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## PRESS RELEASE

### Award-winning Children's Book *The Storm Whale* Live on Stage at Lakeside Arts this Christmas

- Lakeside Arts to welcome families to enjoy the much-loved story of *The Storm Whale* based on Benji Davies' award-winning books *The Storm Whale* and *The Storm Whale in Winter*
- Tickets are selling fast so book now to secure your festive experience
- The production runs between Saturday 14 Dec 2024 – Sunday 5 Jan 2025

High res images [can be found here](#).

Nottingham families are in for a treat this Christmas at Lakeside Arts. The University of Nottingham's arts centre proudly presents *The Storm Whale*, a heartwarming stage adaptation of Benji Davies' award-winning books *The Storm Whale* and *The Storm Whale in Winter*. Written and directed by Matt Aston, this captivating production is designed especially for children aged 3 and up, and their families.

Join this magical Christmas show as we take you out to sea to meet a little whale... This is a tender story following Noi, who rescues and befriends a whale washed up on the beach. Next winter, Noi waits and longs to see his friend again. Will it take another storm to bring them back together?

Filled with playful storytelling, brilliant puppetry, and original music by Julian Butler, *The Storm Whale* is a perfect introduction to theatre for children. Produced by some of the biggest names in children's theatre – Engine House, York Theatre Royal, Little Angel Theatre and The Marlowe – this production promises to be a magical experience for the whole family.

Benji Davies' *The Storm Whale* won the inaugural Oscar's Book Prize and was named Dutch Picture Book of the Year 2017. Inspired by the coastal charm of Whitstable in Kent, Davies' story beautifully captures themes of friendship, love, courage, and the wonders of the sea.

Writer and director Matt Aston is a familiar name to Nottingham audiences. A master storyteller, he previously directed the 2018 Christmas show *Red Riding Hood* at Lakeside Arts, as well as the stage adaptation of Benji Davies' *Grandad's Island*. His work has been praised as "witty and wonderful" by The Guardian.

This charming theatre adaptation of *The Storm Whale* has been described as "quality storytelling at its best" by Pocklington Post, guaranteed to enchant little ones. Previous young viewers have shared their delight: "really good and fun and snowy" (Noah, 6) and "Wow, it was so good!" (Edward, 8).

Writer and Director Matt Aston said: "Benji Davies' *The Storm Whale* and *The Storm Whale in Winter* are two books very close to my heart as they are firm favourites with my two children. It is beyond fantastic to get the chance to adapt both Benji's books into one play for young people and their families. And we are delighted to bring the show to Lakeside Arts this Christmas."

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Families visiting Lakeside for *The Storm Whale* will find plenty of festive surprises. From whale-themed decorations, delicious Christmassy treats in the café, to a special *The Storm Whale*-inspired installation in the Wallner Gallery – created by students from Djanogly Strelley Academy – there’s something for everyone to enjoy. Based on the idyllic University Park campus, with the popular Highfields Park on Lakeside’s doorstep, there’s plenty of space for children to burn off energy before or after the show.

James Parkinson, Deputy CEO at Lakeside Arts says: “Christmas at Lakeside is always a magical time, with our spaces filled with festive cheer and children’s excitement for theatre. We’re especially thrilled to show this adaptation of Davies’ charming books to the theatre, and we can’t wait to welcome you for this special holiday treat.”

This enchanting production will warm hearts and bring much excitement – so book your tickets now at [lakesidearts.org.uk/StormWhale](https://lakesidearts.org.uk/StormWhale)

-- ENDS --

**To reserve press tickets for shows on Saturday 14 or Sunday 15 December**, contact Lakeside Arts’ Marketing and Communications Manager, Mária Konyelicska-Visky [maria.konyelicska@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:maria.konyelicska@nottingham.ac.uk) or Amy Steels [amy.steels@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:amy.steels@nottingham.ac.uk) / 0115 846 7777

[lakesidearts.org.uk](https://lakesidearts.org.uk)

