

DAVID COPPERFIELD: OUR JOURNEY

A community play by **Mike Akers**

Directed by **Sally Cookson** and **The Company**



**“TREMENDOUS AND IMPORTANT... A FEEL-GOOD EVENT, MUCH
NEEDED IN THESE TROUBLING TIMES.”**

ASHLEY JENSEN, ACTOR

IN FEBRUARY 2026 OUR YEAR-LONG COMMUNITY PROJECT - DAVID COPPERFIELD: A LIFE – CULMINATED IN FIVE PERFORMANCES ON THE MAIN STAGE AT THEATRE ROYAL BATH. THIS LARGE-SCALE COMMUNITY PRODUCTION FEATURED A CAST OF 103 LOCAL RESIDENTS IN AN INCREDIBLE CELEBRATION OF CREATIVITY, INCLUSION, AND COLLECTIVE STORYTELLING.

“BEING PART OF THIS SHOW IS ONE OF THE BEST EXPERIENCES IN MY LIFE! AND MANY OF US FEEL THE SAME”

ANETA, CAST MEMBER

“A popular refrain in the production was “we are all David Copperfield”, because each company member had contributed to this version of the story, and all could in some way relate to the character of David. I wanted to invite people from different local communities into the theatre and build an inclusive community company of storytellers where everyone was equal. Through an ambitious inclusive recruitment process, a rehearsal room where everyone’s voice was welcomed and high artistic production values, we created a play that reflected the individuals taking part – to celebrate all that community projects can do, and showcase this on our largest stage.”

Katherine Lazare, Head of Community Engagement



CREATIVE FULFILMENT AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

The production was particularly successful in nurturing confidence and creativity for participants – 100% of participants agreed that they had developed or improved their creative skills*. Cast members developed a strong sense of belonging, connection and creativity through their involvement.

*Taken from feedback from 41 participants where 100% reported improved their creative skills

HOW IT HAPPENED...

103 PERFORMERS BETWEEN AGE 8 AND 82 INCLUDING 10 DISABLED PARTICIPANTS

28 PROFESSIONAL CREATIVES

300 PEOPLE ATTENDED TASTER WORKSHOPS

500 HOURS OF REHEARSALS IN SCHOOL HALLS AND COMMUNITY SPACES ACROSS THE CITY

7 DIFFERENT DAVID COPPERFIELDS

2,883 AUDIENCE MEMBERS

3 D/DEAF AND LEARNING DISABLED PARTICIPANTS AND 10 BSL INTERPRETERS

100S OF TEARS SHED BY THOSE WHO SAW IT

5 STANDING OVATIONS

“I FELT THAT THE ENVIRONMENT CREATED DURING THE SESSIONS WAS GENUINELY EMPOWERING – A SPACE WHERE EVERYONE’S VOICE WAS ENCOURAGED AND RESPECTED.”

CAST MEMBER



Poppy and Mei Yin

“IT’S MADE ME THINK THAT MORE THINGS ARE POSSIBLE AND IT’S OK TO TRY THINGS AND NOT BE THAT GOOD/ PERFECT.”

CAST MEMBER

“A THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER. I’VE NEVER EVER BEEN TO SUCH A JOYOUSLY INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE PRODUCTION, REVELLING IN THINGS LIKE SIGNING AND DEAFNESS, DISABILITY AND AGE THAT WOULD NORMALLY NEVER APPEAR ON THE STAGE. OR IF THEY DO, WOULD BE IN A PIECE WHICH IS ABOUT THOSE ISSUES, RATHER THAN THIS, WHICH WAS ALL ABOUT LIFE”

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

A SENSE OF BELONGING

An overwhelming majority of participants said that being part of the production helped them feel that they belonged. Participants reported developing connections, making friendships and feeling part of a community. The inclusive approach to casting meant access wasn’t an add-on, but at the heart of the production. Two full scenes were led by D/deaf and learning disabled actors, and every performance was live BSL-interpreted.



Above: The Company using BSL integrated in the finale song

“A POWERFUL AND DELIBERATE ACT OF INCLUSION, REALISED WITH INTEGRITY, COURAGE AND ARTISTRY.”

