



**ACTORS TOURING COMPANY**

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT – **WEDNESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER**

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## **ACTORS TOURING COMPANY ANNOUNCES 2023 CO-PRODUCTION AND NATIONAL TOUR OF MOJISOLA ADEBAYO'S AWARD-WINNING PLAY FAMILY TREE**



**Actors Touring Company (ATC)**, the UK's leading theatre producer of international plays, today announces a major Co-Production and National Tour with Belgrade Theatre Coventry, in association with Brixton House of a new stage production of **Mojisola's Adebayo's** play *Family Tree*.

Adebayo's powerful and poetic drama explores race, health, the environment and the incredible legacy of one of the most influential Black women of modern times, Henrietta Lacks. Originally commissioned by ATC and the Young Vic in 2020, an outdoor work-in-progress piece was showcased at the 2021 Greenwich + Docklands International Festival. This new 2023 tour will be the fully-realised stage production.

The Belgrade Theatre Coventry will stage the World Premiere in March 2023 followed by a London premiere at Brixton House in April 2023. The play will then tour until June, visiting major venues across the country including performances in Keswick, Ipswich and Nottingham.

*Family Tree* is the current winner of the Alfred Fagon Award, the leading Black British Playwrighting prize, for best original stage play. ATC's Artistic Director **Matthew Xia**, who will be directing the production says: "Mojisola Adebayo is an exceptional writer and I'm excited that her award-winning play will be seen by audiences far and wide. There's a beauty in her work that responds so well to the present moment whilst also holding

historical malpractice to account. It's fearless, brutally honest, at turns hilarious, and ultimately transformative.

He adds: "Henrietta's HeLa cell line forms the basis of the most important medical research and breakthroughs across the last 70 years, from Cancer and HIV to COVID, we owe our lives to her. Denied her place in history, now is the time to bring Henrietta's epic legacy alive on stage."

**Mojisola Adebayo** says of the new co-production: "When I met Matthew Xia, Henrietta Lacks came into our minds at *exactly* the same time. Xia is magic but Lacks is more, she's immortal and her body has touched every life on the planet – yours, mine... So why have so few people heard of her? Let alone Lucy, Betsey, Anarcha and more... The play paints a family tree of Black women whose cells, blood and waters have birthed, raised and changed the world. Matthew said to me: "I want the audience to leave the theatre looking up". I went away and wrote a play on a promise. Come see it."

**Pauline Walker**, the Creative Producer for the Alfred Fagon Awards adds: "Mojisola Adebayo is a thrilling playwright who infuses her writing with epic ideas, vision and compassion and we're delighted that *Family Tree* is now being produced and will go on tour. We look forward to seeing it."

The Belgrade's CEO, **Laura Elliot** and Creative Director, **Corey Campbell** says: "We're thrilled to be co-producing *Family Tree* with Actors Touring Company. Its mission and message are ones we align ourselves with at the Belgrade and we're honoured to be hosting its world premiere in Coventry next year."

**Brixton House's** Artistic Director **Gbolahan Obesisan** adds: "*Family Tree* spotlights the story of Henrietta Lacks, and what we owe to her legacy. Henrietta's story will surprise many whilst also highlighting the need for medical research to be more transparent especially as a concern for Black communities. *Family Tree* is an urgent part of our history and a unique opportunity for the Black diaspora to connect and reflex on how our bodies have long been commodified. Brixton House embarks on an exciting partnership with ATC to bring this production to Brixton as the genesis of future partnerships."

**Andrew Smaje**, ATC's Executive Director says: "We're so excited to be forging new partnerships with venues and communities in Coventry and Brixton. The fresh artistic leadership of the Belgrade and Brixton House opens doors to stories like Henrietta's and to artists like Mojisola - and our collaboration means that *Family Tree* can tour to many more communities around the UK."

Full cast, creative team and tour schedule will be announced in the New Year.

