



Press Release

**UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 11AM ON TUESDAY 16 JUNE 2026**

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## FACTORY INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES AUTUMN-WINTER PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

The return of **Lightroom** with **David Bowie**, a bold and irreverent black comedy from Palestinian theatre maker **Ahmed Masoud** and a powerful exhibition of portraits interrogating what it means to be **Black** and living in the UK.

Works announced today join the previously announced dance adaptation of **Russell T Davies** award-winning series *It's a Sin* which makes its **World Premiere** at **Aviva Studios** in **February 2027**

In collaboration with groundbreaking artists and companies such as **Lightroom**, **Ahmed Masoud** and **Cephas Williams**, **Factory International** today announces a programme of thought-provoking theatre, visual arts and 360° immersive experiences for autumn-winter at their home, Manchester's landmark cultural destination **Aviva Studios**.

Tickets will go on sale for **Factory International** members on **Tuesday 16 June** ahead of public on sale on **Thursday 18 June**. Tickets are available from **£10** across all shows.

- Utilising the versatility of **Aviva Studios'** Warehouse space, **Lightroom** returns with a new 360° immersive experience. **David Bowie: You're Not Alone** gives audiences insight into the creative mind and performances of one of the world's most visionary artists, featuring **David Bowie** as its sole voice.
- Artist photographer, speaker, activist and campaigner **Cephas Williams's Portrait of Black Britain** is a powerful collection of portraits interrogating what it means to be a Black person living in the UK. Part of a project to build the largest collection of photographic portraits of Black British people ever created, the exhibition was originally commissioned for **Manchester International Festival (MIF) 2021** and shown

as a major public exhibition in Manchester's Arndale Centre. The exhibition will run at Aviva Studios as part of Black History Month (from 1 October).

- The irreverent and sharply satirical black comedy **Application 39** from Palestinian theatre maker and writer **Ahmed Masoud** imagines Gaza as host of the 2048 Olympics, exactly 100 years after the Nakba. A surreal yet pressing journey through occupation, bureaucracy, absurdity and reconstruction - rooted in hope and drawing on real-life testimonies - the bold theatre work is produced by ETT, Matthew Schmolle Productions and Theatre Royal Stratford East. (9 - 10 October).
- The programme announced today joins the visceral new dance piece inspired by Channel 4's award-winning series **It's a Sin** which went on sale earlier this month and makes its World Premiere at Aviva Studios. Presented by **Rambert** and **Factory International**, the era-defining story of love and survival is directed and choreographed by Rambert's Artistic Director **Benoit Swan Pouffer**, with series creator **Russell T Davies**, **Pet Shop Boys** and **Gyn Fussell** as Executive Producers (16 - 27 February).

**John McGrath, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Factory International said:**

*"This autumn's programme includes work by extraordinary artists exploring key issues of our time, as well as a joyous treat celebrating the world of David Bowie. Following our Spring season of premieres and our amazing summer show from Ai Weiwei, we are thrilled to celebrate Cephias Williams and Lightroom's return to Manchester, as well as welcoming the resonant and surprising Palestinian play Application39 .*

*Every season at Factory International we have the privilege of hosting some of the UK's most exciting musicians, artists and writers, and the rest of the programme for this year brings more great talent. From Interpol to Manchester Collective and the spectacular Black Creative Trailblazers the programme Aviva Studios will be full to the brim of celebration and stimulation. And not to be missed in October, we continue to highlight our homegrown artists with the 6th edition of Factory International's Artist Takeover, supporting the very best of Manchester talent."*

With gigs from international headliners spanning genres from pop to metal and rave to classical, Aviva Studios has established itself as the new hub for music in the UK, recognised for its flexible spaces and outstanding acoustics. This season sees co-headline events from **Bloc Party** and **Interpol** (23 - 24 November), plus country duo **Ward Thomas** celebrating the 10th anniversary of their landmark album *Cartwheels* (19 September), indie singer-songwriter **Bill Callahan** with his new album *My Days of 58* (12 October) and Canadian bluegrass and neo-folk ensemble **The Dead South** (6 March). Further feature musical experiences at Aviva Studios include the return of shapeshifting classical ensemble **Manchester Collective** with compositions from Bach, James Tenny, Sasha Scott, Hildur Guðnadóttir and Luke Mombrea (4 December) and 10-piece band **Slippery People** recreating Jonathan Demme and Talking Heads' iconic 1984 concert film in *Stop Making Sense: Live* (17 April).

