



ACTORS TOURING COMPANY

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FAMILY TREE CAST ANNOUNCED

**WORLD PREMIERE PRESENTED BY ACTORS TOURING COMPANY and BELGRADE THEATRE
COVENTRY, in association with BRIXTON HOUSE**



(L-R) Aminita Francis, Mofetoluwa Akande, Keziah Joseph, Aimée Powell, Alistair Hall

BY MOJISOLA ADEBAYO DIRECTED BY MATTHEW XIA

Press Night (Belgrade Theatre Coventry) 14 March

London Press Night (Brixton House) 12 April

National Tour from 10 Mar – 17 June 2023

- ***FAMILY TREE* is a powerful and poetic new drama exploring race, health and the environment. Inspired by the story of one of the most influential women of modern times, Henrietta Lacks.**
- **Alfred Fagon Award winner (Best New Play 2021) by Mojisola Adebayo.**
- **13 week, 12 venue National Tour. World Premiere at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry.**
- **Directed by Matthew Xia (*Rice, One Night in Miami...*, *Blue/Orange, Shebeen, The Wiz, Hey Duggee*), the award-winning Artistic Director of Actors Touring Company.**
- **The production is one of the most substantial and significant tours in ATC's 42 year history.**

Aminita Francis (*Red Riding Hood, Liverpool EVERYMAN*), **Keziah Joseph** (*Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear, NATIONAL THEATRE*), **Mofetoluwa Akande** (*A Christmas Carol, BRISTOL OLD VIC*), **Aimée Powell** (*Nothello, BELGRADE THEATRE*) and **Alistair Hall** (*Safe, NORWICH THEATRE ROYAL*) are cast in the World Premiere and National Tour of **Mojisola Adebayo's** award-winning play **Family Tree**, presented by Actors Touring Company (ATC) and Belgrade Theatre Coventry in association with Brixton House Theatre.

This 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, whose influence on modern-day medicine still reverberates today.

Originally commissioned by ATC, the UK's leading theatre producer of international plays, and the Young Vic Theatre in 2020, as an outdoor work-in-progress piece which was showcased at the 2021 Greenwich + Docklands International Festival.

This brand new 2023 production opening at the Belgrade Theatre Coventry from 10 – 17 March 2023 will be the fully-realised stage play directed by ATC's award-winning Artistic Director **Matthew Xia** and is part of a 13-week National Tour taking in 12 venues until 17 June 2023 from Keswick to Plymouth, via London, Liverpool and Bristol.

Family Tree won the 2021 Alfred Fagon Award, the leading Black British Playwrighting prize, for best new play. Director Matthew Xia, 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.

"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 to life on stage."

Mojisola Adebayo adds: "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."

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."

Brixton House 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."

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.

CAST

Aminita Francis	Henrietta Lacks
Mofetoluwa Akande	Ain, Anarcha, Oshun (multi-rolling parts)
Keziah Joseph	Bibi and Betsy (multi-rolling parts)
Aimée Powell	Lyn and Lucy (multi-rolling parts)
Alistair Hall	Smoking Man

CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright	Mojisola Adebayo
Director	Matthew Xia
Set & Costume Designer	Simon Kenny
Lighting Designer	Simisola Majekodunmi
Composer & Sound Designer	Francesca Amewudah-Rivers
Movement Director	Diane Alison-Mitchell
Associate Director	Amelia Thornber
Costume Supervisor	Maybelle Laye
Production Dramatherapist	Wabriya King
Tour Casting Consultant	Matilda James CDG
Original Casting Consultant	Sophie Parrott CDG

PRODUCTION TEAM

Production Manager	Matt Ledbury
Company Stage Manager	Cassie Adey
Deputy Stage Manager	Elliott Sheppard
Lighting Associate	Tom Lightbody

NATIONAL TOUR – Venues and Dates

Mar 10 - 17	Belgrade Theatre Coventry - Press Night - March 14
April 5-7	Traverse Edinburgh
April 12 - 23	Brixton House - Press Night - April 12
April 27 – 29	Tron Glasgow
May 4 -6	Liverpool Everyman
May 11	Theatre by the Lake, Keswick
May 16 - 20	Theatre Royal Plymouth
May 23 - 24	Sheffield Theatres (Playhouse)
May 26 - 27	The North Wall Oxford
June 1 - 3	Nottingham Playhouse

June 8 - 10 New Wolsey Ipswich
June 13 - 17 Tobacco Factory Theatre Bristol

PREVIOUS PRAISE FOR ATC'S WORK

***** *"Beautifully poetic ... Adebayo's deft writing and the layered, nuanced performances of the excellent cast, allowed us to take solace in community and to look forward to a better future. To Do List* for Greenwich + Docklands International Festival (GDIF) 2021 WIP outdoor iteration of *Family Tree*

"An expansive look at the magnitude of Henrietta Lacks' legacy...wonderfully captured in Matthew Xia's production" **British Theatre Guide** for (GDIF) 2021 WIP outdoor iteration of *Family Tree*

