



Press Release

FREE YOUR MIND

Aviva Studios

18 October - 5 November 2023

Danny Boyle, Es Devlin, Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy, Michael 'Mikey J' Asante and Sabrina Mahfouz bring the classic film to the stage

Factory International presents *Free Your Mind*, a large-scale immersive performance based on The Matrix films and created especially for the official opening of Aviva Studios, Manchester's landmark new cultural venue.

Premiering on 18 October 2023, *Free Your Mind* is a dramatic retelling of the classic 1999 sci-fi film through dance, music and visual effects. Featuring 50 professional dancers from the North West and across the UK, and almost 100 participants from Greater Manchester, this world-first adaptation takes place throughout the building's ultra-flexible spaces.

Directed by **Danny Boyle**, *Free Your Mind* brings together the visceral movement of choreographer **Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy** with a powerful score from renowned composer **Michael 'Mikey J' Asante** (co-founders and artistic directors of the Olivier award-winning *Boy Blue*), set design by world-leading artist and designer **Es Devlin** and the work of the acclaimed writer **Sabrina Mahfouz**.

The creative team also includes celebrated costume designer **Gareth Pugh**, award-winning lighting designer **Lucy Carter**, sound designer **Gareth Fry** and renowned video designer **Luke Halls**.

Working with BAFTA-winning producer **Tracey Seaward**, this unique cross-art collaboration of world-leading artists showcases the breadth and ambition of Factory International's artistic programme and invites audiences into a new realm of possibilities spanning real and imagined worlds. *Free Your Mind* recreates some of the film's most iconic scenes through hip-hop choreography combined with immersive set design and visual effects, provoking visions of an alternate future.

Created for Manchester, the birthplace of the world's first industrial revolution, *Free Your Mind* explores where the digital revolution has the power to take the world. *Free Your Mind* journeys from 1999, the year *The Matrix* was first released and the moment before people's lives were irrevocably entwined with technology, to the present day, where the Metaverse is about to engulf the world. The show brings the words of *The Matrix* character Neo to the forefront: "*I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin.*"

Free Your Mind is a world premiere commissioned and produced by Factory International. Based on the Warner Bros films written and directed by the Wachowskis, produced by special arrangement with Warner Bros Theatre Ventures.

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
factoryinternational.org



Press Release

LISTINGS INFORMATION

Free Your Mind

Aviva Studios, Water Street, Manchester, M3 4JQ

18 October - 5 November 2023 (13-17 October previews)

Standard Tickets £20, £25, £30, £40

Concessions from £10

Over 12's only. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult over 18.

For more information, please contact: press@factoryinternational.org

NOTES TO EDITORS

Free Your Mind performers

Of the 50 professional dancers in *Free Your Mind*, 28 are from across the North West, 20 of which are from Greater Manchester including Bolton, Manchester, Prestwich, Salford, Tameside and Trafford.

Michael 'Mikey J' Asante – Composer / Co-creator

Michael 'Mikey J' Asante MBE is a renowned producer, composer and DJ, whose 20-year career history is firmly etched in the UK black music industry.

As co-artistic director of hip hop dance theatre company Boy Blue, founded in 2001 with Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy, Asante is credited with the direction and composition of *REDD* (2019), the film *R.E.B.E.L* (2018), *Outliers* (2018), *Blak Whyte Gray* (2017), *The Five & the Prophecy of Prana* (2013), *Touch* (2011), *Legacy* (2011) and *Pied Piper* (2007). As a producer, Asante has worked with major label artists including Delilah, Raleigh Ritchie, Estelle and George The Poet. Notably Asante has worked extensively with Kano including engineering and production on the critically acclaimed album *Made In The Manor* and the albums *Home Sweet Home*, *London Town* and *140 Grime Street*. Recent television and theatre work includes composition for *Tree*, a Kwame Kwei-Armah and Idris Elba creation for Manchester International Festival, composition for *Clotilda: Last American Slave Ship*, a National Geographic documentary special, the BBC documentary *The Three Lives of Michael X*, and a collaboration with Brian Eno over two series of Netflix's *Top Boy*.

Outside of the studio, Asante mentors and delivers master classes in directing, choreography and music and is also found residing in the Guildhall School of Music and Drama's faculty as a Professor of electronic music, from where, in 2018, Asante was awarded an Honorary Fellowship (HonFGS). Asante received an MBE to Hip Hop Dance and Music in the 2022 New Year's Honours.

Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy – Choreographer / Co-creator

Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy MBE is the co-founder and co-Artistic Director of Boy Blue, an Artistic Associate of the Barbican, London, and a renowned choreographer and performer.