Highlights in the autumn-winter season also include the return of **Black Creative Trailblazers** (4 September), a spectacular black-tie celebration of unapologetic Black

excellence showcasing the work of Black artists through fashion, music, art and poetry. Plus talks from chef and food-writer **Yotam Ottolenghi** with his new cookbook *Simple Too* (6 September), *The Rest is Politics: US* host **Anthony Scaramucci** in conversation with political satirist **Matt Forde** (16 September) and bestselling author **Jon Ronson** with *Enter The Castle* (20 September).

Further events will be announced over the coming months including the full **Black History Month** programme, which also features a collaborative interpretation of **Gemma Cairney's** literary work *The Immortal Sisterhood* through music, movement and poetry (8 October, on sale from 15 July).

Alongside its work with established artists, Factory International is committed to nurturing the future of Manchester's creative workforce through its free industry-focused training programme **Factory Academy** and supporting artists at every stage of their careers with artist development initiatives offering a range of financial support, mentorship and opportunities. Five early-mid career artists based in the North of England will begin their **Factory Fellowship** from August 2026 - July 2027, developing their producing skills and creative practice over a year, with the opportunity to shadow large-scale productions and MIF27 commissions. The 6th edition of **Factory International's Artist Takeover** lands in October, with artists taking over Aviva Studios' North Warehouse for 5 days to experiment, play and test ideas on an epic scale. Applications for 2027's **Factory Sounds**, Factory International's programme supporting people working in music in Greater Manchester, open in November.

Factory International is the UK's largest cultural exporter; its work, created in Manchester and the North of England, has now been seen by audiences in over 35 countries. Forthcoming international presentations include Marina Abramović's masterpiece *Balkan Erotic Epic*, which premiered at Aviva Studios in Autumn 2025, at Ruhrtriennale and New York's Park Avenue Armoury, plus a specially adapted stage version at Berliner Festspiele, following its success at Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona in the Spring. *The Surge: An Ode to Sinead O'Connor*, which makes its world premiere at Aviva Studios from 25 - 27 June, will open at The Joyce Theater, New York in September.

### **Autumn-Winter Programme Highlights:**

#### **Portrait of Black Britain (opening 1 October)**

*Commissioned by Factory International and Co-Produced by Factory International and Cephias Williams*

Artist, photographer, speaker, activist and campaigner **Cephias Williams** presents a powerful exhibition interrogating what it means to be a Black person living in the UK.

**Portrait of Black Britain** profiles a range of Black people living in the UK, highlighting the different roles people play in our community. Its focus is not only on high-profile people and success stories, but as many people from as wide a range of society as possible, aiming to

make more Black people visible and to offer the next generation and wider society a holistic picture of Black achievements in the UK and the 21st century.

From the creator of *56 Black Men*, *Letter to Zion* and the Black British Network, the exhibition is part of a project that will ultimately lead to Williams building the largest collection of photographic portraits of Black British people ever created.

***Portrait of Black Britain*** was originally commissioned for Manchester International Festival 2021, with 116 portraits, many of which were of people from Manchester, shown in a major public exhibition in Manchester's Arndale Centre. It was created at a time when candid conversations and dialogue about the Black community were taking a long-overdue centre stage following the murder of George Floyd. In response, *Portrait of Black Britain* centralised Black-led representation on what it meant to be Black in the UK at that moment.