RUEBEN COLLINGS

Clinical Operations Delivery Lead for Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence at NHS BSW Integrated Care Board

“WHEN I WAS CAST I WAS ABSOLUTELY OVER THE MOON WITH JOY. I WAS SO RELIEVED TO NOT JUST BE ON THE ENSEMBLE, I’VE ALWAYS WANTED TO HAVE A NAMED PART SINCE DAY ONE. STANDING AND PERFORMING ON THE STAGE HAS GOT TO BE MY DREAM COME TRUE”

JOSH, WHO PLAYED MR DICK

“ I DEFINITELY FEEL LIKE I HAVE A VOICE. THE TONE OF THE WORKSHOPS HAS BEEN INCLUSIVE, FUN AND HUGELY INSPIRING. I HAVE LEARNT A LOT!”

CAST MEMBER

JONATHAN

“I loved being a part of *David Copperfield: A Life*. I played Mr Wilkins Micawber. I loved the acting, I liked that I was taking down the villain in the show, Uriah Heap. My favourite scene was with the family and the children, they didn’t sign when they started, but we taught them and they practised, and now they can communicate. The children were faster to learn than the adults were. I’m definitely more confident and more involved in theatre than before, at school when I was little, I couldn’t take part in theatre. In this production I learnt about singing and signing together, and dancing, being on time with the music. I could feel the vibrations, that’s how I kept in time.



I also learnt about independence for travelling, getting to rehearsals. I now feel much more independent and able to travel. My mum can be nervous about me travelling on the bus and the train but this really helped mums’ confidence as well to see how independent I could be. When my sister and my mum came to watch me they were amazed, “wow , that’s my son!”. She cried, all of the Achieve Together staff that came cried too, they were so proud.”

Below: Jonathan and Sherrie Eugene-Hart in rehearsals





SEVEN COMMUNITY PERFORMERS PORTRAYED DAVID COPPERFIELD AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF HIS LIFE.

"I loved watching the other people do their parts, it inspired me to put some more expression into it. It made me more confident as I watched other people, they got braver and braver each day so that made me braver "

Rachel (David 1) Age 8

"I felt like it was the most diverse that Bath has ever been – that was amazing. We were all David Copperfield- whatever sort of part we had...we were all equal...I feel like I've learnt the definition of

community - everyone was together with love and kindness... what I loved most was the family we managed to build"

Momoko (David 2) Age 12

"I feel like I learnt a lot of stuff about myself- I'm a bit braver than I thought I was. I stepped out of my comfort zone and I learnt that I loved acting very much. Going into it, I was bit self conscious – I'm a lot more confident now."

Mani (David 3) Age 15



"We got to meet people from different walks of life- I spoke to people who can't speak and have to use sign language and we got to use sign language. I probably wouldn't have met those people or spoken to them if I had seen them in the street as I wouldn't have known how to- it made us see things from different perspectives"

David (David 4) Age 20

"Everyone has that childhood dream of being a star, I thought, one day as I get older, I could be the female

Morgan Freeman, I've always gravitated towards it. I don't have the best memory so there was the challenge of learning lines. I really enjoyed learning sign language, for me that was one of the best of all the experiences that I loved the most."

Eshiva Wright (David 5) Age 32

"Over the course of nearly a year, a group of strangers gradually became a genuine ensemble and a genuine community. Through Dickens' story, we ended up telling something about our own – about belonging, resilience and connection."

Phil Maguire (David 6) Age 53

"I have always acted – and wanted to start again. But I have a neuropathic condition and need to walk with a stick, so I wasn't hopeful that a conventional drama group would be right. I contacted Engage and found I could contribute even despite this disability – my experience with Engage that gave me the confidence."

John Bull (David 7) Age 82

“I WAS DRAWN IN AND UNEXPECTEDLY MOVED. IN INTRODUCING THEMSELVES THE CAST SEEMED TO CONVEY THE BOND WHICH THEY HAD FORGED WORKING ON THE PRODUCTION TOGETHER AND TO ENVELOP US, THE AUDIENCE, IN THEIR WARMTH TOO. I WAS MILES AWAY FROM THE STAGE, UP IN THE GODS, BUT SOMEHOW FELT LIKE I MATTERED AND WAS INVOLVED IN THE ACTION.”

