

The world premiere

# RETURNING TO HAIFA

by Ghassan Kanafani. Adapted by Ismail Khalidi and Naomi Wallace.

Directed by Caitlin McLeod. Set and Costume Design by Rosie Elnile. Lighting by Joshua Gadsby. Sound by David Gregory.

Presented by Lynne McConway Productions in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

Cast: Myriam Acharki. Leila Ayad. Ammar Haj Ahmad. Ethan Kai. Marlene Sidaway.

"You haven't asked, but yes, you both may stay in our house for the time being. And use our things.  
I figure it'll take a war to settle it all."

The world premiere of the first English-language adaptation of the classic novella by **Ghassan Kanafani**, **Returning to Haifa**, adapted for the stage by **Naomi Wallace** and **Ismail Khalidi**, opens at the Finborough Theatre for a four week limited season on Tuesday, 27 February 2018 (**Press Nights: Thursday 1 and Friday 2 March 2018 at 7.30pm**).

A compelling story of two families – one Palestinian, one Israeli – forced by history into an intimacy they didn't choose.

In 1948, Palestinian couple Said and Safiyya fled their home during the Nakba. Now, in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War, the borders are open for the first time in twenty years, and the couple dare to return back to their home in Haifa. They are prepared – of course – to find someone else living where they once did. Yet nothing could prepare Said and Safiyya for the encounter they both desire and dread: the son they had to leave behind, and what he has now become...

Coinciding with the 70th anniversaries of both the Nakba or "catastrophe" – the mass dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948 – and the foundation of the State of Israel, **Returning to Haifa** is a unique, deeply moving play of suspense and heartbreak, where humanity and vision combine with a frontline immediacy.

This adaptation was originally commissioned by New York's Public Theater who had committed to programming the play, but subsequently abandoned the production after political pressure from the board. It now receives its long-overdue world premiere at the Finborough Theatre, directed by **Caitlin McLeod** whose critically acclaimed production of Naomi Wallace's *And I And Silence* sold out at the Finborough Theatre and transferred Off Broadway.

Writer **Ghassan Kanafani** (1936-1972) is widely regarded as one of Palestine's greatest novelists, writing some of the most admired stories in modern Arabic literature. He was also an intellectual and political activist. His novellas and short stories, now translated into dozens of languages, are considered by many today as having been ahead of their time, both in form and content. Kanafani wrote the novella *Returning to Haifa* in 1969, a testament not only to Kanafani's principled commitment to the politics of liberation, but also his deep empathy for the 'other' as well as his modern approach to storytelling. Ghassan Kanafani was assassinated by a car bomb in Beirut in 1972 at the age of 36. Kanafani's obituary in Lebanon's *The Daily Star* wrote that: "He was a commando who never fired a gun, whose weapon was a ball-point pen, and his arena the newspaper pages."

Playwright **Naomi Wallace's** plays include *In the Heart of America* (Bush Theatre), *Slaughter City* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *One Flea Spare* (Public Theater, New York City), *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* and *Things of Dry Hours* (New York Theatre Workshop), *The Fever Chart: Three Vision of the Middle East* (Public Lab, New York City), *And I and Silence* (Finborough Theatre and Signature Theatre, New York City) and *Night is a Room* (Signature Theatre, New York City). Naomi has been awarded the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize twice, the Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, the Obie Award and the Horton Foote Award. She is also a recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts development grant. In 2013, Naomi received the inaugural Windham Campbell Prize for Drama, and in 2015 an Arts and Letters Award in Literature. Naomi's play *One Flea Spare* was recently incorporated in the permanent repertoire of the French National Theatre, the Comédie-Française. Only two American playwrights have been added to

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# Press Information

La Comédie's repertoire in 300 years, the other is Tennessee Williams.

Playwright **Ismail Khalidi** was born in Beirut and raised in the United States. His plays include Truth Serum Blues and Sabra Falling (Pangea World Theater, Minneapolis), Tennis in Nablus (Alliance Theatre, Atlanta) and Foot (Teatro Amal, Chile). His writing has appeared in numerous anthologies as well as in The Nation, Guernica, American Theatre, Mizna and Remezcla. Ismail co-edited (with Naomi Wallace) Inside/Outside: Six Plays from Palestine and the Diaspora. He is currently under commission from Noor Theatre and Actors Theatre of Louisville and is a visiting artist with Teatro Amal in Chile.

