# Indhu Rubasingham opens National Theatre season with bold reinterpretation of Bacchae



Indhu Rubasingham is commencing her leadership at the National Theatre (NT) with an audacious and striking reinterpretation of ancient Greek tragedy, setting a bold and contemporary tone for her inaugural season. The opening production, Bacchae, a part verse and part spoken-word adaptation of Euripides’ classic, is notable for its visceral depiction of chaotic revelry and violent upheaval as a female chorus exacts brutal vengeance on a king. Rubasingham herself will direct this new work by debut playwright Nima Taleghani, an actor known for his innovative rapping Cyrano in Jamie Lloyd’s production.

Significantly, the staging of Bacchae in the NT’s Olivier Theatre represents a historic move, as it is the first time a debut play will be presented on the venue’s largest stage. The production marks a thematic and architectural nod to the origins of Western theatre, with the auditorium’s design inspired by the ancient amphitheatre at Epidaurus where Bacchae was first performed in the fifth century BC. “I think it’s an important statement,” Rubasingham commented to The Guardian. She praised Taleghani’s contemporary and refreshing language style, candidly noting a colleague’s cheeky remark about her directing suitability, “Do you think you’re cool enough to direct this?”

The trailer for Bacchae offers a stark and vivid imagery of grisly chaos, featuring close-ups of female chorus members delivering rap lines that chillingly recount their violent acts, including tearing the titular king apart. This youthful and anarchic approach complements the play’s tradition of disruption, Rubasingham said, reaffirming its place alongside classic productions such as Hamlet, which will also feature in the season under the direction of NT deputy artistic director Robert Hastie. That production sees Hiran Abeysekera portraying Hamlet with modern flair, adding a British slang twist to the iconic soliloquy.

Beyond the opening, Rubasingham’s season intentionally explores themes of disruption, celebration, reinvention, and internationalism, with music playing a key role. One highlight will be a collaboration with rapper Stormzy, signalling the theatre’s commitment to bridging classical and contemporary forms. This season will also see an adaptation of the 2014 film Pride, a real-life narrative about the LGBTQ+ community’s alliance with striking miners in 1984, further underscoring the NT’s engagement with diverse stories and formats. Rubasingham emphasised that new writing will be integrated across all three NT performance spaces, challenging traditional boundaries around what is staged where.

Kate Varah, co-chief executive alongside Rubasingham, described the artistic choices as “the right kind of risk,” balancing heritage with renewal. She highlighted the potential for fresh reinterpretations to revitalize audience connections. Rubasingham echoes this sentiment, expressing a desire for the NT to remain accessible and appealing both to long-time patrons and to younger audiences, consciously blending canonical works with contemporary voices into what she terms the “modern mainstream.”

An important development in Rubasingham’s first season is the reinstatement of the repertory theatre system, absent from the NT since 2019. Rep will return on the Lyttelton stage with actor Paul Mescal leading two rotating productions, A Whistle in the Dark and Death of a Salesman. Rubasingham rejected any notion that this move was a reaction to pressure from playwright David Hare, affirming it was a strategic, post-Covid decision designed to allow artistic flexibility and agility. Mescal’s enthusiasm for the rep model highlights a fusion of screen and stage prominence, which Rubasingham views as complementary to artistic quality and audience engagement rather than merely a celebrity draw.

Regarding the broader theatre landscape, Rubasingham acknowledged the challenge of high ticket prices seen in the West End and on Broadway but distinguished the NT’s comparatively affordable access. Varah pointed to the theatre’s digital initiatives, such as NT Live and NT at Home, which expand accessibility globally and provide alternative viewing options.

Rubasingham’s transition into her new role has been marked by steady confidence and familiarity with both the NT institution and the scale of its operation. Reflecting on her predecessor Rufus Norris’s supportive message, she said, “You’ve got this,” and described her preparation for the opening production as rigorous, aware that it would be closely scrutinised. She concluded with an expression of excitement about the collaborative potential within the NT, “It’s a world of possibilities. That’s thrilling.”

This opening season under Rubasingham signals a deliberate commitment to innovation within tradition, aiming to broaden the National Theatre’s artistic and demographic reach while honouring foundational theatrical principles.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/dec/13/indhu-rubasingham-chosen-as-national-theatres-next-director> - This article announces Indhu Rubasingham's appointment as the National Theatre's first female director, confirming her leadership role and the start of her tenure in 2025.
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/indhu-rubasingham-rufus-norris-national-theatre-kiln-theatre-british-b1126567.html> - This piece discusses Rubasingham's background, including her tenure at Kiln Theatre and her upcoming role at the National Theatre, highlighting her leadership and artistic vision.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/indhu-rubasingham-rufus-norris-national-theatre-kiln-theatre-british-b1126547.html> - This article provides insights into Rubasingham's appointment and her plans for the National Theatre, emphasizing her approach to blending traditional and contemporary works.
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7. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2025/apr/29/paul-mescal-stormzy-rep-national-theatre-indhu-rubasingham-miners> - Please view link - unable to able to access data