### **Background**

Commissioning Mojisola Adebayo's play was originally borne out of Actors Touring Company's (ATC) commitment to commissioning new plays from female writers of colour for the first three years of Matthew Xia's tenure (2019-21). This was alongside ATC's mission during the same period to produce UK premieres of contemporary international plays, all of

which were exclusively by female writers of colour. The strategy aimed to pro-actively improve and elevate the representation and diversity of playwriting voices in ATC's work and in the wider sector.

*Family Tree* was jointly commissioned by ATC and Young Vic Theatre. The development production in 2021 was produced by ATC and Greenwich & Docklands International Festival, supported by the Young Vic.

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

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**ACTORS TOURING COMPANY (ATC)** is a portable portal to the world. Through our work, we connect global artistic voices to local communities.

Actors Touring Company (known as ATC) produces contemporary plays that amplify and celebrate global artists from both within and beyond the UK.

Our work reflects and represents the perspectives and experiences of global cultures, through plays that tour to venues of all scales and sizes, and to places the length and breadth of England. We engage with communities whose experiences are under-represented on our stages, and we invite traditional theatre audiences to share the journey.

We are one of the UK's leading producer of international plays, creating a dialogue between Britain and the rest of the world. We are equally passionate about amplifying the voice of the 'outsider within', the cross-cultural communities at the heart of our nation. We are a leading commissioner of plays by writers from the global cultures within the UK.

Founded in 1980, ATC has produced plays from Australia, Norway, Germany, Israel, and the US - bringing international voices to audiences across the UK, from Glasgow to Plymouth and internationally, from Helsinki to Hong Kong.

ATC is currently developing projects with playwrights Nessah Muthy and Yasmin Joseph, writer/performer Ammar Haj Ahmad and partners Soho Theatre, imPOSSIBLE Productions, Brixton House and the Belgrade, Coventry.

### Signature productions include:

- *Family Tree* by Mojisola Adebayo, commissioned by ATC and the Young Vic, premiered at the Greenwich & Docklands International Festival in August 2021. Winner of the 25<sup>th</sup> Alfred Fagon Award for Best New Play. Nationwide tour co-produced with Belgrade Theatre Coventry in association with Brixton House Theatre, Spring 2023.
- *Tambo & Bones* by Dave Harris, co-production with Theatre Royal Stratford East, June – July 2023 with national tour to follow in 2024.
- *Rice* by Michele Lee, directed by Matthew Xia. Orange Tree Theatre, Autumn 2021 and 10-week nationwide tour Spring 2022. Co-production with Orange Tree Theatre, toured in association with Theatre Royal Plymouth.
- *The Brothers Size* by Tarell Alvin McCraney, directed by Bijan Sheibani, new revival of the ATC & Young Vic production planned for Broadway.

**MATTHEW XIA** is one of the busiest and most exciting directors in the UK, was appointed Artistic Director of Actors Touring Company in November 2018. He is a former Associate Artistic Director of Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester; Director in Residence at Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse; and Associate Director of Theatre Royal Stratford East.

Some of Matthew's acclaimed productions include: at the Royal Exchange, Manchester *Frankenstein*, *Wish List* (also Royal Court), and *Into The Woods*; for the Young Vic *Blue/Orange* and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*; and *One Night In Miami...* and *Shebeen* at Nottingham Playhouse and *The Wiz* at Hope Mill.

Matthew's recent projects include *Feeling Afraid as if Something is Going to Happen* by Marcelo Dos Santos (Francesca Moody, Edinburgh Fringe First Winner, 2022) and *Hey Duggee* (Cuffe & Taylor, Kenny Wax, BBC Studios, national tour Dec 2022 – June 2023).

Other work of note includes: *Blood Knot* at The Orange Tree, *Sleeping Beauty* at Stratford East, *Scrappers* and *Migration Music* at the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse; *Dublin Carol* at the Sherman Theatre Cardiff; and NitroBeat's *Suckerpunch Boomsuite* at the Barbican.

