

Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree Celebrated with New Poem

New poem written with the help of primary school children displayed on colourful banners around the tree



2010 Christmas tree. Photo: Hayley Madden for the Poetry Society

It's probably the most famous Christmas tree in the world, and its lighting-up ceremony has come to signify the beginning of the Christmas season in the British capital. A specially commissioned new poem is at the heart of the celebrations.

The Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square is the City of Oslo's annual gift to the people of London, in a tradition that dates back to 1947. Since 2009, the Poetry Society has worked with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London to create a poetry project inspired by the tree, which is now established as a central part of the tradition.

A new poem, written with the help of primary school children, will be performed as part of the official lighting-up ceremony in the Square on 6 December, and then displayed on colourful banners around the tree.



A workshop participant.
Photo: Hayley Madden for the Poetry Society

Hundreds of children, from 12 schools across London and Lincolnshire have participated in the 'Look North More Often' project. The Poetry Society's team of six leading children's poets ran free poetry writing workshops in the schools, exploring the tree's message of friendship. The children's poems were then sent to poet Jackie Kay, who has drawn together ideas, lines and images from their work, to compose a celebratory collaborative new poem for Trafalgar Square.

As part of the project, the Poetry Society also sends a group of children to Norway every year to witness the felling of the tree as it starts its voyage to Trafalgar Square. This year, the lucky children were from St Paul's Whitechapel CE Primary School.

The crowds in Trafalgar Square on 6 December will hear the new poem's first performance, by three children from St Clement Danes School, as part of the official lighting-up ceremony, introduced by the Lord Mayor of Westminster. The ceremony which begins at 6pm also includes carols from the Regent Hall Band of the Salvation Army, the choir of St Martin-in-the-Fields, and trumpet player Tine Thing Helseth. The tree will be lit by the Governing Mayor of Oslo.

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The poem's theme of friendship reflects the Christmas tree's history – a gift which symbolises the close and warm relationship between the people of Norway and the people of Britain.

The poem will be displayed on banners around the tree in Trafalgar Square from 7 December until 6 January 2012.

– ENDS –

For further information, contact Alan Ward on 020 7420 9886 or email award@poetrysociety.org.uk

Notes to Editors:

- **The Poetry Society** was founded in 1909 to promote "a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing poetry nationally and internationally, with 4,000 members. It publishes the leading poetry magazine *Poetry Review*, and has an extensive education programme. It has a long commitment to the commissioning of new work, and runs prestigious competitions including the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award and the National Poetry Competition. The Poetry Society is a registered charity, and an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation. www.poetrysociety.org.uk
- **A symbol of Anglo-Norwegian friendship**, a tree for Trafalgar Square has been given to the people of London by the City of Oslo since 1947 in gratitude for British support during the Second World War. www.norway.org.uk
- **The schools** that worked with 'Look North More Often' this year are: John Keble Anglican Church Primary; Christchurch CE School; Ronald Ross Primary School; St Pauls Whitechapel CE Primary School; Allerton Primary School; Grafton Primary School; Westminster Cathedral RC Primary School; Cayley Primary School; Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Primary; St Clement Danes CE Primary School; St Mary of the Angels; Heathmere Primary School.
- **The project's title**, 'Look North More Often' is taken from a poem by the Norwegian poet Rolf Jacobsen. 2012 is the fourth year the Poetry Society has created poetry for the Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree. Each year pupils from different primary schools have worked with poets to write poems to celebrate the tree. The children's lines and images have then been combined into a new poem by a favourite poet. The 2009 poem was 'Tree Song' by Kit Wright, 2010 saw 'Green Magi' by John Agard, and last year's poem was 'Roots' by Roger McGough. Commissioned new translations have also been displayed by Kevin Crossley-Holland and Philip Gross of classic Norwegian poems by Tarjei Vesaas and Nordahl Grieg. In 2010 the poem banners were destroyed when protesters in the Square attempted to set fire to the tree.

POETS

- **Jackie Kay** is a poet, novelist and playwright. She was born and brought up in Scotland, and lives in Manchester. Her many poetry collections include *The Adoption Papers*, *Off Colour* and *Darling*. Her novel *Trumpet* won the Guardian Fiction Prize and her children's poetry collection, *Red, Cherry Red* won the CLPE Poetry Award. She is Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Newcastle. Her latest books are *Red Dust Road*, a memoir about finding her Nigerian father, the short story collection *Reality, Reality*, and a new poetry collection, *Fiere*.

The school workshops were led by the following poets:

- **Chrissie Gittins** writes poetry, radio drama and short stories. Her children's poetry collections are *Now You See Me, Now You...*, *I Don't Want an Avocado for an Uncle* and *The Humpback's Wail* (Rabbit Hole). Her children's poems have been animated for Cbeebies TV and are widely anthologised. www.chrissiegittins.co.uk
- **David Harmer's** poetry for children has appeared in more than 130 books. In 30 years of education he has been a teacher, head teacher and INSET training provider, and he also lectures in creative writing. The Poetry Society works with David on its Poetry Train project – a pioneering poetry teaching programme for trainee primary school teachers.
- **Lindsay MacRae** has had three books published by Puffin, including *How To Avoid Kissing Your Parents in Public*, which won a Scottish Arts Council award.
- **Cheryl Moskowitz** is a poet, playwright and novelist, and an actress and storyteller with more than 25 years of experience. Author of *Can it Be About Me?* (Circle Time Press), her poetry for children has featured on BBC TV's *A Bear Behind* and the Cbeebies's *Poetry Pie*.
- **Coral Rumble** has worked as a poet and performer for many years, specialising in writing and performing for children. She recently developed a parent's guide to poetry with the Poetry Society in association with Disney Channel's *A Poem Is* series. Her poetry collections include *Creatures, Teachers And Family Features* (1999), *Breaking The Rules* (2004), and *My Teacher's As Wild As A Bison* (2005).
- **Joelle Taylor** has worked extensively as a performance poet, spoken word artist and storyteller since 1986, and is Artistic Director of the Poetry Society's celebrated performance poetry championship and mentoring scheme, SLAMBassadors UK.

For further information

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