Facebook, X and Instagram: @LakesideArts

## CASTS & CREDITS

Based on *The Storm Whale* and *The Storm Whale in Winter* by Benji Davies

Writer and Director: Matt Aston

Production Designer: Lydia Deno

Lighting Designer: Jason Salvin

Associate Lighting Designer Alistair Fox

Composer and Sound Designer: Julian Butler

Production Manager: Callum Finn

Choreographed by Hayley Del Harrison

Puppet direction by Sue Dacre

Puppets made by Keith Frederick

Performed by Charlotte Wood – Flo, Hannah-Marie Payal – Noi, Richard Lounds – Dad

This production of *The Storm Whale* is forever dedicated to the memory of our lighting designer and dear friend Jason Salvin.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**LAKESIDE ARTS** is the University of Nottingham’s public arts centre presenting a programme of visual arts and museum exhibitions, theatre, dance, and families’ productions, as well as a learning programme for everyone. Its venues include the Djanogly Recital Hall; the Djanogly Gallery; the University Museum; and the Djanogly Theatre presenting UK and international touring work as well as producing and co-producing new theatre and dance. [lakesidearts.org.uk](https://lakesidearts.org.uk)

### **BENJI DAVIES – Author**

Benji Davies is an illustrator, author and animation director. Benji studied animation at university where he learnt how to tell stories with pictures, from short films and music videos to title sequences and picture books. In his work, he aims to capture how it feels to be a child. His first self-penned picture book *The Storm Whale* won the inaugural Oscar’s Book Prize and was Dutch Picture Book Of The Year 2017. His second, *Grandad’s Island*, won the children’s book category of the AOI World Illustration Awards and was crowned Children’s Book of the Year at the Sainsbury’s Children’s Book Awards. Both books have since been

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adapted for the stage. He is the illustrator of Nosy Crow's internationally bestselling board book series, Bizzy Bear. He has given talks for and proudly supports the work of CLPE, The Children's Bookshow, Pathways, SCBWI, Artillery and The Guardian amongst many others, and makes regular appearances at literary festivals and bookshops around the UK and beyond.

### **MATT ASTON – Adaptor/Director**

Matt is a freelance director and Artistic Director of his company – Engine House. Credits include: Touched by Stephen Lowe, A Day in the Death of Joe Egg by Peter Nichols; Diary of a Football Nobody (Premiere) by William Ivory for Nottingham Playhouse; Bomber's Moon (Premiere) by William Ivory for the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry and Nottingham Lakeside Arts (plus West End transfer to Trafalgar Studios); Grandad's Island (Premiere) by Benji Davies (also adapted by Matt) - for Engine House and York Theatre Royal - National Tour in 2018 and 2019; The Storm Whale by Benji Davies (also adapted by Matt) for Engine House and York Theatre Royal; and many more. Through Covid lockdown Matt produced and curated two outdoor 'Park Bench Theatre' seasons in York. As part of the Summer 2020 season in Rowntree Park he directed First Love by Samuel Beckett, co-wrote and directed Teddy Bears' Picnic and wrote the premiere of Every Time A Bell Rings. In 2021 he returned to Rowntree Park to direct the premiere of The Park Keeper by Mike Kenny as part of their 100th Anniversary celebrations. As well as directing The Storm Whale this Christmas, Matt is also directing Cinderella by Chris Hannon at Theatre Royal Wakefield and premiering The Snowflake – that he adapted from the book by Benji Davies – at Birmingham Rep.

Matt's projects for 2025 include premiere of Reception – a musical inspired by the music of semi-legendary indie band The Wedding Present and Gilly Gilly Ossenfeffer Katzenellen Bogen by the Sea – a show for young people and their families inspired by the song of the same name.

Matt received the Writers' Guild of Great Britain Award for the Encouragement of New Writing for his work on Lakeside's Production of Stephen Lowe's Smile.

### **IMAGES**



Production images of *The Storm Whale* from the premiere at York Theatre Royal in 2020. Photos by Northedge Photography.



Promotional artwork, *The Storm Whale* at Lakeside Arts

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