Sandy's credits are extensive; as choreographer he's responsible for the film *R.E.B.E.L* (2018), the dance theatre shows *REDD* (2019), *Blak Whyte Gray* (2017), *The Five & the Prophecy of Prana* (2013), *A Night With Boy Blue* (2018, 2016, 2015, 2013) and *Pied Piper: A Hip-Hop Dance Revolution* (2007). Off the main stage, Sandy collaborated with director Danny Boyle for the London 2012

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
factoryinternational.org



Press Release

Olympic Opening Ceremony, winning the Evening Standard's Beyond Theatre award. Sandy and Boyle reunited in 2017 to film Boy Blue's *Emancipation of Expressionism*, a set work on the GCSE Dance syllabus. On screen work includes choreography for The *BAFTA Awards*, *All Stars* and *T2 Trainspotting*, plus appearances on *Street Dance 3D* and the BBC's *So You Think You Can Dance*. Sandy has also created choreography for artists FKA twigs and Rita Ora and brands Nike, adidas and ASOS. Sandy was awarded an MBE for services to dance and the community in 2017 and a Companionship from LIPA and an Honorary Fellowship (HonFGS) from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2018.

Boy Blue – Associate Producers

Founded in East London in 2001 by Michael 'Mikey J' Asante and Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy, Boy Blue is a radical force that has defined the potential and power of hip hop dance theatre across the UK. The spirit in which Boy Blue was formed came from the three 'E's – 'Education, Enlightenment and Entertainment' – and the company's achievements and accolades are as far-reaching as the community it has fostered and the hip hop culture it has elevated. For many, Boy Blue is also a family, with many UK-based hip hop dancers having called it home during their careers.

Boy Blue's dedication to creating world-class dance productions is inextricable with their commitment to empowering young people to make space for themselves and tell their own stories. Thousands of young people have been educated at Boy Blue, with the aim of nurturing their ambition and raw talent and harnessing it into craft, enabling transformative access and opportunities, both professionally and personally. Many of the dancers you'll see in *Free Your Mind* have trained with Boy Blue across the UK. Thank you to all Boy Blue teachers, past and present, for creating an environment in which they could grow.

Danny Boyle – Director / Co-creator

Household name Danny Boyle has delivered some of the most iconic moments in cinema over the past 30 years as one of Britain's best loved directors. From the seminal *Trainspotting* to unnerving hits like *The Beach* and *127 Hours* to the multiple Academy Award- and BAFTA- winning *Slumdog Millionaire*, his works are known and revered world-over. His career also spans theatre and television; Boyle directed the widely acclaimed *Frankenstein* for the National Theatre and *Pistol*, a six-part TV series based on guitarist Steve Jones' 2018 memoir *Lonely Boy: Tales From a Sex Pistol*.

Boyle also directed the 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony. For *Free Your Mind*, he joins forces with Kenrick Sandy MBE who choreographed part of the ceremony, as well as long-term collaborator and creative producer, Tracey Seaward.

Es Devlin – Set Designer / Co-creator

Artist and designer Es Devlin's recent works include the large-scale choral sculpture *Come Home Again* at the Tate Modern Garden which fused drawings and voices of 243 endangered London species; *Conference of the Trees*, which brought together 197 trees at COP26 in Glasgow; *Memory Palace* at Pitzhanger Manor which mapped shifts in human perspective over 73 millennia; and *Forest of Us* which forms part of the inaugural exhibition at Superblue Miami alongside new works by TeamLab and James Turrell. Her recent theatre work includes *The Crucible*, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Ugly Lies the Bone* at RNT, *A Number* at the Old Vic, *Girls and Boys* and *The*

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
factoryinternational.org



Press Release

Nether at the Royal Court, *Faith Healer* at The Donmar, *Hamlet* at the Barbican and *Chimerica* at the Almeida. Devlin has conceived stage sculptures with Beyoncé, The Weeknd, U2, Kanye West, Saint Laurent, Dior and the 2021 and 2022 Super Bowl halftime shows featuring Dr Dre, Kendrick Lamar, Eminem as well as Olympic Ceremonies in London and Rio. She was the first woman to design the UK Pavilion at EXPO 2020 and her practice was the subject of the Netflix documentary series *Abstract: The Art Of Design*. Her design for *The Lehman Trilogy* won the 2022 Tony Award and she has previously been awarded The London Design Medal, three Olivier awards, doctorates from the Universities of Bristol, Kent and UAL and a CBE.