The exhibition will be shown at Aviva Studios in the Social for all visitors to the landmark cultural venue, opening on 1 October as part of Black History Month.

### **Application 39 (9 - 10 October)**

*An ETT, Matthew Schmolle Productions and Theatre Royal Stratford East Co-Production*

Palestinian theatre maker and writer **Ahmed Masoud's** black comedy ***Application 39*** is a sharply satirical, future-facing drama set against the 2048 Summer Olympics.

Drawing on real-life testimonies, including from Gaza itself, Masoud imagines a Gaza risen from ruin, unexpectedly awarded the right to host the Olympic Games, exactly 100 years after the Nakba. The result of a prank from two IT workers in the municipality of Gaza, what follows is a surreal yet pressing journey through occupation, bureaucracy, absurdity and reconstruction.

Bold, irreverent and rooted in lived testimony as well as hope, *Application 39* asks: what if Gaza were no longer rubble and siege – but a site of global gathering, resistance and renewal?

**Theatre-maker and writer Ahmed Masoud said:** *“I am excited to see my play Application 39 going on tour, I hope everyone goes to see it and imagines Gaza like I did - a city that can host the Olympics in 2048. The play has allowed me to dream that when people come together hope can be born. Come and experience our Palestinian sense of humour and see our experience for yourself. Laugh, cry and be with us, for being together is in itself an act of resilience.”*

### **Lightroom - David Bowie: You're Not Alone (8 December 2026 - 10 January 2027)**

*Presented by Lightroom*

Featuring the artist as its sole voice, ***David Bowie: You're Not Alone*** immerses audiences in the iconic performances and creative mind of one of the world's most visionary and influential artists.

Bringing together a wealth of visual material from a wide range of sources, the experience combines rare performance footage, photography, drawings, lyrics, personal notes and audio recordings. *You're Not Alone* will showcase some of Bowie's landmark performances that redefined popular culture, using a mix of iconic, rarely seen and never-before-exhibited material, selected from thousands of hours of film in the vaults of the David Bowie Archive in New York, from *Space Oddity* through to *Diamond Dogs* and "Heroes" to ★. Each track been newly reconfigured to utilise Lightroom's specialised spatial audio system by multiple Olivier and Tony award-winning sound designer Gareth Fry (*Harry Potter & The Cursed Child*, *David Bowie Is*).

Produced by Lightroom and designed by 59, a Journey Studio, ***You're Not Alone*** is written and directed by 59's Mark Grimmer, who is also Creative Director for the V&A's *David Bowie Is* exhibition, and Tom Wexler. The 360° experience is both a multimedia spectacle and an intimate and revealing self-portrait, giving a unique insight into Bowie's perspective on the subjects most important to him, including theatricality, spirituality, songwriting and the transformative power of creativity, focusing on the man behind the masks - the provocateur, the polymath, the shapeshifting icon in his enduring, human form.

*David Bowie: You're Not Alone* is being made in close collaboration with and authorized by the David Bowie Estate.

**Writer and Director Mark Grimmer said:** *"It says something about our relationship with artistic heroes that we're drawn to mystery, otherness, the alien... In Bowie's case, this is our construct, not his. Throughout his career, Bowie repeatedly resisted being figured as anything but human. Rather than undermining his mystique, we designed a show to celebrate Bowie as a champion of human creativity - focusing on the message he expressed time and again: that art, in all its forms, is our best hope for understanding what it means to be alive."*

## **PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED:**

### **It's a Sin (16 - 27 Feb 2027) - WORLD PREMIERE**

*Presented by Rambert and Factory International. Co-produced with Wales Millennium Centre (Cardiff), Capital Theatres (Edinburgh), Sadler's Wells (London), and Les Théâtres de la Ville (Luxembourg).*

**Rambert** and Factory International present the World Premiere of ***It's A Sin***, a major new dance work inspired by the era-defining, award-winning Channel 4 Series.

