

2 December 2014 *For immediate release*

New Poem Commissioned to Welcome the Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree!

Three London schoolchildren will read a specially commissioned poem by Liz Lochhead at the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree lighting up ceremony on 4 December 2014



The 2013 Trafalgar Square Christmas tree

The Poetry Society and the Royal Norwegian Embassy will once again collaborate in one of London's favourite festive events when we wrap the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree in poetry to celebrate the City of Oslo's annual gift to London. This year's poem was written by the Scots Makar, **Liz Lochhead**, and is entitled 'How I'll Decorate My Tree'. It has been supported by The Northbank.



The children from St Clement Danes Primary School who performed in 2013

Liz Lochhead is a poet and playwright – the current 'Scots Makar' a.k.a. National Poet of Scotland – based in the city of Glasgow, but in demand as a poet, performer and frequent broadcaster all over the UK and internationally.

She says – "I was delighted to be invited to join a select list of my very favourite poets who have in previous years written a recipe for an individual poem to be followed by whole classes of Primary school children: and out of the resultant delicious mixer-maxter, written a brand new one of their own.

"I'll be in London to hear my poem performed by some of these children at what promises to be a wonderful and magical event as the lights go on. Wow! What a thrill. The title of the project, 'Look North More Often', was a wintry, Norwegian inspiration to me."

The poem will be read at the official lighting up ceremony by three children from St Mary of the Angels Primary School, at **6pm on Thursday 4 December**. The project, called **Look North More Often**, brings established poets together with schoolchildren to create a poem to go on display around the tree. Three professional poets worked with children from Westminster schools to write poems inspired by the gift of the tree. Poets Francesca Beard, Malika Booker and Cheryl Moskowitz worked with pupils in Years 5 and 6 to write poems about what they would like to hang on the Christmas tree. They were

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encouraged to think about using the five senses, about family and local nicknames, and about combining imagination with detail.

It's a collaborative effort, with the words of the children being used to inspire the final poem to be displayed around the base of the tree. The poem begins:

How I'll Decorate My Tree

Liz Lochhead

It was still very far from Christmas
When my momma said to me:
Tell me, Precious, what you going to hang
On our Christmas tree?

I said: the fairy-lights that Dad just fixed!
And... jewel-coloured jelly-beans from the pick'n'mix –
Oh, and from it I'll dangle tinsel in tangles,
Sparkles, sequins and spangles,

A round golden coin (chocolate money),
That cracker joke that was actually funny.
My rosary beads – and a plastic rose
As red as Rudolph Reindeer's nose.

The Trafalgar Square Christmas tree was first sent to London in 1947 as a mark of thanks for Britain's support during the Second World War. Every year the Lord Mayor of Westminster visits Oslo for the traditional tree-felling ceremony. Cllr Audrey Lewis, the Lord Mayor of Westminster, said: "The Trafalgar Square Christmas tree – a gift from the people of Oslo – has become an institution in its own right, and stands as a symbol of the close relationship that exists between our two countries.

"It is a privilege to host the ceremony where the famous Christmas tree lights are switched on. This tradition is cherished by thousands of Londoners and marks that Christmas has now truly begun."

The poem will be displayed on banners around the tree in Trafalgar Square from 5 December 2014 until 6 January 2015. The project has been generously funded by The Northbank Business Improvement District.

– ENDS –

**To arrange interviews with the poets, for pictures or any other information please contact
Robyn Donaldson on 0207 420 9886 or email on marketing@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 nearly 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

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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 tree** arrives in Trafalgar Square on Monday 1 December. The lighting up ceremony takes place on Thursday 4 December.
- **The schools** that worked with 'Look North More Often' this year are: St Peter's Eaton Square CE Primary School, Westminster; St Clement Danes CE Primary School, Westminster; and St Mary of the Angels Primary School, Westminster.
- **The project's title**, 'Look North More Often', is taken from a poem by the Norwegian poet Rolf Jacobsen. 2014 is the sixth 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, 2011's offering was 'Roots' by Roger McGough and 2012's poem was 'The Kindness of Trees' by Jackie Kay, with Kevin Crossley-Holland writing 'Decorating the Tree' last year. In 2009-10, commissioned new translations were also 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

- **Liz Lochhead** is a poet and playwright – the current 'Makar', a.k.a. National Poet of Scotland – based in the city of Glasgow, but in demand as a poet, performer and frequent broadcaster all over the UK and internationally.

The poets who worked with the children in the schools were Francesca Beard, Malika Booker and Cheryl Moskowitz.

- **Francesca Beard** has been called 'spine-tingling' (*Independent*) and 'The Queen of British Performance Poetry' (*Metro*). Born in Malaysia, she represents contemporary British literature all over the world with performances and workshops through the British Council. She has a one-woman show, 'Chinese Whispers' produced by Apples & Snakes, which has toured nationally and internationally and a family show, 'Animal Olympics' which she premiered at Southbank Centre's 'Imagine' Children's Festival in 2008 before a run at Edinburgh Fringe's Assembly Rooms and national tour of theatres and festivals in 2009.
- **Malika Booker** is a writer, spoken word and multidisciplinary artist, whose work spans literature, education and cross-arts. She has appeared world-wide both independently and with the British Council. She is an experienced creative writing course leader and has run courses for various organisations including the Arvon Foundation, the Royal National Theatre and the Young Vic. She jointly runs 'Malika's Kitchen', a writers' collective based in London and Chicago. Her latest play, *Unplanned*, opened in Spring 2007, with a run at Battersea Arts Centre and subsequent tour. Her book, *Breadfruit*, was published in 2007
- **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*.

• The Northbank Business Improvement District (BID)

The Northbank area takes in many famous landmarks in Central London including Trafalgar Square, the Aldwych, Temple and the Strand. It includes a major stretch of the Thames Embankment and brings the area under one name for the first time. The BID has been established to improve the look and feel of the area, promote the cultural offerings, encourage a stronger business community and enhance The Northbank's appeal as a top destination.

The BID won the support of 280 businesses in the area – including The Savoy, the National Gallery and Somerset House – in September 2013 – making it London's newest and most exciting BID. Following a ballot, Westminster City Council approved an £8 million plan to improve the area over the next four and a half years.

For further information

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