



R17 programme notes

2017 marks the centenary of the Russian Revolution. Arts organisations across Wales are enjoying a season of performances and events in the first collaboration of its kind, which capture the social and cultural explosion of the era, and Wales' historic connections with the Russia of the time.

“Russia 17” – the R17 season - is a cultural reflection on the centenary of the Russian Revolution through the eyes of Wales, and takes place in many diverse venues such as **Wales Millennium Centre, National Museum of Wales and St. David's Hall.**

Why Wales? There is a strong historic resonance between the revolution and the radical traditions of the South Wales Valleys. Immediate links were forged with the emerging Soviet Union: letters sent from Lenin himself to Valleys miners and the foundations of the first UK Communist Party established in the Valleys. Maerdy for one was renamed “Little Moscow”, the red flag flew at pitheads, and the area's socialist sympathies produced several important Communist trade unionists. Historians have noted how the Russian revolution was uniquely celebrated in Wales – and how its impact was felt for years later.

Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980 by Kenneth O. Morgan

“A massive new encouragement came in Russia with the February revolution followed by that in October. It aroused immense enthusiasm amongst Welsh miners, railwaymen, and steelworkers. Soldiers' and Workers' Councils appeared in the Rhondda on the model of Petrograd. Maerdy was renamed 'little Moscow'; the red flag flew at pitheads. The most powerful voice of Maerdy socialism, operating under an assumed name because of his anti-war activities in Wales and Ireland, was Arthur Horner, who was finally arrested and imprisoned for sedition. Here and in other respects, south Wales seemed the very cockpit of class war, a centre of neo-Bolshevik extremism, an 'El Dorado' for every species of revolutionary socialist ideology.”

A History of Wales by John Davies

“The unrest in the coalfield was encouraged by the revolution in Russia... “There was no place outside of Russia where the Revolution has caused greater joy than in Merthyr Tydfil,”

proclaimed the Merthyr Pioneer, and the miners of Ammanford sang: "Workers of the Vale of Amman/ Echo Russia's mighty thrust."

The Story of Wales by Jon Gower

"The Russian revolution which began in 1917 was widely seen as a call to arms by disgruntled workers all over Europe, and it received a sympathetic reception in the South Wales coalfield."

The effects of ideas created by the revolution in Russia can be seen and felt in the Valleys of South Wales years later – with the swell of socialism and communism. For example, Jon Gower says this about the 1930s:

"The apparent collapse of capitalism during the Depression increased support for socialists and communists in Wales, who were at the forefront of all protests... The community of Maerdy was so left-leaning that it was known as 'Little Moscow'."

R17 Patrons BAFTA award winning actor and director **Michael Sheen** and artistic director of the Mariinsky Theatre St Petersburg **Valery Gergiev** have thrown their support behind the season. Valery Gergiev said *"The Centenary of the Russian Revolution is a time for reflection and the arts provide an ideal vehicle to explore this momentous historical event."*