In the heart of 1980s London, ***It's a Sin*** follows a group of young gay men and their friends chasing identity, connection and a life on their own terms. When day spills into night they find a world of abandon, music and friendship, where bodies move freely and life feels limitless. But as the AIDS crisis begins to unfold, their lives are irrevocably changed. Love, fear and defiance collide as they fight for each other in a world that is rapidly shifting around them - and increasingly hostile to their existence.

Brought to life by Rambert's extraordinary dancers, *It's a Sin* weaves past and present into something raw, visceral and devastating. With original series creator **Russell T Davies** (*Queer as Folk*, *Doctor Who*), legendary pop duo **Pet Shop Boys** and **Glyn Fussell** (*Sink the Pink*, *Mighty Hoopla*) as Executive Producers, this powerful dance story of love and survival is directed and choreographed by Rambert's Artistic Director **Benoit Swan Pouffer** with dramaturgy from **Kaite O'Reilly** (*The Almond and the Seahorse*).

Expanding the world of the beloved television drama, the production brings together an extraordinary creative team. **Roman GianArthur** (whose Grammy nominated albums multi-instrumentalist credits include Janelle Monáe's *Dirty Computer* and *The Age of Pleasure*) will compose the music with the support of Pet Shop Boys to evoke the glamour, defiance and emotional intensity of 1980s queer life. Set and video design comes from **Luke Halls Studio** whose work spans global arena tours and major stage productions (*West Side Story*, concerts from Pet Shop Boys, Adele, Dua Lipa and Take That).

To celebrate the World Premiere of this bold, euphoric and electrifying new work, a programme of related events and activities will coincide with the run at Aviva Studios.

**Benoit Swan Pouffer said:** *"Storytelling sits at the heart of Rambert's mission. This is a story we feel compelled to tell right now, and collaborating with Russell - one of the most powerful storytellers of our time — is incredibly exciting. Together we're exploring how dance and choreography can carry urgent, emotional narratives in a visceral way. I can't wait to share this with audiences, and there is so much more still to come as the work evolves."*

**Russell T Davies said:** *"It's A Sin was such a special show for me, and it's one of the greatest honours of my life to have the show transformed by Rambert into something new and exciting."*

**Pet Shop Boys commented:** *"The original TV drama was a landmark series which compellingly presented the reality and tragedy of the Aids crisis to a mass audience. Our song "It's a sin" was contemporary with the crisis and we are proud to be involved as this poignant and important story is interpreted in a different medium."*

*It's a Sin* is made possible thanks to major support from the Colwinston Charitable Trust's 30th Anniversary Fund. *It's a Sin* has been supported by Incentivising Touring: Repayable Grants for Theatre and Dance, a pilot scheme developed by Arts Council England.

This production is inspired by the television series "*It's a Sin*" created by Russell T Davies and produced by Red Production Company.

**ENDS**

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## LISTINGS INFORMATION

### **Application 39** (9 - 10 October)

Press night - 9 October

*An ETT, Matthew Schmolle Productions and Theatre Royal Stratford East Co-Production*

### **Portrait of Black Britain** (From 1 October )

Press launch: 1 October

*Commissioned by Factory International and Co-Produced by Factory International and Cephias Williams*

[View the online gallery here](#)

Free entry

### **Lightroom - David Bowie: You're Not Alone** (8 December 2026 - 10 January 2027)

Press view: 9 December

*Presented by Lightroom*

### **It's a Sin** (16 - 27 February 2027)

Previews: Tuesday 16 & Wednesday 17 February

Press night: Thursday 18 February

*Presented by Rambert and Factory International. Co-produced with Wales Millennium Centre (Cardiff), Capital Theatres (Edinburgh), Sadler's Wells (London), and Les Théâtres de la Ville (Luxembourg).*

Please note all requests for press tickets are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

### **About**

### **Factory**

### **International**

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios.

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year.

Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester.

