

## PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release: Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024**

### **A host of artists, writers and academics join Words of Colour and the Southbank Centre to celebrate James Baldwin's centenary year**

The centenary of James Baldwin's birth, and his powerful legacy as a writer, intellectual, civil rights activist and fashion icon will be celebrated at *Conversations with Baldwin*, a one-day festival at the Southbank Centre on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2024.

Curated by Words of Colour, and presented in collaboration with the Southbank Centre, *Conversations with Baldwin* will explore the iconic American writer's artistry, literature and enduring influence with some of the country's most exciting contemporary artists, writers and academics.

Running from 12pm to 9pm, the festival opens with an examination of *Another Country* - Baldwin's masterly story of desire, hatred and violence - with author, academic and broadcaster Emma Dabiri, poet and writer Nikita Gill and writer Mendez.

In *Notes of a Native Son: Baldwin and Artists' Roles*, a staged reading of his non-fiction collection will be followed by a discussion on the role of activism and being an artist with actor and director Burt Caesar, Douglas Field, Founding Editor, *James Baldwin Review*, and writer, broadcaster and social advocate Yassmin Abdel-Magied.

The one-day event ends with a celebratory exploration of *Baldwin and Fashion*. Baldwin's stylish prose, sartorial flair and how we dress to shape identities will be unpacked by TV, film and theatre actress Sarah Niles, fashion designer Nicholas Daley and writer, performer and theatremaker Travis Alabanza.

**Mendez, an award-nominated novelist (*Rainbow Milk*), said:** "*Another Country*, considered to be James Baldwin's fiction masterpiece, captures him at his free, forthright best, and shows - with its diverse cast of characters - that he backed himself to see the world through anyone's eyes. Reading him again to mark his centenary, I'm struck by his boldness, his attitude, his self-confidence, his eloquence and his talent for voice."

**Academic, broadcaster and bestselling author (*Don't Touch My Hair*) Emma Dabiri said:** "James Baldwin's work is enduring and remains so compelling because of the singularity of his voice. Explorations of the complexities and dynamics of race, gender and sexuality are central to his work, but rather than reify identity, Baldwin unravels it, and in doing so offers profound insights, not just into the specificities of the identities he examines, but rather into the very nature of what it is to be human in the 20th century."

**Joy Francis, Executive Director, Words of Colour, said:** "*Conversations with Baldwin* honours how relevant, resonant and vital James Baldwin continues to be for artists, activists, writers and readers, especially from the global majority. Baldwin speaks the truth about what makes us human, gives voice to how blackness is

weaponised and eloquently exposes the insidiousness of racism. His writing defies convention, leaps from the page into your subconscious and dares you to live boldly, and with agency. We are happy that the Southbank Centre shares our appreciation of Baldwin’s timeless value.”

**Ted Hodgkinson, Head of Literature and Spoken Word, Southbank Centre, continued:** “From the beauty of his prose to the lasting resonance of his perceptions, James Baldwin is a vital touchstone for the generations and a figure at the heart of the Hayward Gallery’s exhibition *Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere*, which takes its name from a Baldwin sentence. This enduring message is central to the Southbank Centre’s summer programme *You Belong Here*, so we are thrilled to be collaborating with Words of Colour on *Conversations with Baldwin*, for what promises to be an illuminating celebration of Baldwin’s many dimensions and defining works.”

The day-long *Conversations with Baldwin* is part of the Southbank Centre’s *You Belong Here* season, which explores themes of community, identity with a message of welcome at its core. The season takes its name from a work shown as part of the Hayward Gallery’s current exhibition, *Tavares Strachan: There Is Light Somewhere*.

-ENDS-

## Notes to editors

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**Press Folder:** You can [access the press pack here](#). **bitly link:** <https://bit.ly/CWBPressFolder>

**Hashtag:** #ConversationswithBaldwin

**Booking / Tickets:** *Conversations with Baldwin* sees a host of artists, writers and creatives celebrate the pioneering power of James Baldwin on the 100th anniversary of his birth at the Southbank Centre on 21 July, presented in collaboration with Words of Colour. Tickets from £15. [Southbankcentre.co.uk](https://southbankcentre.co.uk)

## About the *Conversations with Baldwin Festival*

*Conversations with Baldwin* is a hybrid festival, curated by Words of Colour, to celebrate and examine the legacy of one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest authors, James Baldwin (1924 - 1987). First launched in Bristol and London in 2023, featuring book clubs, live literature events, virtual salons, film screenings and workshops, *Conversations with Baldwin 2024* will commemorate the centenary of Baldwin’s birth with partners nationally and internationally from July to November 2024. *Conversations with Baldwin* is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

## About Words of Colour

Words of Colour, The Immersive Change Agency, creates alternative pathways and sustainable opportunities for writers, creatives, entrepreneurs and communities of colour to thrive - and for unheard stories to be told.

Launched in 2006, it originates, curates, produces, collaborates and leads on projects that straddle literature, creative industries, academia, research, digital entrepreneurship and creative wellbeing to generate meaningful change. Among its awards is the NESTA/Observer ‘New Radicals’ Award 2018 for the Synergi Collaborative Centre, a national initiative it co-founded, and the prestigious HSJ Mental Health Innovation Award 2023 for its creative intervention models as part of the Synergi-Leeds Partnership.

[www.wordsofcolour.co.uk](http://www.wordsofcolour.co.uk)

### **About the Southbank Centre**

The Southbank Centre is the UK’s largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project – that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal communities and should be available and accessible to everyone – are still our guiding principles today. The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) and six resident orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra).

[www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk)

### **About Arts Council England**

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let’s Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £440 million of public money from Government and an estimated £93 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)