**Dear England**

**Audio description Act 1 programme notes – Gwen Furniss 17/9/25**

Welcome to Theatre Royal Plymouth, and this afternoon’s performance of “Dear England”. This is a National Theatre production of a new play by James Graham, directed by Rupert Goold, with set design by Es Devlin. My name is Gwen and I will be audio describing Act 1. After the 20 minute interval my colleague, Pauline will describe Act 2.

The role of England football manager is one of the most scrutinised jobs in sport. On a certain level it’s a doomed task, and no manager has left the post exactly as he would have wanted. Few, if any, departed on their own terms. Then came Gareth Southgate. He was appointed England manager in 2016, following in the footsteps of Roy Hodgson and (briefly) Sam Allardyce. He finally stepped down in 2024, following the Euro final, having become the most successful national football manager in English history. “Dear England” is Southgate’s story, a man who was true to himself and what he believed in, a man of decency, honour and courage.

The part of Gareth Southgate is played by David Sturzaker, in his late 40s, slim and slightly built with short brown hair and neatly trimmed beard. His voice is at times hesitant, but leaves no one in any doubt of his determination and strength of character. When he first appears, at the start of the play, we see him wearing his trademark waistcoat with long sleeved shirt, striped tie and trousers.

The other main character is Pippa Grange, played by Samantha Womack, a psychologist brought in by Southgate to oversee team development. Although born in Yorkshire she moved to Australia, where she trained for her profession and lived there for 20 years, giving her with a slight Australian accent. Pippa is a slim woman in her late 40s, with long straight fair hair and casually dressed in a long sleeved shirt with loose trousers.

Apart from these two, the play features the England players, and other members of the cast take 3 or 4 roles each. There are reporters, commentators, previous England managers, the team physio, football fans, and even cameo appearances from Theresa May and Boris Johnson!

Sam Allardyce, who preceeded Southgate as Manager, is an older man, with greying hair, sturdily built, and recognisible by his Northern accent. The current club chairman, Greg Clarke and the outgoing chairman, Greg Dyke, are both older men with balding heads, and they wear dark blazers with the club monogram. There are appearances by previous England managers: Graham Taylor, Sven-Goran Erickson and Fabio Capello. Head of operations, Roxanne, is tall and slim with abundant dark hair. She dresses fashionably, often in white with gold jewellery. Physio Phil is a well-built man, balding, wearing a light blue polo shirt with dark tracksuit trousers. The England players are introduced one by one, their names projected on the backdrop above the higher neon circle. Each wears the kit of the league team he plays for, but eventually they all wear the England team strip, with their name and number on the back.

The set is simple but dramatic, making much use of lighting and projected backgrounds. The floor of the stage is filled with a circular platform, raised slightly, and surrounded by an illuminated tubular neon strip. When this platform represents a football pitch, an illuminated spot in the centre signifies the penalty spot. High above this, a thicker circular neon tube is suspended from above and tilted slightly toward the auditorium. Between these lower and upper circles, at times a projected backdrop is shown, for example, a stadium full of crowds. Projections also appear above the higher circle, showing results of matches played and other information. These projections appear from the right hand side, panning around until they settle in position.

The other main feature is what appear to be lockers, 7 foot high rectangular cubicles made of marine ply, each with a door, allowing the cast to enter and exit through them. The doors of these lockers each have a cut-out of a team shirt attached to the them, and are illuminated. In the floor of each locker is a hatch which can be lifted to allow the cast access to various props. The lockers are moved around by members of the cast, sometimes forming a straight line across the stage, sometimes in a semi circle and sometimes removed from the stage completely. There are between 7 and 11 of these lockers used in several scenes.

The story takes place between June 2016 and December 2022, but includes flashbacks to events in the previous 60 years of football. The setting is multiple locations, but mainly the St George’s Park training ground, the FA offices, dressing rooms and stadiums all over the world.

As we wait for the show to begin, the basic set is visible, the lower circle, surrounded by illuminated neon tube, and the lit circle overhead. A glowing spot appears centrally on the lower circle. The ominous, echoey music incorporates the noise of crowds in the football stadium.

Theatre Royal Plymouth

Dear England Act 2

                                                     Audio described performance

Friday Sep 19th  2025 @7.30p.m.

Welcome back to this performance of Dear England written  by James Graham. The set is the same with the base illuminated circle slightly raised at the front and connected to  flat bases on either side leading to the exits.

My name is Pauline and I will be describing this act to you which runs for 74minutes.

**There will be strobe lighting and flashing lights,  swearing , loud cheering and shouting.**

We left  Theresa May in her red suit and leopard print kitten heels , having a go at a penalty shot and Pickford saving it.

Additional Cast

Theresa May…………………………………….Courtney George

Jordan Henderson………………………………Jake Ashton- Nelson

Liz Truss…………………………………………..member of the company

Boris Johnson……………………………………George Rainsford

Gianna Infantino…………………………………Steven Dykes

 Matt Le Tissier/Thomas Tuchel………………..Ian Kirby

Prologue

The  marine ply lockers are in place  in a straight line with the white  England cardboard  shirts attached to the  locker doors;

5                 1         6             10            8            12            19             3         4         20

Stones    Kane    Pickford  Maguire   Sterling   Tapper    Radford    Rose  Dier       Ali

A teenager in a college style jacket and baseball cap is spraying’ Its coming Home’ and it  is chastised by a Chip shop owner in a white dust coat and white trilby but more for the missing apostrophe than the graffiti.   A pair of Morris dancers join the supporters and they are joined by the players in red shirts with the goalie in green and a  wedding party of a  bride in a tiered  white wedding dress and veil ,  and groom in a grey suit with a  frock coat  and  a  cassocked vicar  all  excitedly agree with the slogan.