Under the pseudonym Excalibah, Matthew was the first DJ to join BBC 1Xtra, where he spent 6 years. As a sound designer and composer, credits include: *The People Are Singing* (Royal

Exchange); *Freerun* (Udderbelly); *That's The Way To Do It* (TimeWontWait); *Bolero Remixed* (New London Orchestra). In 2012 Excalibah performed as a headline DJ at the London Paralympic Opening Ceremony.

Matthew is a founding member of Act for Change, a trustee of Artistic Directors of the Future, Cardboard Citizens and Get Into Theatre, and has served on the boards of Rich Mix, Creative Futures and Theatre Royal Stratford East. He has been a judge for the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting (2017), the Yale Drama Series (2018), the Alfred Fagon Award (2017 – 2021) and the Eurovision Song Contest (2022).

**MOJISOLA ADEBAYO.** Dr. Mojisola Adebayo FRSL FHEA is a Theatre Artist: Writer, Performer, Director, Facilitator, Academic. Writer-on-Attachment to the Royal National Theatre 2022-2023.

**Plays coming soon:** *Family Tree* - Winner of the Alfred Fagon Award 2021 (Actors Touring Company, Belgrade Theatre Coventry,, Brixton House Theatre, UK tour Spring 2023). *STARS* - (Tamasha Theatre Company and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London and touring from April 2023). Highlighted work: *Nothello* (Belgrade Theatre Coventry, May 2022); *The Interrogation of Sandra Bland* (Goodman Theatre Chicago / Black Lives, Black Words, 2019); *Wind / Rush Generation(s)* (National Theatre, Connections, Spring / Summer 2021)

**Selected works in print:** *Mojisola Adebayo: Plays One and Plays Two* (Oberon Books, 2011 and 2019); *Black British Queer Plays and Practitioners: An Anthology of Afriquia Theatre* (Bloomsbury Methuen, co-edited with Lynette Goddard).

**BELGRADE THEATRE** is Coventry's largest professional theatre, producing and presenting a diverse range of shows, events and ground-breaking community and education initiatives. In its landmark building, across the region, the UK and online, it uses theatre to entertain, inspire, share the city's stories, uncover hidden histories, and unleash the creativity of diverse communities.

64 years ago, critic Kenneth Tynan saw the theatre's completion as the beginning of a new era. 'Enter most theatres and it's the gilded, cupidaceous past', he wrote. 'Enter this one, and you enter the future.' The Belgrade is in a period of transition into a new future, led by CEO Laura Elliot and Creative Director Corey Campbell. These leaders have ambitious plans to build on the Theatre's rich history of pioneering theatre, participation, and talent development, to realise a lasting place of sanctuary for creatives and communities.

Through values of collaboration, evolution and authenticity, their working mission is to use the transformative power of theatre to enrich the people of Coventry and beyond.

Over the next three years, Laura Elliot and Corey Campbell will lead a people first approach; prioritising co-creation and cultural democracy, aiming to be a leading example of a regional inclusive learning theatre that sits at the heart of its community.

**BRIXTON HOUSE** (formerly known as Ovalhouse) is a modern venue opening in early 2022 in the heart of Brixton on Coldharbour lane as part of the Somerleyton Road development. Continuing our long legacy of ground-breaking theatre and being a home for artists, Brixton House will be a place for people to come together, to create and enjoy performances. We will house two studio theatres, performance spaces, several rehearsal rooms and multi-use meeting rooms, as well as public spaces, a café and bar. Brixton House will define theatre-making for a new generation of makers, artists, writers, producers, technicians and audiences, inspiring new experiences that develop community solidarity and passion for social change. Brixton House is generously supported by London Borough of Lambeth, Arts Council England, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Wolfson Foundation, Cockayne Grants for the Arts, London Community Fund, The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust.

