

Inspirational

WOMEN

Kathryn Conway meets four fabulous females who are helping to cement London's status as one of the best cities in the world

When Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, launched the #BehindEveryGreatCity campaign, it felt like a turning point for gender equality. In a year that marked 100 years since the first women gained the right to vote in the UK, the Mayor's campaign honoured women's contributions to the capital. In 2019, events such as International Women's Day (8 Mar) and WOW – Women of the World Festival at the Southbank Centre (8-9 Mar) keep the focus on gender equality. So, let's meet some of the women behind the city's reputation for excellence.



CLARE SMYTH
Chef-patron of Core
by Clare Smyth

As the first female chef to head up a three-Michelin-starred restaurant in the UK during her tenure as the chef-patron of Restaurant Gordon Ramsay, Clare Smyth is no stranger to awards. Since opening Core, her debut restaurant in Notting Hill in August 2017, however, the chef's trophy cabinet is now bursting. Last year, Smyth was named the World's Best Female Chef at The World's 50 Best Restaurants awards and Core was awarded two Michelin stars. And she still found the time to cater for the evening reception of the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex.

Attributing her success to sheer hard work and a determination to cook with the best, Smyth is quick to point out that 'nothing is more important

and valuable than the people around you'. It's why she is investing in development and why, every week, a staff member is asked to research a great chef, classic dish or ingredient and present their findings to the team. 'I think a lot of chefs miss out on the foundations but without that, you can't really make it to the top,' Smyth says.

Smyth is championing the sustainability revolution, by emphasising vegetables over meat and fish and ensuring British produce is at the heart of the menu. 'We have fabulous ingredients here in the UK, particularly fish, shellfish and game,' says Smyth. But what makes her stand out is the way she uses techniques and finesse that she has gleaned from Michelin-starred kitchens to create her exciting British fine-dining experiences. She is an inspirational figure in her own industry and beyond.

www.corebyclaresmyth.com ▶





INDHU RUBASINGHAM
Artistic Director of the Kiln Theatre

Since becoming Artistic Director of what was

then called the Tricycle Theatre in 2012, Indhu Rubasingham has overseen a major refurbishment of the building, changed the theatre's name from the Tricycle to the Kiln and implemented the mission she had when she started: to stage works that shine a light on unheard talent. Kiln's current production, for example, is *The Son* (until 6 Apr), the final part of Florian Zeller's family trilogy and a story that explores mental health.

'I love the effect a work can have on an audience member – how it can change someone's perception or how it humanises something for them,' says Rubasingham.

The artistic director's choices of productions are also informed by her exasperation at not seeing people like herself on stage. 'I was frustrated as a person, and as a British-Asian person, of the perceptions of people like me; firstly of not even seeing people like me on stage and secondly, that when I did they were often stereotyped,' she reveals. 'That's why the unheard voice became important – I was interested in people having the main stage.'

Naturally, Rubasingham says there is much to be done with diversity in theatre. But, given how much the landscape has changed, she is excited: 'Look at the majority of artistic directors now and they're women, they're people of colour, which is extraordinary,' she says. 'I don't think this diversity of leadership is happening anywhere else.' Perhaps, in part, we have Rubasingham to thank for that.

www.kilntheatre.com



JUSTINE SIMONS
Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries

As any visitor to the

capital will attest, one of London's greatest appeals is its diverse cultural offering. But, the capital wouldn't be the artistically rich city it is without the help of one woman in particular. Instrumental in shaping the city's arts policy for more than 15 years, Justine Simons believes that culture is vital to London, saying: 'It's the reason most tourists visit. But, more than that, it shapes our identity as a city.'

Working across a broad spectrum of sectors, Simons gets involved in projects as diverse as campaigning to save the capital's cultural venues, supporting the launch of the new Fashion District in east London and developing initiatives such as the London Borough of Culture (Waltham Forest is the first borough to enjoy this accolade).

However, her proudest achievement to date is the development of the Fourth Plinth programme, which commissions leading artists to create sculptures for display on the once-empty plinth in Trafalgar Square.

'It is arguably the world's most renowned sculpture commission and puts contemporary art in the middle of one of London's most famous locations,' Simons says. 'And, well, it is kind of bonkers. It is both stellar public art and the source of much argument – and that's what is brilliant about it.'

www.london.gov.uk



CAROLINE RUSH
CEO of the British Fashion Council

London's fashion industry owes a debt to Caroline

Rush. Since becoming Chief Executive of the British Fashion Council in 2009, she's ensured that the city's fashion scene has become the envy of the world.

High-profile brands such as Burberry and Victoria Beckham have left the catwalks of Milan and New York to show instead at London Fashion Week (LFW) during her tenure, while last year she orchestrated what was perhaps the biggest coup of all: inviting the Queen to sit in the front row of designer Richard Quinn's autumn/winter 2018 show. 'It was such a privilege to have the Queen in attendance and it was a proud moment for all of us,' says Rush.

Encouraging wider acknowledgment of the power of British fashion has been a key mission for Rush. Whether it's commissioning impact studies showing how much the industry contributes to the UK economy, nurturing fledgling talent with bursaries through initiatives such as NEWGEN, or opening up the LFW catwalks to a wider audience through live streaming, Rush has brought professionalism to the industry.

She acknowledges that none of this would have been possible without a network of renowned fashion schools – the incubators of young talent – and says: 'We have some of the best fashion schools in the world here and it is the importance we give to creativity and innovation that makes London's fashion scene so special.'

www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk ■



WOW
Women of the World Festival

Opening on International Women's Day, the Southbank Centre's festival (8-9 Mar) marks the launch of The WOW Foundation, which celebrates the work of women around the world. The festival was founded by Dame Jude Kelly, who is establishing WOW worldwide. The London festival includes American activist and author Angela Davis in conversation, as well as British comedian Jo Brand.

www.southbankcentre.co.uk