



For immediate release

Graeae announces writers on the fifth year of the Write to Play programme, in partnership with the Bush Theatre, Soho Theatre, Ovalhouse, Talawa and Tamasha.

Write to Play is a bold new writing initiative committed to developing the skills and experience of D/deaf and disabled writers. Over the course of one year, five writers will each write and develop a full-length play through collaboration with some of the most creative minds in the industry.

In summer 2017, Graeae announced that year five of the programme would focus on D/deaf and/or disabled writers from across the UK identifying as BAME, and would be run in partnership with five of the most exciting companies and theatres championing diverse programming; Bush Theatre, Soho Theatre, Ovalhouse, Talawa and Tamasha.

The first four years of *Write to Play* have developed twenty playwrights, many of whom have gone on to have work produced professionally. In August 2017, Graeae and the Royal Exchange Theatre produced for the first time a full length play from a Write to Play graduate. *Cosmic Scallies* by Jackie Hagan (from year 2 of the programme) premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2017, followed by a run at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester. Both runs played to sell-out houses, 4-star reviews and audience acclaim.

[Click here to read about other writers and partners from the previous four years of the programme.](#)

The year-long *Write to Play* programme includes Playwriting 101 (an intensive craft-focussed playwriting course), specialist workshops, mentoring sessions and opportunities to have short pieces of work performed in front of an audience. This will

not only provide the writers with the opportunity to develop their skills, it will also introduce a new generation of D/deaf and disabled playwrights to the wider theatre landscape.

Graeae and its partners are thrilled to announce that the writers selected for the fifth year of the *Write to Play* programme are: **Leanna Benjamin, Kathryn Golding, Shahid Iqbal Khan, Charlotte Maxwell** and **Lettie Precious**.

The *Write to Play* programme (incorporating *Play Labs* and *Play Chats*) is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Arts Council England and Backstage Trust.

Contact the press team for more information, or if you would like this information in alternative formats.

Graeae Press Office

Richard Matthews

Tel: 020 7613 6906

Email: richard@graeae.org

Website: www.graeae.org

Quotes

‘Our *Write to Play* programme goes from strength to strength, and producing the first piece from one of our graduates this summer - *Cosmic Scallies* by the incredible Jackie Hagan – was such a special moment for us. I’m delighted to be welcoming these five new writers to the Graeae family, and I can’t wait to see what gems of new writing they come up with! As ever, we’re hugely grateful to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Backstage Trust and Arts Council England for funding this key strand of our activity.’

Jenny Sealey, Artistic Director & CEO, Graeae Theatre Company

‘Tamasha feel incredibly excited to work on this project with Graeae, alongside theatre companies we greatly admire. Nurturing and developing diverse artists has always been at the heart of Tamasha’s work, and when Graeae approached us to partner on a project that created opportunities for BAME writers who are D/deaf and disabled, with a national reach, we saw it an incredible opportunity. This is a massively underrepresented group in playwriting and we look forward to building relationships with writers, seeing their development, hosting them and most importantly, hearing what stories they come to tell.’

Fin Kennedy, Artistic Director, Tamasha

‘Soho Theatre are thrilled to be working with Graeae again for the next year of *Write to Play*. Having partnered with the programme in its first year, we whole-heartedly share their commitment to championing unheard voices in the theatre and breaking through new talent. This is a vital programme in identifying new writers and diversifying the stories we tell on our stages. It is schemes like this which truly make a difference to the theatre landscape and we are excited to work with and develop the writers we find through the process and build long-lasting creative relationships for the future.’

Charlotte Bennett, Associate Director, Soho Theatre

'We are thrilled that Talawa Theatre Company is part of *Write to Play*. The programme is becoming a crucial part of the theatre landscape and we look forward to discovering exciting new voices with Graeae, Bush Theatre, Ovalhouse, Soho Theatre, and Tamasha. We can't wait to see the stories that emerge from this collaboration bringing together BAME and D/deaf & Disabled led companies. This is just the start for Graeae and Talawa as we continue our work together on artist development throughout 2018 with *Write to Play* and Talawa's MAKE Programme.'

Jane Fallowfield, Literary Associate, Talawa Theatre Company

'Ovalhouse is delighted to be working with Graeae on the *Write to Play* project. We have a fifty-year history of nurturing, supporting and developing new voices in the arts. Ovalhouse provided Jenny Sealey with the opportunity to make her first production here, so it feels right that we are now working together to ensure that these five writers are given the same opportunity to develop their skills, learn their craft and tell their stories.'

Owen Calvert-Lyons, Head of Theatre and Artist Development, Ovalhouse

'We are thrilled to be able to support *Write to Play* this year, an important initiative that not only develops and showcases some of the best of new writing talent, but that also speaks up for a group of artists often marginalized in the industry. The quality, energy and sheer hustle of this project is hugely energising and chimes with the Bush's own mission to produce bold, new and diverse voices.'

Madani Younis, Artistic Director, Bush Theatre

'It all started with *I Smile*, a 3 minute piece I wrote and performed for a community project with the West Yorkshire Playhouse. Just over 18 months later, the desire to see a full-length play that I have written is even stronger and thanks to *Write to Play* I am now one-step closer to realising my dreams. I am really excited about writing pieces that provoke, entertain and hopefully shift the narrative that exists in our society that demonises people who are in similar shoes, or should I say wheels, that life has put me in. As well as sharpening my writing skills, I am really looking forward to working with a mentor and learning more about the industry that hopefully one day I will be fortunate to work in.'

Leanna Benjamin, Year 5 writer

'Theatre is collaborative so opportunities with year-long support are vital to emerging playwrights. I've long been an admirer of Graeae and this year's partners so I am absolutely thrilled to be a part of this programme. It's a fantastic long road ahead and I cannot wait to get started!'

Kathryn Golding, Year 5 writer

'I feel very excited about *Write to Play*. What a blessing! I'm really looking forward to meeting the other writers on the programme and engaging with Graeae Theatre as well as their programme partners. It's a great way to get to know the London theatre scene more as I have previously had very little engagement with it.'

Shahid Iqbal Khan, Year 5 writer

'After initially having a lot of anxiety about submitting my writing, I am so glad I sent my application in! I applied for *Write to Play* as I thought it would be an amazing opportunity to grow as a writer. I'm excited by the prospect of working with industry experts and having a mentor to support the development process. Having spent a week at Graeae recently completing their *Ensemble* programme, I'm ecstatic to be working with them again. The year ahead is going to be a real challenge but it's one that I welcome with open arms.'

Charlotte Maxwell, Year 5 writer

'Being part of the *Write to Play* is everything I have been looking and waiting for to further my career as a writer. Having access to great resources, mentorship and learning new skills is surreal, but it's a dream I'm happy to not wake up from.'

Lettie Precious, Year 5 Writer

Editor's notes

Graeae is a force of 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

Tamasha is a diverse cohort of bold theatremakers producing and touring the best new plays and placing the voices of emerging and established artists from culturally diverse backgrounds centre-stage. Successes like *Blood*, *Snookered*, *My Name is...* and *Made in India* have won acclaim from critics and audiences alike. www.tamasha.org.uk

Soho Theatre is London's most vibrant venue for new theatre, comedy and cabaret, occupying a unique and vital place in the British cultural landscape. Soho Theatre's mission is to produce new work, discover and nurture new writers and artists, and target and develop new audiences. As entrepreneurial as it is innovative, over the last seven years under the joint leadership of Soho's Artistic Director Steve Marmion and Executive Director Mark Godfrey, the charity and social enterprise has almost trebled audiences and produced more work than ever before. The future vision is to ambitiously expand beyond Dean Street (which sees over 2,000 performances a year) with an additional larger venue beyond central London, a digital and TV presence, as well as a strong national and international touring programme. www.sohotheatre.com

Talawa Theatre Company is the UK's primary Black led touring theatre company. Their work is informed by the wealth and diversity of the Black British experience, and through that they create outstanding work by cultivating the best in emerging and established Black artists. They invest in talent, develop audiences and inspire dialogue with and within communities across the UK and internationally. By doing so, they aim to enrich the cultural life of all. www.talawa.com

For the past 50 years **Ovalhouse** has been a home to experimental, radical and overlooked artists seeking to make theatre and performance that speaks to a world beyond the mainstream. A hotbed of artistic activism in the five decades since we began, Ovalhouse has seen the social and artistic ideals it has aspired to become widely accepted as the model for a better society. We have sheltered social and political movements whilst pursuing an unerring agenda for positive artistic, political and social change. Ovalhouse stands on a proud history and continues to be a vital

home for boundary-pushing art and artists with an eye on the future.

www.ovalhouse.com

Bush Theatre is a world-famous home for new plays and renowned champion of playwrights. We discover, nurture and produce the best new playwrights from the widest range of backgrounds and present their work to the highest possible standards. We look for exciting new voices that tell contemporary stories with wit, style and passion and we champion work that is both provocative and entertaining. In March 2017, the Bush Theatre reopened following a year-long £4.3million renovation by architects Haworth Tompkins. The redevelopment includes a brand new studio space, rehearsal room, entrance and front-of-house area as well as an exterior garden terrace. www.bushtheatre.co.uk

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation aims to improve the quality of life for people and communities throughout the UK both now and in the future. We do this by funding the charitable work of organisations that are building an inclusive, creative and sustainable society.

The Foundation is one of the largest independent grant-makers in the UK. In 2016 we made grants of £42.4 million towards a wide range of work within the arts, children and young people, the environment and social change. We also have a £45 million allocation to social investments for organisations with the aim of creating social impact. www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

GRAEae

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