Theresa May appears in a red suit and obligatory leopard  print court shoes to support the team  as they are about to go to Russia before we join the team playing accompanied by commentators   Guy Mowbrey  and Gary Lineker . Pippa shouts encouragement.

The team line up and  supporters mingle with the players, one in chain mail and the St George tunic before we see the score displayed on the screen directly below the high  circle of light under the banks of floodlights.

Back in the dressing room and the  despondent players are seated on the steps of the open lockers listening to  Southgate. They all leave and Pippa is with Rashford who  tells Pippa of a superstition he has  and how he  performs a ritual before each match.

 We move to  St George’s Park  where multiple England crests are displayed below  the circle of light and the training team and Southgate are discussing the best way forward, against the background of the lockers placed in a semi circle, Theresa May puts in another  appearance to voice her resignation surrounded by reporters.

1 The white silhouette of Wembley Stadium  with its distinctive twin towers , emerges on the back screen  and the pitch is empty where Clarke and Southgate  are discussing the forthcoming European Championships.

We move  back to St Georges Park and the team are seated  on chairs, facing right and  Southgate spreads the St Georges flag on the floor  and encourages the players to connect with their childhood roots and how to make themselves proud.

2.A training session under strobe lighting  and to a beat  where the players intermingle and use chairs to exercise. They are all in training kits under tabards and they use their phones to video themselves and this is displayed on the rear wall.

Southgate wants to  ditch his waistcoat for a plain polo shirt under a blazer to become a manager rather than a figurehead in his waistcoat, and he is assisted by Roxanne.

Gary Lineker, in a shirt and jeans appears eating a bag of crisps! He is joined by Alex Scott in a form fitting blue shift dress and her long dark hair is down. The players run on with chairs which they all stand on with Southgate at the front.   He has doubts on how to manage the team and  Pippa  makes a suggestion.

Later, he is approached by Jordan Henderson with some statistics, before Pippa enters the dressing room denoted by the lockers and talks to a disappointed Alli. Pippa accepts her role is over and quietly walks away.

Kane joins Southgate, and Kane voices his unease at being Captain and questions Southgate’s decision, before we move back to the pitch and the team throw chairs to the ground after the black players of the team  report experiencing racial abuse from the crowds.

Gareth, now in a blue polo shirt and smart trousers is left alone in a spotlight,   to ponder the problem and begins to form a letter  beginning , ’ Dear England’  before the players come on to the Wembley  pitch and take a knee  before the Euros 2020 begins.

3. We are still in Wembley for  the match against Croatia. Le Tissier and Alex Scott are commentating.

The  score  against Scotland is  displayed and the training team and Southgate have a heated discussion and Southgate joins the forlorn, sulking, angry players in the Briefing Room where Kane has the floor and uses the footage of the  triumphant England team in 1966 to illustrate how carefree they were and he encourages the team to dance.

Back out in the stadium and the changing  score against Germany  is displayed, followed by scores against Ukraine and  Denmark.

Southgate is over enthusiastic and has to have treatment from Physio Phil before he joins 4 players in the dug out to watch the match against Italy and a penalty shoot out with the 5 players chosen, Rashford, Saka, Sancho, Maguire and Kane. They take their shots from the central point. The suspense builds.

Pippa consoles Southgate and we see how the supporters react to the outcome and Saka addresses them, and the teenager with a spray can paints a mural of Rashford.

A series of political  figures step up to try a penalty, Clarke, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss before we have Demi Stokes wielding the World Cup and she is joined by Sarina Weigman. She offers the trophy to Southgate who declines.

4 The countdown displayed on the board below the lit circle is still ticking down towards the Qatar World Cup 2022 and the team are in the locker room in white shirts, with blue shoulders.Gianna Infantino, in a smart italian suit and tinted glasses meets Southgate and Alex Scott commentates. England v Iran, England v USA, and England are through to the Quarter Finals in Qatar. Lineker makes a derogatory comment as Southgate addresses the team in the dressing room where he steps away and lets Kane talk to his team as they stand in  a line.

They sing God save our Gracious King.

We are on the pitch ready for penalties and Kane holds his head in his hands as Southgate has done before him, and he sympathises as Lineker comments on the match the next day. Southgate listens to the comments before the final whistle blows and he hands over the management to Thomas Tuchel, dressed in a blue polo shirt, sweat pants  under a padded gilet and wearing a baseball cap.Tuchel congratulates Southgate on his record  as the players and coaching staff surround him and encourage him to dad dance to Sweet Caroline .

Pippa appears in her loose white palazzo pants and blue shirt and smiles at him as the players are still dancing behind them.

The play will move to Nottingham, Canterbury, Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle, Chichester, Southampton in Jan 2026, Milton Keynes, Oxford, Norwich, Woking, Bradford, Wimbledon, and Liverpool  finishing in Birmingham in March 2026.

The next Audio Described performance  here  should have been Lord of the Rings  which has been cancelled so  it will  now be  Woman in Black on Saturday November 8th @ 2.30pm preceded by a touch Tour @ 1.30pm. Please book the touch Tour through the Box Office.