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

“I HAD JUST MOVED TO BATH AND DID NOT KNOW A LIVING SOUL AND HAD LEFT FRIENDS BEHIND - BUT NOW! NOW I HAVE FRIENDS!”

CAST MEMBER

Making connections with those different from themselves became a highlight for many participants. The community spirit that developed between the cast was remarked upon by many as feeling like family.

Sara, who participated alongside her daughter Mia, reflects **“myself I haven’t got any parents, and Mia hasn’t got any grandparents, so I’m at the head of the family. It’s been really nice to mix with a lot of different people, the older generation which have brought lots of wisdom and different stories. Its been really lovely to mix with a lot of different**

people and I will miss that”



Mia and Sara

A POEM BY JOSH (MR DICK)

“When David Copperfield began,
We didn’t know each other at all
We were a group of strangers,
But we could hear the journey call,

One hundred unknown faces,
And two hundred unknown eyes
Were not familiar to anyone,
An unexpected surprise,

Over the course of eleven months,
We all bonded with a story to tell
Of David Copperfield’s life adventures,
With happy memories and sad times as well,

With director Sally Cookson,
And writer Mike Akers too
And musical director John as well,
We wanted to make friends new,
We told this story with BSL,

With our voices, hands and hearts
Throughout this DC journey,
An incredible work of art,

Once a group of total strangers,
Became the best of friends
Now we are an ensemble,
Where every story blends,

When this play is over,
We’ll be sad to say goodbye,
It will be hard for all of us,
To try hard not to cry,

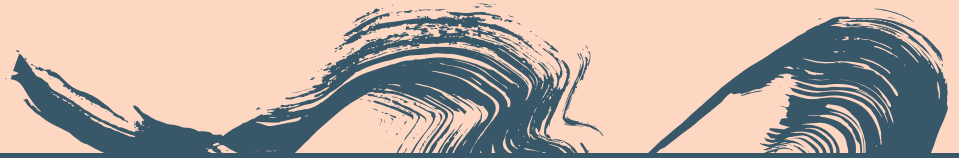
But that’s OK, I’m sure we’ll meet,
For coffee and a chat
We’ll have a picnic in the summer,
We must remember our sunhat!

When we take our last bow,
After our final curtain call
To say to all the audience,
‘Goodbye for now, that’s all!’



“WATCHING THE PLAY, I SAW INCLUSION. AS AN IMMIGRANT IN BATH I FELT A SENSE OF BELONGING AND FELT AT HOME - A LONG LASTING FEELING THAT TIME CANNOT TAKE AWAY.”

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK



LASTING IMPACT

“We did it together- in the knowledge that we were a community standing strong and looking out for each other, ready to share ourselves and our story- and by doing so we created something unique and magical that will stay with us forever”

SALLY COOKSON, DIRECTOR



“The process of making the show has been more about just putting on a play. It has been about building a community with a group who began as complete strangers to one another. In our currently troubled and divided times, this to me feels like the most important aspect of the experience”

MIKE AKERS WRITER



“*David Copperfield: A Life* will leave a lasting impact for the cast who were involved, for the audience who saw it - and for us at Theatre Royal Bath. With the opening of The Billings, a dedicated theatre space for the community, we will continue to commit to creating excellent and exciting work that is diverse, inclusive and creates a sense of belonging and connection. This production is a benchmark for that and it sets the bar very high!”

DANNY MOAR, THEATRE ROYAL BATH DIRECTOR



“IT DID EXACTLY WHAT A COMMUNITY PRODUCTION SHOULD, IT SHOWCASED THE TALENTS OF THE HUGELY DIVERSE CAST. SO VALUABLE. WE HOPE THE BILLINGS WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE WITH THIS WORK.”

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK





“I THOUGHT DAVID COPPERFIELD - A LIFE WAS SUPERB. DEEPLY MOVING IN SO MANY WAYS. WONDERFUL TO SEE SUCH AN INCLUSIVE CAST IN A WORLD OF PREJUDICE AND CRUMBLING HUMANITY. IT FILLED ME WITH A SENSE OF HOPE.”

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK