



**For immediate release:**

- **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to support Graeae's Write to Play programme for a further three years, with a grant of £300,000.**
- **Fourth year announced in partnership with Midlands partners Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Curve Leicester and Belgrade Theatre Coventry.**

Graeae Theatre Company are delighted to announce that following a highly successful three years of the *Write to Play* programme for aspiring Deaf and disabled writers (and with a fourth year about to launch), Esmée Fairbairn Foundation will be supporting the programme for a further three years, with a grant of £300,000.

The *Write to Play* programme runs annually in partnership with some of the leading producing venues across the UK, with five writers per year working with some of the most creative minds in the industry. The year long programme includes Playwriting 101 (a crash course in the art of playwriting), specialist workshops, mentoring sessions and opportunities to have short pieces of work performed in front of an audience. Not only does this provide the writers with the opportunity to develop their skills, *Write to Play* introduces a new generation of Deaf and disabled playwrights to the wider theatre landscape.

Year One of *Write to Play* was open to writers nationally, with partners the Royal Court Theatre, Soho Theatre and the National Theatre Studio. Year 2 was open to writers based in the North West, with the Royal Exchange Manchester, Octagon Theatre Bolton and Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse partnering, and Year 3 is currently running in the North East, with Live Theatre Newcastle, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Hull Truck Theatre. Applications for Year 4, which will be open to writers based in the Midlands, with partners Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Leicester Curve and the Belgrade in Coventry, will open on Monday 5 September 2016.

The 15 writers who have taken part in the scheme so far are: Amy Bethan Evans, Sean Burn, Nicola Werenowska, Rosaleen McDonagh, Tom Wentworth, Danni Skerritt, Helen Martin, Helen East, Jackie Hagan, Karen Featherstone, Sarah Gonnet, Sarah Jane Dickenson, Sharon Wilson and Rick Poppa.

Writers from the programme have gone on to win awards and have their work professionally commissioned and performed.

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## Quotes

'We are thrilled that Esmée Fairbairn have once again given their generous support for *Write to Play* for another three years. *Write to Play* is a programme at the very heart of Graeae designed to put the enormous talent AND diversity of Deaf and disabled artists at the forefront of British theatre.'

**Jenny Sealey, Artistic Director and CEO, Graeae Theatre Company**

'It's so wonderful to see *Write to Play* go from strength to strength and with the incredible support from Esmée Fairbairn we can now continue the vital work this programme does. I'm absolutely delighted that Deaf and disabled writers based in the Midlands will get the same experience that our previous writers had access to; theatre companies that champion new writing, world class practitioners, and a platform for their work to be showcased. *Write to Play* really is shifting perceptions and attitudes to Deaf and disabled writers.'

**Amit Sharma, Associate Director, Graeae Theatre Company**

'Esmée Fairbairn aims to support the artistic and financial sustainability of the arts sector and make sure that the widest range of people can participate. We are proud and excited to be continuing our support of Graeae's *Write to Play*, a programme with the potential to create meaningful, lasting impact across the theatre sector that will significantly broaden the opportunities and progression routes available to Deaf and disabled writers.' **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**

'We're thrilled to join Graeae's trailblazing *Write To Play* programme in its fourth year, giving Deaf and disabled playwrights in our city and region the opportunity to develop their voices, make new work with our support, and get to know us better. Being a home for our community's diverse audiences and artists is at the heart of everything we do at Curve, and it's an honour to form this new partnership with Graeae, a company that boldly, brilliantly pushes for greater accessibility in the arts. Joining forces with our

friends at Birmingham Repertory Theatre and Belgrade Theatre Coventry, it's a real Midlands powerhouse of venues on the programme and I can't wait to see what stories we all discover.' **Suba Das, Associate Director, Curve Leicester**

'We are delighted to partner with Graeae, The Belgrade and The Curve on this most exciting and ambitious of projects. To be a part of this programme on a region wide scale, to discover, nurture and support a new generation of Deaf and disabled writers and to diversify the pool of fantastic storytellers in the Midlands is a great honour. I really look forward to seeing how these writers, ideas and plays develop and grow with the support and focus that the mentoring, workshops and sharings of work that this scheme offers.' **Tessa Walker, Associate Director, Birmingham Repertory Theatre**

'The Belgrade is delighted to be working in partnership with Graeae on the fourth year of its *Write to Play* Programme. The Belgrade Theatre is committed to telling the stories of the diverse range of communities that make up the city, the region and the country; and to developing artists from this broad range of contexts – so it is great to be involved in a project that is contributing to redressing the balance in terms of the development of skills / stories from Deaf and disabled artists. We are also pleased to be working again with regional partners, Birmingham Repertory Theatre and Leicester Curve.'

