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PRESS RELEASE

THURSDAY 30 MAY 2024

LIFT and The Royal Court Theatre present the World Premiere of

## **ECHO (EVERY COLD-HEARTED OXYGEN)**

Written by **Nassim Soleimanpour**

Directed by **Omar Elerian**

Commissioned by LIFT as part of their Concept Touring Programme.

- **Kathryn Hunter, Toby Jones, Fiona Shaw, Meera Syal and Rebecca Lucy Taylor (Self Esteem)** announced as the first wave of artists to perform in the new production from **Nassim Soleimanpour** and director **Omar Elerian**.
- An additional ten artists will be announced in the coming weeks for this groundbreaking piece where a different artist takes to the stage each night to perform a script they've never seen before.
- The world premiere of **ECHO (Every Cold-Hearted Oxygen)** will run at the Royal Court Theatre as part of LIFT 2024 from Saturday 13 - Saturday 27 July 2024.

The Royal Court Theatre and LIFT (London's International Festival of Theatre) have today announced five of the fifteen artists who will perform in the world premiere of *ECHO (Every Cold-Hearted Oxygen)* which will run at the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs from Saturday 13 - Saturday 27 July 2024 with opening night on Wednesday 17 July.

**Kathryn Hunter** (*Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*), **Toby Jones** (*Mr Bates vs. The Post Office*), **Fiona Shaw** (*Killing Eve*), **Meera Syal** (*Roar*) and **Rebecca Lucy Taylor aka Self Esteem** (*Cabaret*) will each perform this new work from critically acclaimed Iranian playwright **Nassim Soleimanpour** (*White Rabbit, Red Rabbit, NASSIM*) and director **Omar Elerian's** (*NASSIM, Misty, two Palestinians go dogging*). *ECHO* pushes the boundaries of Soleimanpour's signature unrehearsed cold reads. An additional ten artists and dates for each performer will be announced in the coming weeks.

Across the three week run, a different performer will take to the stage at each show without having a clue of what is going to be asked of them. Unrehearsed and unprepared, the script becomes their guide as they journey through the story of the playwright, connected live from his flat in Berlin. Or is he? Can we really know where or when we are?

*ECHO* asks us to confront what it feels like to be an immigrant in time. Fusing technology with the oldest tricks in the book, *ECHO* is an experiment in concept touring for the age of

climate crisis: an ambitious, magical and uncompromising production where no one travels yet everybody can be present.

**Kathryn Hunter** said: *"I am excited to be a part of project ECHO for LIFT at the Royal Court. Working with Omar Elerian on Ionesco's The Chairs was both hugely inspiring and challenging; a leap into the unknown; this project promises to be no less, for performers and audience alike."*

**Rebecca Lucy Taylor** said: *"Alarmingly my gut is telling me to choose interesting and challenging projects when it comes to my acting career. I am honoured and terrified to be asked to be a part of this insanely special event. The fear is so loud that I know it's the right thing to do!"*

**Meera Syal** said: *"I had the pleasure of working with Nassim Soleimanpour on Red Rabbit White Rabbit and it is simply a unique theatrical adventure for both actor and audience. Delighted to be included in the next journey at the Royal Court with the extraordinary talents of Nassim and Omar Elerian."*

*Have no idea what is going to happen - but that's the magical buzz of this experience. Can't wait."*

## **Biographies**

### **Kathryn Hunter**

Kathryn Hunter is an Olivier Award-winning Actress and Director.

Theatre credits include: **King Lear, The Chairs, Happy Days, WHY, Timon of Athens, Prometheus Unbound, The House of Bernarda Alba, Fragments, The Valley of Astonishment, The Emperor, Kafka's Monkey, Cyrano De Bergerac, Hearts-Cards, A Midsummer Night's Dream, A Tender Thing, Antony & Cleopatra, King Lear, One Green Bottle, The Diver, The Bee, Yerma, Celestina, Whistling Psyche, Dona Rosita, Richard III, The Taming of the Shrew, Macbeth, Electra, Far Away, The Rose Tattoo, The Devils, Live Like Pigs, The Recruiting Officer, Our Country's Good, The Hypochondriac, Women of Troy, Romeo & Juliet, Spoonface Steinberg, Mother Courage, The Skriker, The Visit.**

As long-term associate of Théâtre de Complicité, her credits include: **Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead, The Visit (Olivier Best Actress Award), Foe, Out of the House Walked a Man, Anything for a Quiet Life, Help! I'm Alive and The Winter's Tale.**

