

Kindness is the theme for Kate Fox's Great North Passion play

Performance poet Kate Fox has been working with South Shields pupils ahead of The Great North Passion



Photo: Kate Fox with pupils of South Shields

Community School

This is the contemporary re-telling of the Bible story of Christ's last hours which is building towards a dramatic event to be broadcast live on BBC1 on Good Friday.

Kate and youngsters from South Shields Community School, along with local community groups, are working together on a poem that will feature as part of the event in Bents Park, South Shields.

Kate, who is also a Journal columnist, took as her theme the kindness of strangers, inspired by the story of Veronica who handed her veil to Jesus so that he could wipe his face as he carried the cross to the place of crucifixion.

“We used this example of kindness to help explore the theme more widely,” she said.

“I wanted the poem to mean something to the people of Shields so there are references to the Great North Run, Minchella's ice cream and Ocean Road.

“In our workshops we worked with students from South Shields Community School and two primary

schools, as well as people from the Holder House community.

“It was a great cross-section of people and ages.”

Kate added: “We’ve had some fun but also worked hard at getting their views and opinions on our theme to shape the poem.

“I’m working with a team of 13 pupils from South Shields Community School who will help me perform live on Good Friday and we’re all excited by the prospect.”

The Great North Passion is a collaboration between the BBC and The Cultural Spring, a three-year Arts Council initiative which is investing £2m in 10 council wards – five in Sunderland and five in South Tyneside – where arts opportunities have been in short supply.

Rebecca Ball, project director of The Cultural Spring, said: “We’re delighted to be working with artists of Kate’s calibre and reputation.

“Anyone from Shields, or who has a knowledge of the town, will recognise so much about it in her work, which describes South Tyneside and its people with real fondness and affection.”

Shipping containers sited around the region are currently the focus for artists and community groups who are turning them into works of art. Representing the Biblical Stations of the Cross, these will be transported to Bents Park on April 18 where the big event will take place.

Kate and her team are working on Station Six.

Station One is currently sited on North Shields Fish Quay where sculptor Richard Broderick is working on the theme ‘What is truth?’

“Over the past few weeks I have been collecting truths from people to include in the work,” said Richard.

“The location of the container influenced the external design. On top of the container is a representation of a fishing boat with a net made by local retired fishermen. The boat is called Truth.

“The net seems to be catching fish which, as they go up the net, are turning into people. This is a reference to St Peter, known as ‘the fisher of men’, and his role in the Passion.”

Among others involved are dance group Bad Taste Cru, photographer Julian Germain, opera singer Graeme Danby and band The Futureheads.

David Whetstone - The Journal