Sabrina Mahfouz – Writer / Co-creator

Sabrina is a writer and performer, raised in London and Cairo. Sabrina recently performed her cross-genre show *A History of Water in the Middle East* at the Royal Court Theatre and was one of the inaugural writers in residence at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, co-writing an adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Sabrina's debut non-fiction book is *These Bodies of Water: Notes on the British Empire, the Middle East and Where We Meet*. Her poetry collection, *How You Might Know Me* (Out-Spoken Press), was a 2017 Guardian Best Summer Read and she was an essay contributor to the award-winning anthology *The Good Immigrant* (Unbound). Sabrina has also edited numerous anthologies including *The Things I Would Tell You: British Muslim Women Write* (Saqi), which was a 2017 Guardian Book of the Year. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (FRSL).

Gareth Pugh – Costume Designer

Uncompromising, anarchic and at times fiercely confrontational, it's fair to say that provocation has always been one of British fashion designer Gareth Pugh's governing principles. Described by Andrew Bolton – Head Curator of The Costume Institute at The Metropolitan Museum of Art – as 'the Fellini of fashion' and by The Sunday Times as 'Britain's most exciting designer', he is, as Dazed put it, 'the designer who shattered the monotony of an era of commercial fashion'.

Born in Sunderland in 1981, Pugh studied at Central Saint Martins in London. He graduated in 2005 determined to redefine what it means to be a designer in the cultural space and, nearly two decades later, despite global recognition and critical acclaim, he remains defiant – steadfastly refusing to take his place among the ranks of the establishment, preferring to remain an outlier, viewing fashion not so much as an industry but instead as a vital cultural force.

Over the past decade, Pugh has worked with some of the most popular artists of our time – including Beyoncé, Lady Gaga and Rihanna – and has collaborated with some of the world's most important cultural institutions, designing shows for the New York City Ballet, the Opéra national de Paris, the Dutch National Opera and The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

In 2018, with a view to expanding and diversifying his creative practice, alongside his husband and longtime creative accomplice Carson McColl, Pugh co-founded HARD+SHINY, an award winning independent creative studio based in London. To describe the studio's output as multi-disciplinary would be something of an understatement. Their client portfolio is a rich and colourful line up, ranging from Stonewall to Selfridges, Madison Square Garden to Rolls-Royce Motor Cars.

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
factoryinternational.org



Press Release

By far the studio's largest project to date is This Bright Land, a month-long not-for-profit cultural festival taking place every two years at Somerset House. Launched in the summer of 2022, This Bright Land welcomed more visitors in its first year than Glastonbury and was described by the Evening Standard as 'The summer's most joyful festival! A radical addition to the cultural scene, unlike any festival before it.'

Lucy Carter - Lighting Design

Lucy Carter is a multi-award winning, critically acclaimed lighting designer. She was awarded the 2018 Critics' Circle National Dance Award for Outstanding Creative Contribution. She is a two-time winner of the prestigious Knight of Illumination Award for Dance for Chroma (2008) and for Woolf Works (2015), winner of the 2013 TMA Achievement Award in Opera for Lohengrin and of the 2004 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance for 2 Human.

Her theatre credits include: Shirley Valentine (West End); The Time Traveller's Wife (Storyhouse); 2:22 A Ghost Story (Lyric Theatre, Criterion Theatre, Apollo Theatre, Gielgud Theatre and Noël Coward Theatre, London; Ahmanson, Los Angeles; Melbourne); Much Ado About Nothing, Medea, Emil and the Detectives, Blurred Lines and Husbands and Sons (National Theatre); Persuasion (Rose Theatre); Force Majeure (Donmar Warehouse); Wicked (Hamburg); Everybody's Talking About Jamie (West End and UK Tour); Escaped Alone and Coriolanus (Crucible Theatre); On the Town (Hyogo Performing Arts Center, Japan); Home, I'm Darling (National Theatre, West End and UK Tour); The Almighty Sometimes (Royal Exchange Theatre); Oil (Almeida Theatre); and The End of Longing (West End).

Her opera credits include: Alcina (Royal Opera House; Best New Opera Production, Olivier Awards 2023), Le nozze di Figaro (Opéra national de Paris); Kát'a Kabanová (Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Royal Opera House; Best New Opera Production, Olivier Awards 2019); Mavra/Pierrot Lunaire and Hansel and Gretel (Royal Opera House); The Cunning Little Vixen, Orphée, Salomé and The Dream of Gerontius (English National Opera); Werther (Bergen National Opera); Elektra (Göteborg Opera); Lohengrin (Greek National Opera, Polish National Opera, Welsh National Opera); La finta giardiniera (Glyndebourne, Teatro alla Scala); and Peter Grimes (Aldeburgh Beach).