Film includes: **Megalopolis, Poor Things, The Pod Generation, The Front Room, The Tragedy of Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Tale of Tales, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, The Baby of Macon, Maria's Child, Orlando, All or Nothing.**

Television includes: **Black Doves, Andor, Landscapers, Les Misérables, Black Earth Rising, Flowers, Rome, Silent Witness and Grushko.**

Directing credits include: **Napoleon Disrobed, Othello, The Birds, Mr Puntila and his Man Matti, Wiseguy Scapino, The Glory of Living, The Comedy of Errors, Pericles, My Perfect Mind.**

### **Toby Jones**

Toby Jones most recently played the central role of 'Alan Bates' in **Mr Bates Vs. The Post Office** (ITV). Directed by James Strong, the 4-part drama told the story of one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in British legal history of the Post Master Scandal. He will soon be seen in ITV's upcoming

drama, **Ruth**, which follows the story of the infamous Ruth Ellis who was the last woman in the UK to be hanged.

Toby also took on the role of 'Basil' in Indiana Jones and the **Dial of Destiny** (Walt Disney Pictures), opposite Harrison Ford. Further recent onscreen credits include Sam Mendes' **Empire of Light** (BBC Legends/Searchlight Pictures) alongside Olivia Colman, **The Pale Blue Eye** (Netflix), based on Louis Bayard's novel of the same name, **The Long Shadow** (ITV) and **The Wonder** (Element Picture), opposite Florence Pugh. He will next appear on screen in Duke Johnson's **The Actor** based on the 2010 novel Memory by Donald E. Westlake and Doug Liman's **The Instigators** for Apple TV+, opposite Matt Damon. Previous notable Film & TV credits include **Tetris** (AI-Film/Apple TV+), **The English** (All3 Media), **Danny Boy** (BBC Two), **First Cow** (A24), **Worzel Gummidge** (Leopard Pictures), Sherlock (Hartwood Films) and **The Detectorists** (BBC).

Toby similarly has an expanse of onstage credits to his name, perhaps most notably **Uncle Vanya** at the Harold Pinter Theatre for which he received an Olivier nomination for his portrayal of the titular role. Further theatre credits include **The Painter** (Arcola Theatre), **The Birthday Party** (Harold Pinter Theatre) and **Every Good Boy Deserves Favour** (National Theatre). His role as Arthur in Kenneth Brannagh's **The Play What I Wrote** earned Toby an Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role.

### **Fiona Shaw**

Appointed as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2001 for her contribution to the film, theatrical, and televisual arts, Fiona Shaw is one of Britain's most prized actresses. She has worked with several international directors, including Alfonso Cuarón (**Harry Potter**), Jim Sheridan (**My Left Foot**), Bob Raffelson (**Mountains of the Moon**), Brian DePalma (**The Black Dahlia**), and Terrence Malick (**The Tree of Life**). She is known in the US for her television performance as the villainess witch Marnie Stonebrook on HBO's **True Blood**. On stage, she has excelled in a wide range of performances, including Olivier Award-winning performances in **Electra**, **As You Like It**, and **The Good Person of Sichuan** and **Machinal**, which also won her a London Evening Standard Theatre Award. Her outstanding role as the titular character of **Medea** earned her an Evening Standard Award and a nomination for a Tony Award®. Aside from her work on **Killing Eve**, she can also be seen in the films **Lizzie**; and **Colette**, as well as the TV series **Mrs. Wilson**. She can be seen most recently in the 4th series of the HBO series **True Detective** and the feature film **IF** directed by John Krasinski. Later this year she has the Amazon series **Anansi Boys** to come out, along with the Apple feature film **Echo Valley** and the British independent feature film **Hot Milk**.

### **Meera Syal**

Meera Syal CBE is a multi-Emmy Award-winning British actress, comedian and writer. Last year, she was presented with the BAFTA Fellowship at the BAFTA Television Awards 2023, which is the highest accolade bestowed by BAFTA and recognises an outstanding contribution to the industry and the much-coveted Lifetime Achievement Award at the Women in Film & Television Awards 2023.

Born in Wolverhampton, Syal began her multifaceted career in theatre with roles spanning renowned productions, including the Royal Shakespeare Company's **Much Ado About Nothing**, David Hares **Behind The Beautiful Forevers**, (NT) Kenneth Branagh's production of **Romeo and Juliet**, (Garrick Theatre) and Jeremy Herrin's West End transfer of **Noises Off**. She also starred as Shirley in **Shirley Valentine** (Menier Chocolate Factory and Trafalgar Studios West End), receiving the What's On Stage Award for Best Actress.

Her television credits as a writer/performer include the multi award-winning comedy series **Goodness Gracious Me** and **The Kumars at Number 42**, for which she received a BAFTA nomination. Her additional television credits include **The Split**, **Broadchurch**, **Back To Life** and Sky's **Code 404**. She has just been seen starring in new Apple TV show **Roar**, an anthology series based on a short story

collection of the same name by Cecelia Ahern. Meera can currently be seen in new Amazon series, **The Devil's Hour** and as a series regular in series 2 of Amazon's **The Wheel of Time**. She is also currently starring as the title role in Acorn's **Mrs Sidhu Investigates**.

On the big screen, her film credits include **Yesterday**, **The Nutcracker** and the **Four Realms**, **Paddington 2**, **Doctor Strange**, **Beautiful Thing**, **Absolutely Anything**, and **Alice Through the Looking Glass**. More recently, she has just been seen in Disney Channel Original movie **SPIN** and will also soon be seen in indie movie **The Almond and the Seahorse**.

Syal's first novel, **Anita And Me**, won the Betty Trask Award and is the first novel by a British Asian writer to be included on the national school's curriculum. She has written two other critically acclaimed novels, **Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee** and **The House Of Hidden Mothers**. Meera holds honorary doctorates at the University of Manchester, the University of Birmingham and SOAS, and was also previously a Visiting Professor for Theatre at St Catherine's, Oxford University. She is currently in the process of writing her memoir, which is due for publication by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in June 2025.

Her credits as a screenwriter include the popular films **Bhaji On The Beach**, **Anita And Me** and **My Sister Wife**, for which she won two Asian Film Awards (AFA), for her screenplay and performance. Meera has also been a recipient of the Women In Film And Television Award for Creative Innovation.

### **Rebecca Lucy Taylor**

Theatre credits include: **Sally Bowles in Cabaret** (Kit Kat Club/West End); **As Composer: Prima Facie** (Harold Pinter Theatre & Golden Theatre, NYC, ).

Film credits include: **Layla**

Television credits include: **Smothered; I Hate Suzie Too**

Album credits as Self Esteem include: **Compliments Please; Prioritise Pleasure** (The Guardian and Sunday Times Culture's Album of the Year, Mercury Prize nomination, BRIT Award for Best New Artist, Sky Arts Award nomination, NME Awards nomination, BBC Introducing 2022 Artist of the Year Award, Attitude Magazine's 2021 Music Award).

### **Omar Elerian (he/him)**

As director for the Royal Court, theatre includes: **two Palestinians go dogging**.

As director, other theatre includes: **As You Like It (RSC); The Chairs (Almeida); The Return of Danton (Münchener Kammerspiele); The Long Shadow of Alois Brunner (Schauspiel Leipzig); Autoreverse (BAC); Going Through, Misty (& West End/The Shed, New York), NASSIM (& Traverse/New York City Center/International Tour), One Cold Dark Night, Islands (Bush)**.

As co-director, theatre includes: **The Mill: City of Dreams (Site specific); You're Not Like The Other Girls Chrissy (China Plate)**.

As associate director, theatre includes: **Leave Taking, The Royale, Perseverance Drive, Chalet Lines (Bush)**.

**Omar was the resident Associate Director at the Bush Theatre 2012-2018.**

### **Nassim Soleimanpour (he/him)**

Theatre includes: **White Rabbit Red Rabbit (& Westside Theatre New York City/International Tour), BLANK (& Summerhall/International Tour), NASSIM (& Bush/ Traverse/New York City Center/International Tour) (Nassim Soleimanpour Productions); Blind Hamlet (Actors Touring Company/LIFT); COOK (Copenheagen Grob/ Bush/International Tour); Mr. K and The Flowers (Audible)**.

Awards include: **Dublin Fringe Festival Best New Performance (White Rabbit, Red Rabbit), Summerworks Outstanding New Performance Text Award (White Rabbit, Red Rabbit), The Arches Brick Award (White Rabbit, Red Rabbit), Fringe First Award (NASSIM), Off Broadway Alliance Awards (NASSIM)**.

