



PRESS INFORMATION



Poplar Union and the Finborough Theatre

presents

POPLARISM!

A DIGITAL ARTS FESTIVAL CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY
OF THE POPLAR RATES REBELLION OF 1921

Curated by Beth Watton of Poplar Union and Neil McPherson of the Finborough Theatre.

"Marching to the High Court and possibly to prison..."

Led by George Lansbury, former Mayor of Poplar and future leader of the Labour Party, the Poplar Rates Rebellion of 1921 was one of the milestones of local London history where local government stood against central government on behalf of the poor and the least privileged in society.

Poplar (now in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets) in 1921 – as it is now - was one of the poorest districts of London, and there was no government support to alleviate the high unemployment, hunger, and poverty in the borough. That work had to be funded by local ratepayers – who also had to pay contributions to four cross-London authorities – the London County Council, the Metropolitan Police, the Metropolitan Asylums Board and the Metropolitan Water Board.

Poplar Borough Council's Labour administration was elected in 1919 to undertake a comprehensive programme of social reform and poor relief, including equal pay for women and a minimum wage for council workers, which could only be funded from the rates. Because Poplar was a poor borough, Poplar Borough Council had to set a much higher rate in order to produce the same amount produced by low rates in a wealthy borough. Poplar called for complete equalisation of the rates, so that the same rate brought in the same income both to Poplar and to a wealthier West London borough.

In 1921, faced with the prospect of a further massive increase in the rates, Poplar Council decided to hold them down by not collecting the contributions which should have passed on to the four cross-London authorities. The London County Council and Metropolitan Asylums Board responded by taking the Council to the High Court. The council's response was to organise a procession of 2,000 supporters from Bow, led by the borough's official mace-bearer, to the accompaniment of a band and a banner proclaiming "Poplar Borough Council marching to the High Court and possibly to prison".

Thirty councillors, including six women, one of whom, Nellie Cressall, was pregnant, were sent to prison indefinitely for contempt of court. George Lansbury's son, Edgar, was imprisoned. He went on to become the father of legendary actress Dame Angela Lansbury. One of the jailed women was Edgar's first wife, suffragette Minnie Lansbury, who due to her imprisonment, developed pneumonia and died at the age of just 32. She was one of five councilors said to have died early due to mistreatment in prison.

The revolt received wide public support. After six weeks' imprisonment, the court ordered the councillors release, to great rejoicing in Poplar, and a bill was rushed through parliament that more or less equalised the tax burdens between London's rich and poor boroughs.

Poplarism! is a unique collaboration between two very different venues in two very different parts of London – the recently opened arts and community space, **Poplar Union**, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, one of London's

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439

e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk Artistic Director Neil McPherson

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most deprived boroughs, and the long-established **Finborough Theatre**, located in one of London's wealthiest areas, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The two venues are now joining together in a spirit of cross-London partnership and reconciliation to celebrate this milestone in London's history.

"Poplar will pay its share of London's rates when Westminster, Kensington, and the City do the same."

We're inviting all residents of the **Boroughs of Tower Hamlets** and **Kensington and Chelsea** to submit a proposal outlining their creative response to the events of 1921.

This is an open call out to celebrate and showcase the creativity of both our communities and is an opportunity for those who do and don't consider themselves 'artists'. Whether you're a musician, an actor or a teacher who likes to paint in their spare time, we want to hear from you! Applicants should respond to the theme as naturally and instinctively as possible, though the work should be in some way a response to the events, personalities and issues of 1921 - though this is very much open to interpretation. We're absolutely not looking for a historical saga. This can be from people of any age and can be presented in any way - music, dance, a performance, drawing, poem, talk, zine, anything that can be presented digitally.

The programming teams at Poplar Union and the Finborough Theatre will select 10 submissions (5 from Tower Hamlets, and 5 from Kensington and Chelsea) to receive a micro-commission of £300 each to put towards the creation of the work. The artists selected will also receive guidance and support from the Poplar Union and the Finborough Theatre in developing their piece.

You can read more about the events of 1921 here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poplar_Rates_Rebellion

<https://islandhistory.wordpress.com/2014/06/21/poplarism-aka-the-poplar-rates-rebellion/>

<https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/health/id/1092/rec/1>

<https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/health/id/2710/rec/2>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Lansbury

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Lansbury_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Lansbury_(politician))

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnie_Lansbury

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nellie_Cressall

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_Lawrence

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Scurr

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Scurr

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Sumner_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Sumner_(politician))

When's the festival?

Saturday, 1 May 2021 to Tuesday, 4 May 2021

The winning submissions will be streamed online – submissions from Tower Hamlets will be streamed on Finborough Theatre's YouTube/digital channels, and submissions from Kensington and Chelsea will be streamed on Poplar Union's YouTube/digital channels.

There will also be QandA sessions online every day during the festival with the artists involved.

Useful Dates

Festival announced 18 January 2021

Submissions open 1 February 2021

Submissions close deadline 1 March 2021

Winning submissions announced 1 April 2021

Winning submissions submitted 24 April 2021

How to apply

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439

e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk Artistic Director Neil McPherson

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For residents of Tower Hamlets:

Please fill out the form and send back to info@poplarunion.com with the subject 'Poplarism Community Commission' by Monday, 1 March 2021, 5pm. All applicants will receive a response on Wednesday, 31 March 2021.

For residents of Kensington and Chelsea:

Please fill out the form and send back to admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk with the subject 'Poplarism Community Commission' by Monday, 1 March 2021, 5pm. All applicants will receive a response on Wednesday, 31 March 2021.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Poplar Union:

Libby Spiller on email libby@poplarunion.com or 020 3039 3333

Finborough Theatre:

Livvy Perrett on e-mail press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or 07889 794858

Download press releases and images at <http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources.php>

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