award-winning University Chamber Choir.

His professional musical theatre work includes the UK tours of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Starlight Express*, *Cats*, *The Producers*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Sound of Music*, *Shrek*, *Wicked* and *The Lion King*, as well as Hope Mill Theatre's 2024/25 production of *A Christmas Carol* at The Lowry.

Mark has conducted at many of the leading UK concert venues including The Royal Festival Hall, Birmingham Symphony Hall and The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, where he has performed with the Hallé Orchestra.

Previous credits with the Garrick Playhouse as Musical Director include *La Cage aux Folles*, *A Little Night Music*, *Follies*, *Cabaret*, *West Side Story*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Cats*, *The Secret Garden*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Calendar Girls - The Musical*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* and *A Chorus Line*.

Mark also works as a Sound Designer and Composer, with credits here at The Playhouse including *Shakespeare in Love*, *Blue Stockings*, *Let The Right One In*, *Jane Eyre*, *The History Boys*, *The Audience* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. Mark is also in the process of creating a score for our Easter 2026 Main Stage production of *The Railway Children*. Last year he was Sound Designer for *Glorious!* at The Hope Mill Theatre, Manchester. Mark also was Musical Director on *Life Class*, a new work by Richard Taylor (*Flowers for Mrs Harris*, *The Go-Between*) which was commissioned by Bradford City of Culture 2025 and 509 Arts.

Mark directed *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, the opening show of 2025-26's Irish Season in the Studio and is delighted to be back in the Director's chair for *Pomona*.

A short history of Pomona Island

Pomona Island is one of Manchester's strangest "in-between" places: a thin wedge of land caught between the Bridgewater Canal and the point where the River Irwell becomes the Manchester Ship Canal. It sits just west of the city centre near Cornbrook, on the seam between Manchester and Trafford, and for nearly two centuries it has repeatedly reinvented itself—first as pleasure ground, then dockland, then a long, half-forgotten brownfield void.

From rural escape to mass entertainment

In the mid-19th century the area was still semi-rural: close enough to walk to from the booming city, but far enough out to promise cleaner air and open space. In 1845, a leisure complex opened here – Pomona Gardens – created by William and Joseph Beardsley on leased land in Stretford. Contemporary promotions pitched it as a place to enjoy a "rural fête" without the cost of travel, with attractions that mixed gentility and funfair: bowling greens, archery, flying swings, billiards, a shooting gallery, even a camera obscura and a hedge maze.

The big shift came after 1868, when the entrepreneur James Reilly bought the gardens and pushed Pomona into a new, more commercial, weatherproof form of mass entertainment. He built the Royal Pomona Palace, a vast covered hall described by Chetham's Library as roughly 216 feet by 220 feet and 60 feet high – then the largest such hall in the country, capable of accommodating at least 20,000 people. The site hosted political rallies as well as socialising, dancing, and drinking; it was, in modern terms, a major venue in the city's leisure economy.

But the same industrial growth that fed Manchester's wealth also squeezed Pomona's appeal. By the 1880s, factories were closing in around the gardens. In 1883, it was decided that docks for the proposed ship canal would be built over the Pomona site, and the pleasure gardens limped on only a few more years before closing in 1888.

Dockland: engineered water, warehouses, and rail

Pomona's next identity was literally carved into place. The ship canal project reshaped the riverscape and formalised the island-like strip between waterways. When the canal and the Port of Manchester opened in 1894, Pomona became part of the dock system at the canal's inland end. Sources describing the Manchester docks note that "Pomona docks" formed the eastern section of the dock complex, distinct from the larger docks that later became Salford Quays.

In working dockland terms, this meant lock gates, basins, quay walls, transit sheds, and rail connections: a landscape designed for cargo handling and the movement of goods rather than leisure promenades. The island's edges became hard and vertical – brick, stone, steel – replacing lawns and pavilions with cranes, sidings, and storage.

Decline and dereliction

Like many inland dock systems, Pomona suffered from changes in shipping and logistics. In the 1970s the Manchester docks entered rapid decline, commonly linked to containerisation and the increasing size of freight ships, and the remaining docks closed in 1982 – after which large areas became derelict.

Pomona's post-closure story is less about formal industry and more about absence: fenced-off basins, overgrown ground,



and a reputation as a forgotten edge-land. There were flashes of attempted reinvention – one colourful episode involved turning a moored ship into a "pubship" nightclub in the late 1970s, which closed in 1981 – yet the broader character remained neglected and semi-abandoned for decades.