*ECHO (Every Cold-Hearted Oxygen) is an NSP production, co-produced by LIFT (London) / The Royal Court Theatre (London), Staatstheater Mainz, Riksteatern (Sweden), Why Not Theatre (Toronto), Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles (Brussels) / Le Lieu Unique (Nantes), Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Canberra Theatre Centre / Malthouse Theatre (Melbourne). In association with The Shed (New York City).*

## **ENDS**

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**Images can be downloaded [here](#).**

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### **ECHO (Every Cold-Hearted Oxygen)**

**Written by Nassim Soleimanpour**

**Directed by Omar Elerian**

**Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, SW1W 8AS**

**Saturday 13 July - Saturday 27 July 2024**

**Press Night: Wednesday 17 July 2024, 7pm**

**Monday – Friday, 7.30pm and 2.30pm**

**Saturday, 1.30pm and 6.30pm**

**Post-show Talk: Thursday 18 July 2024**

**Captioned Performance: Thursday 18 July and Saturday 27 July 2024**

**Relaxed Environment Performance: Saturday 27 July 2024**

**Audio Described pre-show notes available after Press Night**

**Standard Tickets £15 - £58**

**First Look Tickets\*\***

**Concessions\***

**Under 30s\*\*\***

**Access £19 (plus a companion at the same rate)**

*A LIFT Concept Touring Commission. Supported by Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. ECHO is generously supported by the Goethe Insitut London and Maria Björnson Memorial Fund.*

**\*ID required. All discounts subject to availability.**

### **Tickets: Ways to Save**

**Concessions** – Enhanced for 2024 to include more performance days and price bands, Concession tickets are now available for previews, matinees and Friday performances on Band AA – C in the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs. Concessions are available for Over 65s, Students, recipients of Jobseekers Allowance, and members of Equity, BECTU, Stage Directors UK or the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

**First Look Tickets (Previews)** - as most of the plays we stage at the Royal Court have never been seen before, the first few performances in front of an audience are the final part of a long creative process that starts with the playwright. Our First Look Performances, which are sold at a reduced price, are an integral part of the process. If you book tickets for a First Look Performance - the first three previews of a new play - you'll be asked for your feedback which is then shared with the artistic team during the preview period, potentially influencing the final piece.

**Under 30s Tickets** – We're also extending our scheme for young audiences, with Under 27s ticket prices now available for ages 30 and under, meaning even more people can access even more tickets at the £15 rate. A number of £15 tickets will be available for selected performances in the Jerwood Theatre Downstairs. Available on Band C & D tickets, subject to availability.

**Monday Tickets** – Every Monday, every seat in the house for Jerwood Theatre Downstairs productions is available for £15 from 9am online. A limited number are available in advance, subject to availability, to Friends and Supporters. The same price is available every Monday for Jerwood Theatre Upstairs productions.

10p Standing - We will start to sell standing tickets for 10p from 6pm on the day of each performance. Patrons buying standing tickets must stand in the windows provided on the side of the auditorium on the circle level.

### **Support**

As a registered charity, all donations received via bookings will go to Support the Court, a fund which enables the Royal Court to continue to create ground-breaking new work for audiences. The support allows the theatre to keep running all of its behind-the-scenes projects, delivering writers programmes here in the UK and across the world, and schemes for, and with, young people. Find out more here.

Backstage tours

Join us on a backstage tour of the Royal Court Theatre, one of the most important theatres of its time. Explore the design of the building before going behind the scenes for a glimpse of how our work goes from page to stage, and everything in between.

Post-tour cream tea packages are available. See website for tour dates. Group & bespoke tour packages available.

### **LIFT**

LIFT, London's biennial international festival of theatre, has been bringing joyful, daring and unforgettable theatre from around the world to London for over 40 years, using the whole of the city as its stage.

Every two years, LIFT presents a festival full of bold and relevant culture, international perspectives, and thought-provoking performances. Whether it's a much-loved venue, iconic landmark or unsung corner of London, LIFT gathers Londoners around incredible art.

LIFT's mission is to create powerful, invigorating experiences that challenge artistic, political and social conventions; to champion artist advancement at home and abroad; to lead sustainable internationalism; and to celebrate and connect London to the world. We engage and create communities around ideas and projects, connect leading artists to locals, connect international artists and local artists to London, and together make incredible art happen.

A charity limited by guarantee and based in Toynbee Studios in East London, LIFT has a diversified income mix and is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation with a biennial turnover in the region of £2 million.