**** *"A powerful, thought-provoking and funny play about cultural identity, class, race and power"* **Broadway World** for *Rice*

"A thoughtful take on the power of women at work." **The Guardian** for *Rice*

"Whip Smart" **The Arts Desk** *Rice*

"A feast of diverse delight, pushing the labels of culture and ambition in a gendered workplace." **Tribe Arts/OffStage Zine** for *Rice*

-ENDS-

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Picture Caption

(L-R) Aminita Francis, Mofetoluwa Akande, Keziah Joseph, Aimée Powell, Alistair Hall

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NOTES TO EDITORS

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

AMINITA FRANCIS

Theatre credits include: *Red Riding Hood* (Liverpool Everyman); *I Am Kevin and Babel* (Wildworks), *Frankenstein: How To Make A Monster* (Battersea Art Centre); *The Immersive Great Gatsby* (Hartshorn-Hook Productions), *Josephine* (Theatre Royal Bath), *Bugsy Malone* (Lyric Hammersmith), *Afobelhas Brazil* (British council Tempo Festival), *Chocolate Cake* (Polka Theatre), *Hive City Legal* (The Roundhouse/Hot Brown Honey), *Six Wives* and *The New Morning* (Theatre Royal Stratford East), *Bite Your Tongue* (Hackney Showroom/TALAWA), *Blood Wedding*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Arsonists* (The Courtyard Theatre/CTTC), *Next Generation* (Zonation) and *Cabin Fever* (Theatre 503). Television credits include: *Frankenstein: How To Make A Monster* (BBC).

MOFETOLUWA AKANDE

Training: The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (winner of *The Peter O'Toole Prize* 2019). Previous theatre credits include *A Christmas Carol* (Bristol Old Vic) and *Girls* (Theatre Royal Plymouth). TV/Radio credits include *The*

Nevers (HBO) and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (BBC Radio 3). Theatre whilst training: *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (Bristol Old Vic); *We Want You To Watch* (Wardrobe Theatre); *Wonderboy* (Bristol Old Vic, Weston Studio); *Clybourne Park* (Bristol Old Vic, Weston Studio).

KEZIAH JOSEPH

Keziah Joseph is an award-winning actress who has worked extensively in theatre and radio.

Theatre credits include: Olivier nominated *Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear* (National Theatre); *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (The Bridge) and Offie-winning *Language of Kindness* (UK Tour). Broadcast credits include: *Crush Hour* (Amazon Audible), *The Archers* (BBC Radio 4), *Dr Who* (Big Finish) *Octonauts* (Netflix).

AIMÉE POWELL

Nothello (BELGRADE THEATRE); *Seaview* (Belgrade Digital Media and Strictly Arts); *Sent To Cov* (Sky Arts); *This Little Relic* (BBC Audio North); *Crongton Knights* (PILOT THEATRE and BELGRADE THEATRE); *FREEMAN* (Strictly Arts Theatre Company); *Doctors* (BBC) **Radio**: *The Archers* – (BBC Radio 4)

ALISTAIR HALL

Alistair Hall is an actor and theatre maker from Chippenham. He graduated from RADA in 2019.

His debut solo show *Declan* received critical acclaim from The Guardian, Attitude magazine and more.

On screen, he recently co-starred with Patricia Hodge in *Rose Pandemic*. Further theatre credits include *The Winter's Tale* (Shake Festival) and *Safe* (Norwich Theatre Royal).

ACTORS TOURING COMPANY

Actors Touring Company (ATC) is a “portable portal to the world”. We are a touring theatre company with an unrivalled track record in the commissioning, producing and touring of contemporary international plays. Our work explores ideas of intersectionality, identity and belonging - opening up conversations across borders both geographic and cultural.

Since 1980, we've pioneered the touring of new global plays, often in world premiere translations of plays from Australia, Norway, Iran, Israel, and the US – bringing global stories to audiences from Glasgow to Plymouth and Keswick to Ipswich.

ATC is currently developing projects with playwrights [Nessah Muthy](#), [Yasmin Joseph](#), writer/performer [Ammar Haj Ahmad](#) and partners [Greenwich and Docklands International Festival](#) and [Belgrade, Coventry](#).
www.atctheatre.com/about

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 25th 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 revival in 2024.

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 most 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 touring in 2023: *Family Tree* - Winner of the Alfred Fagon Award 2021 (Actors Touring Company, Belgrade Theatre Coventry,, Brixton House Theatre). *STARS* (Tamasha Theatre Company and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London). 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 Brixton House is a modern venue in the heart of Brixton, South London. Formerly Ovalhouse, the theatre has a long legacy of ground-breaking theatre and being a home for artists and a new generation of makers, artists, writers, producers, technicians and audiences, inspiring new experiences that develop community solidarity and passion for social change. Continuing its legacy of championing innovation and creative expression, Brixton House presents work that is rich in stories that resonate with its local, international, and intergenerational communities. A place for people to come together, to create and enjoy performances, the venue houses two studio theatres, performance spaces, several rehearsal rooms and multi-use meeting rooms, as well as public spaces, a café and a bar. 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.



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