Her dance credits include: MADDADDAM, The Dante Project, McGregor + Mugler, Woolf Works, Obsidian Tear, AftErite, Yugen, Multiverse, Chroma and Autobiography with long-term collaborator Wayne McGregor; Threshold (Le Patin Libre); and The Most Incredible Thing (Sadler's Wells, Charlotte Ballet). Her other credits include: Gareth Pugh's Women's Collection in London Fashion Week 2017 and 2019, Paloma Faith's performance at the Brit Awards 2015.

Gareth Fry - Sound Design

Gareth Fry is a multi-award-winning sound designer, best known for his cutting-edge work in theatre, on productions such as Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, and Complicité's The Encounter. He has also designed events and exhibitions, from the V&A's landmark David Bowie is exhibition, to the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Recent work includes: Romeo and Juliet (Almeida); Medea (Soho Place); Othello (Frantic Assembly); On The Ropes (Park Theatre); A Christmas Carol and John Gabriel Borkman (Bridge Theatre); and

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS



Aviva Studios
Water Street, Manchester M3 4JQ
factoryinternational.org



Press Release

Bedknobs & Broomsticks (UK tour). Other work includes: Invisible Cities (Manchester International Festival); The Master and Margarita, Shun-kin and Endgame (Complicité); Let The Right One In and Black Watch (National Theatre of Scotland); Wings, The Cherry Orchard, Wild Swans and Hamlet (Young Vic); Boy (Almeida); Othello, The Cat in the Hat, A Matter Of Life and Death, Attempts on Her Life and Waves (National Theatre); Road, B and Victory Condition (Royal Court); and John (DV8 Physical Theatre).

Gareth trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama in theatre design. He is the author of Sound Design for the Stage.

Luke Halls - Video Design

Luke Halls is a London-based video designer, recognised by Drama Desk and BAFTA for his work on concerts, opera, theatre shows, film and public art. His opera credits include: Boris Godunov (Teatro alla Scala); Lucia di Lammermoor and Otello (Metropolitan Opera); The Merry Widow (Bergen National Opera); Atlas (LA Philharmonic); Don Giovanni and Król Roger (Royal Opera House); The Hobbit, The Cunning Little Vixen, Don Giovanni and Der Freischütz (Danish Royal Opera); Zeitgeist (Coliseum); Das Liebesverbot (Teatro Real); Tristan und Isolde (Festival d'Aix-en-Provence); The Flying Dutchman (Finland National Opera); West Side Story (Malmö Opera); Don Giovanni (Barcelona Opera and Houston Opera); Marco Polo (Guangzhou Opera House); Madame Butterfly and Carmen (Bregenzer Festspiele); and Porgy and Bess (National Opera, Amsterdam and Met Opera).

His theatre credits include: Aida (Circustheater); West Side Story (Broadway Theatre); The Starry Messenger, Everyone's Talking About Jamie, The Moderate Soprano, Frozen, 2071, The Nether and The Lehman Trilogy (West End); Shipwreck and Oil (Almeida); Linda and Girls & Boys (Royal Court); Miss Saigon (Austria, Japan, New York and UK tour); Antony and Cleopatra, Man and Superman, Ugly Lies the Bone and The Great Wave (National Theatre); The Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage, Talking Heads, A Christmas Carol, Alys, Always, and My Name is Lucy Barton (Bridge Theatre); Local Hero (Royal Lyceum Theatre); Desire Under the Elms (Crucible Theatre); Elegy for Young Lovers (Theater an der Wien); Half a Sixpence (Chichester Festival Theatre); Mary Poppins (touring); Hamlet and The Master and Margarita (Barbican); I Can't Sing (The London Palladium); and The Little Big Things (Soho Place).

His ballet credits include: Like Water for Chocolate (Royal Opera House, Costa Mesa and Metropolitan Opera); Malgorzata Dzierzon (Ballet Rambert); Connectome (Royal Ballet). Halls has designed visuals for performing artists such as Adele, Rihanna, Robbie Williams, Drake, Pet Shop Boys, The Sessions, George Michael, Rolling Stones, Genesis, Darren Hayes, Elton John, U2, Muse, and Nitin Sawhney. His other credits include Magic Mike Live, Paris Fashion Week, The Band, London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic closing ceremonies, 2022 FIFA World Cup Opening Ceremony, Frameless London, and Concert for Diana at Wembley Stadium. He has been awarded Knight of Illumination Awards in 2014, 2015 and 2016, a BAFTA Award for The Cube and the 2020 Drama Desk Award for West Side Story.

PUBLIC SECTOR FUNDERS

