



## LETTERS LIVE



A celebration of the enduring power of the letter, Letters Live is an unforgettable live experience that pairs great performers with remarkable literary correspondence, and from the most unexpected and varied of sources. One of the joys of Letters Live is that one never knows who is going to take to the stage or what letter they are going to bring alive.

Letters Live was inspired by Shaun Usher's bestselling Letters of Note and Simon Garfield's To the Letter. A worldwide phenomenon, Usher's Letters of Note titles have been translated into eighteen languages and sold over 500,000 copies worldwide, and the Letters of Note website has been visited by tens of millions of people.

The independent publishing house Canongate, who created and developed Letters Live, subsequently partnered with the film and television production company SunnyMarch to build Letters Live into an even more far-reaching and ambitious project. Their shared vision is to harness the power of letters through curated events of exceptional quality and to develop a multi-media platform that delivers the most memorable letters to people all around the world.

Hailed in The Observer as “the best letters in the world read by the best voices”, Letters Live had its premiere at The Tabernacle in west London in December 2013. It quickly established itself as a very powerful and dynamic event format that attracted outstanding talents to performing remarkable letters in front of a live audience. Since 2013 it has been staged over sixty times, including performances in New York, Venice, Brixton Prison, Los Angeles, Edinburgh, the Hay Festival, the Wilderness Festival and in the Calais Jungle. The most recent run took place at Islington’s Union Chapel, to an audience of nearly 3000 people. Past performers have included Benedict Cumberbatch, Olivia Colman, Gillian Anderson, Sir Ian McKellen, Sally Hawkins, Laurence Fishburne, Anjelica Huston, Jake Gyllenhaal, Jude Law, Brie Larson, Tom Hiddleston, Helen McCrory, Stephen Fry, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sanjeev Bhaskar, Riz Ahmed, Juliet Stevenson, Jarvis Cocker, Noma Dumezweni, Noel Fielding, Kylie Minogue, Thom Yorke, Louise Brealey, Toby Jones and Sir Ben Kingsley, plus live music from artists ranging from Nick Cave, Laura Mvula and Jamie Cullum to Benjamin Clementine, Tom Odell and James Rhodes.



Letters read have included those by David Bowie, Marge Simpson, Mohandas Gandhi, Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Kurt Vonnegut, Charlotte Bronte, James Baldwin, Charles Dickens, Emily Dickinson, John Steinbeck, Madonna, Tom Hanks, Dorothy Parker and Che Guevara as well as by many remarkable people who are lesser known. As well as celebrating the pain, joy, wisdom and humour expressed in letters, Letters Live has from the outset been committed to promoting literacy and supporting worthwhile causes and charities including First Story, The Reading Agency, Mothers to Mothers, Help Refugees, 826LA, 826NY, Ministry of Stories and Women for Women. First Story will be supported through this production.

Benedict Cumberbatch, co-producer of Letters Live, said "Letters Live makes us pause and imagine the lives behind the letters read and the circumstances of their origin. It's a privilege and truly inspiring to read this most ancient of writing forms to a live audience."

<http://letterslive.com/>

---

## FIRST STORY

First Story changes lives through writing. There is dignity and power in telling our own story, and we help disadvantaged young people to find their voices and write creatively. First Story places professional writers into secondary schools serving low-income communities, where they work intensively with students and teachers to foster confidence, creativity and writing ability. We publish our students' work in anthologies which are celebrated at launch events in school. Our programmes expand young people's horizons and raise aspirations, as students gain vital skills that underpin their success in school and support their transition to further education and employment. First Story serves communities with high levels of child poverty; we focus on schools in which more than 50% of pupils are considered deprived (according to the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) and where GCSE results fall in the lowest third nationally. Our unparalleled network of talented practitioners and educators have helped us to create the blueprint for best practice in creative writing provision. In 2017-18 we supported 2,039 young people from disadvantaged communities in regular workshops, and reached nearly 6,000 additional young people through opportunities including anthology launch events, assemblies, and regional writing events in universities and cultural institutions.

<https://www.firststory.org.uk/>

---