Even infrastructure arrived in an oddly underused way. Pomona tram stop opened in 1999, elevated on a viaduct, originally intended as a future interchange; for many years it was one of the Metrolink network's least-used stops simply because there was so little around it.

What it's like now – and what's coming next

Today, Pomona Island is a patchwork: stretches of scrubby brownfield land and industrial remnants alongside pockets of new residential development at the edges. Walking past, you'll still read the dock-era geometry in the alignments of water, walls, and embankments, but you'll also see the modern city pressing in from every direction – MediaCityUK to the west and the expanding city centre skyline to the east.

The biggest change now is that "nothing happening" has finally become "something planned." In late 2025, Peel Waters submitted an outline planning application to Trafford Council for a major next phase of "Manchester Waters": around 2,600 waterfront homes across a mix of tenures, new walking/cycling connections, and more than half the site allocated to public realm and green space, including a new five-acre waterside park, plus a hotel and other mixed uses.



Above: An artist's impression of Peel Waters' proposed Manchester Waters development.

So Pomona's story is, once again, a story of remaking land: from gardens to docks, from docks to wasteland, and now from wasteland to a new waterside neighbourhood. Whether the next version manages to keep any trace memory of its past – its pleasure grounds, its giant hall, its working waterfront – will be the real test of how Manchester treats its most liminal places.

Still to come in 2026 – a fantastic line up of productions for everyone. **Book NOW!**

A heart-warming story of **THE** family, adventure & trains!

THE RAILWAY CHILDREN

Adapted by Mike Kenny
from the classic children's story by Edith Nesbit

Directed by Jonathan Barker

Weds 8 – Sun 12 & Weds 15 – Sun 19 April 2026

altrincham garrick playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 12 April
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 10 April
Matinee at 3:00pm, Sunday 12 & Sunday 19 April

An uproarious classic Northern comedy

hobson's choice

Directed by Ros Greenwood by Harold Brighouse

altrincham garrick studio

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Tuesday 28 April – Sunday 3 May 2026
Evenings at 7:30 pm

Vengeance is walking Salem...

The Crucible

by Arthur Miller
Directed by Joseph Meighan

altrincham garrick playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Monday 11 – Sunday 17 May 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 17 May
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 16 May
Evening at 6:00pm, Sunday 17 May

"Intelligent, articulated and f****d"

punk rock

Directed by Meg Brassington by Simon Stephens

altrincham garrick studio

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Tuesday 9 – Sunday 14 June 2026
Evenings at 7:30pm

Be part of a friendly, talented Theatre Company!

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PERFORMANCE
STAGE MANAGEMENT DIRECTING
LIGHTING ACTING
BACKSTAGE PROMPT
FRONT-OF-HOUSE SET DESIGN
SCENIC CONSTRUCTION SOUND

A wonderfully entertaining adaptation of the TV classic

The Good Life

Adapted for the stage by Jeremy Sams
Based upon the classic BBC TV Comedy series, and characters created by John Esmonde and Bob Larbey
Directed by Dan Ellis

altrincham garrick playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
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Monday 1 – Sunday 7 June 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 7 June
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 6 June
Evening at 6:00pm, Sunday 7 June

A smashing, positively dashing, simply lovely musical

My Fair Lady

Adapted from George Bernard Shaw's play and Gabriel Pascal's motion picture "Pygmalion"

Book and Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner Music by Frederick Loewe
Original production directed and staged by Moss Hart

altrincham garrick playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Monday 22 – Sunday 28 June 2026

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 28 June
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 27 June
Matinee at 4:00pm, Sunday 28 June

When the world stopped, their stories moved us all

COME FROM AWAY

Book, Music and Lyrics by Irene Sankoff and David Hein

altrincham garrick playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Thursday 10 – Saturday 19 September 2026

Evenings at 8:00pm, except Sun 13 September
No performances, Mon 14 & Tues 15 September
Matinee at 3:00pm, Sat 12 & Sun 13 September
Matinee at 4:00pm, Sun 13 September

An amateur production presented by arrangement with The Really Useful Group Ltd

The wonderfully entertaining smash-hit family musical

JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT

Lyrics by Tim Rice Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber

altrincham garrick playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

Thursday 22 October – Sunday 1 November

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 25 Oct & 1 Nov
No performances Monday 26 & Tuesday 27 October
Sunday 25 October: Matinee at 2:30pm & Saturday 24 & Evening at 6:30pm
Matinee at 2:30pm, Saturday 24 & Sunday 31 October
Matinee at 4:00pm, Sunday 1 November