



# THROUGH THE SHORTBREAD TIN

I have never thought of my work as epic. But in 2018 I answered a callout, looking for ideas on that theme, and in time those ideas became this show. Previously, I would have described my work as *informal, domestic, everyday*. But now I had the chance, not to completely change my direction, but to be able to tell my stories in a new way. An epic way. Another big opportunity for me was to write a historical piece. The only trouble was that I was never taught the history of Scotland. But rather than feel embarrassed about that, I began to question why. Why are there aspects of our history and especially Scottish cultural history that have been hidden from us? Why is it considered dangerous to be equipped with knowledge? What could that information have done for a young working-class boy that was trying to find his voice? Maybe by understanding the past he could see his present in a new light. And – believe it or not – even imagine a future. Aspects of public and private life that were taken as a given could be questioned. Or maybe he would just find a cultural home and that would be enough. Maybe he could take pride in something that didn't feel like shame at the same time. But after all that, maybe it would be good just to eat a bit of shortbread without analysing it too much. Just enjoy yourself son. Have another one, that's what they're there for.

**Writer and performer**  
**Martin O'Connor**

How much of the stories we tell about ourselves to other people are true? There's usually a grain of truth, but stories shift and change depending on their audience. And in each retelling a new version is created.

What first jumped out at me when I read Martin's incredible script was that it was a brilliant response to that question of whether or not it's deceitful for a story to change in the telling. His play says that a different version doesn't necessarily obscure the truth; in fact it can make it ring out even more clearly.

I also immediately fell in love with the ambition and audacity of Martin's storytelling in this play – spanning three timelines, and at least two lifetimes. He has risen to meet the challenge thrown down by the poet who inspired him, James Macpherson. Who was himself a proper maverick, a risk taker who had a wild but important idea and the spirit to carry it through despite the risks to his reputation and livelihood.

At the heart of *Through The Shortbread Tin* is what knowing and not knowing, hearing and not hearing, the languages of your country does to your relationship with yourself; so Gaelic is an important part of this piece. We have three extraordinary singers who perform in Gaelic; and whether you speak it or not, I hope you'll feel the power and layers of meaning being conveyed when they sing; alongside the lyricism and sharp wit of Martin's beautifully crafted words.

**Director**  
**Lu Kemp**

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## THE STORY OF THE GREATEST LITERARY HOAX OF ALL TIME

1760 – Scottish poet James Macpherson sets the world ablaze with stories of the third-century Scottish bard, Ossian. This tartan-trimmed tale of Highland history spreads far and wide, capturing the imagination of thousands– but is it built on deceit?

2025 – Scottish poet Martin O'Connor reads Macpherson's epic and questions his own relationship with Scottish culture. The sporrans, the stags, the shortbread – do these 'gift-shop' images of Scotland hold us back or bring us forward? What does it mean to be authentic, and is the truth sometimes better told in a lie?

*Through The Shortbread Tin* is a brand-new show, performed in Scots with Gaelic songs, which explores Scottish culture, myths, history and identity.

Join Martin and Macpherson on an oral odyssey spanning centuries of Scottish history, exploring the myths we tell each other and the stories we tell ourselves. Because *it takes a lot aae imagination tae tell a true story*.

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## CAST

<b>Josie Duncan</b> (she/her)	Singer
<b>Claire Frances MacNeil</b> (she/her)	Singer
<b>Mairi Morrison</b> (she/her)	Singer
<b>Martin O'Connor</b> (he/him)	Performer

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## TEAM

<b>Emma Bailey</b> (she/her)	Set & Costume Co-Designer
<b>Lara Bauchop</b> (she/her)	Costume Supervisor
<b>Ali Biggs</b> (she/her)	Company Manager
<b>Mel Drake</b> (she/her)	Vocal Coach
<b>Neil Foulis</b> (he/him)	Lighting Supervisor (Rehearsal)
<b>Michaela Fee</b> (she/her)	Lighting Designer
<b>Naomi Ireland-Jones</b> (she/her)	Tour Driver & Front of House
<b>Lu Kemp</b> (she/they)	Director
<b>Andrew King</b> (he/him)	Sound & Video Supervisor
<b>Thierry Mabonga</b> (he/him)	Trainee Director
<b>Nina Madriz</b> (she/her)	Rehearsal DSM
<b>Nicki Martin-Harper</b> (they/them)	Costume Maker
<b>Martin O'Connor</b> (he/him)	Writer
<b>Rachel O'Neill</b> (she/her)	Set & Costume Co-Designer
<b>Morag Pirrie</b> (she/her)	Costume Maker
<b>Jonny Reed</b> (he/him)	Lighting Supervisor (Tour)
<b>Valerie Rickis</b> (she/her)	Rehearsal ASM
<b>Archie Scott</b> (he/him)	Technical Supervisor
<b>Oliver Searle</b> (he/him)	Music Director & Composer
<b>Rob Willoughby</b> (he/him)	Sound & Video Designer
<b>Alasdair Whyte</b> (he/him)	Gaelic Consultant

*NTS is proud to be an organisation where all are welcome and, where we've been given them, we've listed the pronouns of the cast and creative team in this free sheet as part of our ongoing commitment to use more inclusive language wherever we can as part of our LGBT Charter for Business Award.*

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Photography by Eoin Carey

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## ACCESS

<b>Sandra Duguid</b> (she/her)	BSL Consultant
<b>Catherine King</b> (she/her)	BSL Interpreter
<b>Emma-Jane McHenry</b> (she/her)	Audio Describer
<b>Alison Pendowski</b> (she/her)	Captioner

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## THE COMPANY WOULD LIKE TO THANK

**Kathleen MacInnes, Mairi McGillivrey, Kim Carnie, Mischa MacPherson, The Dr Gavin Wallace Fellowship, Playwrights' Studio Scotland, Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Rosie Kellagher, Hannah Lavery, Beathag Mhoireasdan, PACE Theatre Company, Seth Bennett, Kate Bowen, Denis O'Connor and Rae O'Connor**

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## ABOUT NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND

National Theatre of Scotland is a Theatre Without Walls. We don't have our own venue, instead, we're able to bring theatre to you wherever you are. From the biggest stages to the smallest community halls, we showcase Scottish culture at home and around the world. We have performed in airports and tower blocks, submarines and swimming pools, telling stories in ways you have never seen before. We want to bring the joy of theatre to everyone. Since we were founded in 2006, we have produced hundreds of shows and toured all over the world. We strive to amplify the voices that need to be heard, tell the stories that need to be told and take work to wherever audiences are to be found.

To find out about the full team at National Theatre of Scotland please visit: [nationaltheatrescotland.com/about/our-people](https://nationaltheatrescotland.com/about/our-people) or follow us on



If you would like to give us feedback on the show, please email us at [feedback@nationaltheatrescotland.com](mailto:feedback@nationaltheatrescotland.com)

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## SUPPORT NATIONAL THEATRE OF SCOTLAND

We believe theatre has a special kind of magic - the power to spark joy, stir emotions, and bring people together.

Our mission is to open up that experience to as many people as possible, whether as audiences or theatre-makers.

As Scotland's national company, and the sector's biggest employer, we champion the brilliant artists, crews, companies and venues that make our theatre scene world-class.

We're a charity, supported by the Scottish Government - but we couldn't do what we do without the generosity of our donors and partners.

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