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Students take centre stage for new play inspired by the North East

Final year drama students from Northumbria University are preparing to give the debut performance of award-winning playwright Chinonyerem Odimba's new work, *Land: Beating the Bounds* at Live Theatre, Newcastle from Wednesday 29 May – Saturday 1 June.

The play has been written specifically for the final year [Drama BA \(Hons\)](#) students by Chino, who is Northumbria University and Live Theatre's current joint Writer in Residence.

Having taken up the post in September last year, Chino has been regularly visiting Newcastle, and was so moved by the city's sense of place she used it as inspiration for her new play.

As she explains: "More than any other place I have worked in or know, Newcastle feels like a place that really needs to speak of its own locality and people, so I wanted to write something that felt like it was rooted in this city.

"Most of the time I write without knowing who is going to be performing my work, so this project was great as I got to meet the students before I started writing and really get to know them.

"I quickly realised they were quite capable of taking on a big piece of work and wanted to present them with something exciting and challenging.

"This new play is all about how we engage with the sense of place and community, as well as touching on questions we all have around land, environment and climate change."

Land: Beating the Bounds follows the lives of a local family through the generations as they finally meet with the modern world and the issues facing the current generation in relation to land, including ownership, homelessness and environmental challenges.

As Chino explains: "I wanted to write about an issue the students would have something strong to say about. The issues in the play are at the forefront of their minds. I feel we rarely ask young people what they have to say and it was important for me to use this opportunity to explore those questions."

Much of the content in the play is a direct result of the students working closely with Chino, an experience they have found extremely valuable in their final year of study.

Kyla Dean, 21, said: "Working with Chino has been an amazing opportunity. There are not many students who get the chance to be involved in a new play from the very start. Being able to share our ideas with Chino and see these being incorporated into the final play was really amazing."

Moses Kanu, 22, added: "The themes explored in this play are very relevant to

our generation. During our workshops with Chino we were able to discuss our feelings about various issues. Seeing our words then appearing in the script was a great experience.”

This is the first time students on the Drama BA (Hons) course have worked with the Northumbria University and Live Theatre joint writer in residence, and the play’s director and Associate Head of Arts at Northumbria, Steve Gilroy believes it has been a valuable experience.

He said: “It’s a tremendous and rare opportunity for students to work on a new piece of writing and they have embraced the process with openness and enthusiasm. The resulting production is the culmination of their sincere commitment and hard work.”

The Northumbria University and Live Theatre Writer in Residence programme was established in 2015 to create cultural collaborations, enhance teaching and learning, inspire new research, and connect academic research with the world of professional theatre.

Joe Douglas, Artistic Director, Live Theatre said: “Chino is an exceptional writer who has already brought so much to theatre in the region in her short time as our Joint Writer in Residence.

“The opportunity for students to engage with working theatre professionals builds skills, experience and confidence, providing the next generation of theatre artists in the North East with a launch pad into a supportive creative industry.

“Live Theatre is a home for new stories in the region and beyond. I have no doubt that some of these students will be working with us as professionals in the years to come.”

Chino, a Nigeria-born London-raised playwright and poet, is the 2018 Writer in Residence. Her work has been shortlisted for several awards including the Adrienne Benham Award and the Alfred Fagon awards. In 2015 her unproduced play *Wild is De Wind* was shortlisted to the final ten for the Bruntwood Playwriting Award. She is the joint winner for the 2018 Sonia Friedman Award (Channel 4 Playwright Bursary) for a new play for Talawa Theatre, and her play *Princess and the Hustler* was performed at Live Theatre

earlier this year as part of a national tour.

Speaking about the Northumbria University and Live Theatre joint residency, Chino said: “The scope of the residency felt really exciting, as did the opportunity to work within a theatre and academic institution. It felt very different to other residencies out there and during the time I’ve spent in Newcastle I’ve realised the partnership between Northumbria and Live is very unique.”

Land: Beating the Bounds will be performed at Live Theatre from Wednesday 29 May to Saturday 1 June. For more information and to book tickets visit <https://www.live.org.uk/whats-on/land-beating-bounds> or call Live Theatre’s Box Office on (0191) 232 1232.

Additional events will also be taking place, including:

- Masters Students’ Research Projects – Wednesday 29 May, 2pm
- Applied Theatre Student Presentations – Thursday 30 May, 2pm
- Scriptwriting Student Readings – Friday 31 May, 2pm
- Spaces of Appearance: Drama Research Group Book Launch and Preview – Friday 31 May, 5.30pm

All these events are free to attend, although booking is required. Please click [here](#) or call Live Theatre’s Box Office on (0191) 232 1232 for more information.

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