**Justine Themen, Associate Director, Belgrade Theatre Coventry**

## Editor's notes

**Graeae** is a force for change in world-class theatre - breaking down barriers, challenging preconceptions and boldly placing Deaf and disabled artists centre stage. Artistically led by Jenny Sealey, Graeae's signature characteristic is the compelling creative integration of sign language and audio description, which engages brilliantly with both disabled and non-disabled audiences. Championing accessibility and providing a platform for new generations of artists, Graeae leads the way in pioneering, trail-blazing theatre. Graeae won the Promotion of Diversity Award at the TMA Theatre Awards UK 2012. [www.graeae.org](http://www.graeae.org)

**Esmée Fairbairn Foundation** aims to improve the quality of life for people and communities throughout the UK both now and in the future. They do this by funding the charitable work of organisations with the ideas and ability to achieve positive change. The Foundation is one of the largest independent grant-makers in the UK. They make grants of £30 - £35 million annually towards a wide range of work within the arts, education and learning, the environment and social change. They also operate a £26 million Finance Fund which invests in organisations that aim to deliver both a financial return and a social benefit. [www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk](http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk)

**Curve** is a spectacular state-of-the-art theatre based in the heart of Leicester's vibrant Cultural Quarter. Opened in 2008 by Her Majesty The Queen, the award-winning

building, designed by acclaimed architect Rafael Viñoly, offers a completely unique visitor experience. Unlike any other theatre in the UK, Curve has no traditional backstage area. Audiences can enjoy the full theatre making process, peek behind the scenes and maybe even spot an actor or two dashing from the stage to their dressing room or just enjoying a coffee in our Café. The building's curved façade is made from 1,192 tonnes of steel and 46000m<sup>2</sup> of glass. Managed by Leicester Theatre Trust, Curve is a registered charity providing engaging world-class theatrical experiences for local communities, enabling people of all ages and backgrounds to access, participate in and learn from the arts, nurturing new and emerging talent, and creating world-class theatrical experiences. Under the leadership of Chief Executive Chris Stafford and Artistic Director Nikolai Foster, Curve is developing a reputation for producing, programming and touring a bold and diverse programme of musicals, plays, new work and dance. All of this presented alongside a dynamic mix of community engagement and learning opportunities, which firmly places audiences and communities at the heart of what Curve does. Recent productions and co-productions made at Curve include: *Legally Blonde: The Musical*, Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Ishy Din's *Wipers*, Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Hairspray*, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Akram Khan's *Until the Lions*, Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾ - The Musical*, and Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful Thing*. [www.curveonline.co.uk](http://www.curveonline.co.uk)

**Birmingham Repertory Theatre** is one of Britain's leading producing theatres. Founded in 1913 by Sir Barry Jackson, Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company rapidly became one of the most famous and exciting theatre companies in the country launching the careers of an array of many great British actors including Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Edith Evans, Paul Scofield, Derek Jacobi, Elizabeth Spriggs, Albert Finney and many more. In 2013 the company celebrated its centenary. The REP's aim is to inspire a lifelong love of theatre in the diverse communities of Birmingham and beyond. As well as presenting over 60 productions on its three stages every year, the theatre tours its productions nationally and internationally, showcasing theatre made in Birmingham. The commissioning and production of new work lies at the core of The REP's programme and over the last 15 years the company has produced more than 130 new plays. The theatre's learning and participation programme is the best of any cultural organisation in the city and in the past year The REP has engaged with 4500 young people and 2600 adults through its learning and participation programme equating to 30,000 individual educational sessions. The REP is also committed to nurturing new talent through its youth theatre groups, The Young REP, its professional artist development scheme, REP Foundry, plus a new initiative, FURNACE which offers local people opportunities to develop new talents. [www.birmingham-rep.co.uk](http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk)

The **Belgrade Theatre** was built in 1958 as part of the reconstruction of Coventry after World War II. Holding 858 in its two-tier main auditorium, and 250-300 in the flexible, new second space, B2, it remains one of the largest regional producing theatres in Britain. Autumn 2007 saw the re-opening of the Belgrade Theatre after completion of

its £14 million redevelopment project, including the creation of B2, and refurbishment of the existing listed building. The Theatre remains the major arts and cultural facility in Coventry and the only building-based professional producing theatre company in the city. It aims to present a broad spectrum of excellent work and produces a wide range of shows. Having started the Theatre-in-Education (TIE) movement in the 1960s, the Belgrade also continues to pioneer new initiatives in this field as well as other community and outreach programmes. Despite the ongoing economic pressure, the theatre's bold in-house programme remains as strong as ever. Recent Belgrade productions include: *Only A Day*, *Cougar The Musical* and *Three Minute Heroes*, as well as its annual pantomime and alternative B2 Christmas Show, and a production of *The Sisterhood* in 2016. The Belgrade also works with some of the UK's leading theatre-makers to co-produce work, which often plays to broader audiences on tour. Recent examples include *Charlie Peace: His Amazing Life and Astounding Legend* and *Propaganda Swing* with Nottingham Playhouse; *The Silver Sword* with Sell A Door Theatre Company; *Wipers* with Birmingham REP and Curve Theatre, Leicester and *A Raisin in the Sun* with Sheffield Theatre and Watford Palace.

[www.belgrade.co.uk/](http://www.belgrade.co.uk/)