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James Mackenzie-Blackman named Chief Executive of Theatre Royal Plymouth

Theatre Royal Plymouth has announced that James Mackenzie-Blackman will succeed Adrian Vinken OBE as its Chief Executive.

Currently Chief Executive of Eden Court Highlands, Scotland's largest single-site performing arts venue, James Mackenzie-Blackman's previous roles include Executive Director of Matthew Bourne's award-winning dance company New Adventures, Executive Director of the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain and six years in a variety of roles at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith.

James Mackenzie-Blackman grew up in Plymouth and cites his time with Theatre Royal Plymouth's long-established Young Company as a life-defining experience.

Under James Mackenzie-Blackman's leadership, Eden Court has been internationally recognised for its industry leading response to the global pandemic. The organisation was a winner of the inaugural Calouste Gulbenkian 2021 Civic Arts Award.

In 2020 James Mackenzie-Blackman entered The Stage 100, an annual list of the most influential people in the UK theatre industry, and was recently nominated as Outstanding Business Leader in the 2021 Scottish Development and Industry Council Business Awards. During his time at Eden Court James has grown both audiences and income.

James Mackenzie-Blackman said: *"It is the honour of my career to take on the leadership of the organisation that defined the path my life would take. I told my Careers Advisor at 15 years old that one day I wanted to run the Theatre Royal. 26 years later that ambition has become a reality. Throughout the recruitment process I was deeply impressed by the continued ambition for the city of Plymouth, the role that the theatre plays in the cultural life of the region and equally the recognition of the work*

still to do in the years to come. It will be a great privilege to build on all that Adrian and his colleagues have achieved.”

Nick Buckland OBE, Chair of Theatre Royal Plymouth said: *“Finding a new Chief Executive for the iconic Theatre Royal Plymouth to follow Adrian Vinken’s outstanding tenure was never going to be easy, but after an exhaustive process I’m delighted that we’ve been able to appoint James. His extensive experience in the sector means the organisation can continue to develop its preeminent role in the city, the region, and nationally, offering the broadest programme of stage work, and one of the biggest engagement, learning and talent development programmes. As James developed his love of theatre in his youth here at TRP, it’s particularly gratifying to welcome him back to his home city.”*

Adrian Vinken OBE, DL, who has led Theatre Royal Plymouth for over 30 years said: *“I remember James from my early days at TRP when he was a member of our Young Company and particularly an unforgettable trip to Poland to perform our production of Korczak in Warsaw and Gdynia. I have watched with pleasure his rapid career development over the years and couldn’t be happier than to be handing over the reins of the theatre to him. James is a shining example of TRP’s talent development in action so he already has the Theatre Royal’s DNA in his blood.”*

Leader of Plymouth City Council, Nick Kelly said: *“James’ return to run the theatre where he started his career is a fantastic success story for Plymouth and I can’t wait to see what unfolds for the Theatre Royal Plymouth. Adrian Vinken leaves an astonishing legacy - a theatre loved by people from all walks of life in Plymouth and beyond, from the families who take their kids to the pantomimes, the great nights out at a feel-good show to the thought-provoking productions which start in The Drum and end up in London. As a long-term investor in TRP we are enormously proud of the breadth, variety and success of the organisation and I very much look forward to welcoming James back here.”*

James Mackenzie-Blackman will formally take-up the role in January 2022.

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James Mackenzie-Blackman

James grew up in Plymouth where he was a proud member of the Theatre Royal Plymouth Young Company.

After concluding his formal education James spent two years working overseas in Nepal, Europe and North America.

After University in Liverpool, James started his career at Greenwich Theatre where he ran a musical theatre academy to engage culturally diverse young people with the performing arts, specifically musical theatre.

In 2004 James commenced six years at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith culminating in jointly raising £12m for a major capital project at the Lyric to build the world's first teaching theatre so that young people could train for careers on; off and backstage in a professional performing arts venue. James held three posts: Director of Creative Learning (Management & Strategy), Associate Director: Capital Development and Commercial Director. During his time at the Lyric James helped bring the Broadway production of Spring Awakening to London that went on to win four Olivier Awards.

Between 2010 and 2012 James was Executive Director of the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain and was heavily involved in NYT's involvement in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Between 2012 – 2017 James was Executive Director of Sir Matthew Bourne's award-winning dance company New Adventures. Matthew is one of the world's most well-known choreographers and theatre-makers who has changed the landscape of dance forever. James regularly toured the UK; North America, Asia and Australia and during his time at the company James oversaw substantial growth in participation, audiences and turnover.

James took up the post as Chief Executive of Eden Court Highlands, Scotland's largest single-site performing arts venue, in December 2017 and has steered the business through a period of substantial change and modernisation. During his tenure the



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business has grown its annual audiences, and income, and further embedded itself into the cultural life of the Highland region.

More recently Eden Court has been recognised nationally and internationally for its industry leading response to the global pandemic. The organisation was one of four winners of the inaugural, and highly competitive, Calouste Gulbenkian 2021 Civic Arts Award. James was named by The Scotsman as the theatre industry 'One to Watch' in January 2021, joined The Stage 100, an annual list of the most influential people in the theatre industry, and was nominated as Outstanding Business Leader in the 2021 Scottish Development and Industry Council Business Awards.

James has also led the business through a period of significant growth of its fundraised income. In January 2021 Eden Court was awarded £500,000, the largest grant in Scotland, from the Garfield Weston Foundation's Cultural Fund to enable the organisation to establish a pathway to producing its own work and encourage audiences back to their venues. James has also led his team to self-generate £2.1m from external sources to protect the business from the damage caused by the pandemic.

James is regularly invited to speak at conferences and events in the UK and overseas. His paper: Education vs. training: The future of participation in Building Based Theatre is published by Cambridge Scholars Press.

He is a proud board member of Scottish Ballet and the Compass Partnership of Schools in South East London and Chair of the Scottish Producing Theatre Consortium.

Theatre Royal Plymouth (TRP) is a registered charity providing art, education and community engagement in Plymouth and across the region. It engages and inspires with the aim of touching lives. Theatre Royal Plymouth presents a year-round programme of world class productions on all scales as the South West's principal centre for performing arts.

Theatre Royal Plymouth works with partners to understand the challenges people face accessing the arts, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged people. It creates pathways that are genuinely accessible to those who might otherwise never get to



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engage with the arts. They collaborate to co-create and co-author work that represents the community, creating the space needed for people to tell their story in their own way.

Theatre Royal Plymouth is the UK's largest regional producing theatre. With a focus on embracing the vitality of new talent and supporting emerging and established artists. It collaborates with a range of partners to provide dynamic cultural leadership for the city of Plymouth.



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The Theatre Royal Plymouth is a registered arts and education charity.
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