Director **Caitlin McLeod** returns to the Finborough Theatre where she directed Facts, Northern Star and And I And Silence which subsequently transferred to the Signature Theatre, New York City. She is the Artistic Director of new-writing company The Coterie (supported by a Sky Academy Scholarship) and has formerly been part of the Old Vic 12, Artistic Associate with HighTide and Trainee Director at the Royal Court Theatre. Productions include One Flea Spare (Sheen Centre, New York City), A Further Education (Hampstead Theatre Downstairs), BRENDA (HighTide Festival Theatre and Yard Theatre), Polar Bears (West Yorkshire Playhouse), The Malcontent (Shakespeare's Globe), Commonwealth (Almeida Theatre), HomeTruths (Cardboard Citizens at The Bunker) and The Children's Hour (Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama). Caitlin has been Assistant or Associate Director for Dominic Cooke, Jeremy Herrin, James Macdonald (all at the Royal Court Theatre), Simon Godwin (National Theatre), Hamish McColl (Hampstead Theatre), and Dominic Dromgoole (Shakespeare's Globe).

The cast is:

**Myriam Acharki** | Safiyya

Theatre includes Kabeirol (Punchdrunk), Dionysos Unbound (Bridewell Theatre), Jane Eyre (West End and Tour for Shared Experience), Woyzeck (St Ann's Warehouse, New York City and Gate Theatre), The Seven Year Itch (Queen's Theatre), Macbeth False Memory (Actors Touring Company), Princess Sharon (Scarlet Theatre), and Peter Pan (West Yorkshire Playhouse).

Film includes City of Tiny Lights, 28 K, John Carter of Mars and The Beach.

Television includes Next of Kin, Doctors, Chasing Shadows, Silk, Sinbad, New Tricks, E20, Under Suspicion, Little Miss Jocelyn, Human Cargo, Paradise Heights and Holby City.

**Leila Ayad** | Young Safiyya

Trained at Rose Bruford College.

Theatre includes Elton John's Glasses (Palace Theatre, Watford) and Imogen (Shakespeare's Globe).

Television includes Doctors and Rellik.

**Ammar Haj Ahmad** | Said

Trained at The Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, Damascus.

Theatre includes The Jungle (The Young Vic), Love (National Theatre and Birmingham Rep), The Great Survey of Hastings (Ladie's Parlour), rehearsed reading of Goats/Told From the Inside (Royal Court Theatre), Kan Yama (Cockpit Theatre), Mawlana (Mosaic Rooms), The Knight and the Crescent Hare (National Tour), One Thousand and One Nights (The Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre, Toronto, and Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh) and Babel (Caledonian Park).

Film includes Wall, Round Trip, Maqha Almawt and Wada'an.

Television includes Agatha Raisin and Letters from Baghdad.

**Ethan Kai** | Young Said

Trained at Academy of Live and Recorded Arts.

Theatre includes Goats (Royal Court Theatre).

Film includes Instrument of War.

Television includes Doctors, Emmerdale and Mount Pleasant.

**Marlene Sidaway** | Miriam

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include A Bed of Roses, Foreign Lands and Susan which subsequently transferred to the Gielgud Theatre.

Trained at East 15 Acting School.

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Theatre includes *The Enchantment*, *A Prayer For Owen Meany* (National Theatre), *Kenny Morgan* (Arcola Theatre), *Enjoy*, *The Crucible* (West Yorkshire Playhouse), *Animals* (Theatre503), *Uncle Vanya* (The Print Room), *The Daughter in Law*, *Macbeth* (Crucible Theatre Sheffield), *Just Between Ourselves* (Royal and Derngate Theatres, Northampton) *The Lady in the Van* (Salisbury Playhouse), *A Cream Cracker Under the Settee* (Harrogate Theatre), *All My Sons* (Bristol Old Vic), *We'll Always Have Paris* (The Mill at Sonning), *Kiss Me Like You Mean It* (Soho Theatre), *A Time and A Season* (Plymouth Theatre Royal), *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (Royal Court Theatre), *The Dearly Beloved* (Hampstead Theatre) and *Hedda Gabler* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester).

Film includes *Sink*, *Me and Orson Welles*, *Venus*, *Oliver Twist*, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, *Beautiful Thing*, *I Want Candy* and *The Key*.

Television includes *Doc Martin*, *Doctors*, *Mum*, *Cuffs*, *Wallander*, *Hustle 8*, *Being Human*, *Survivors*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Kindness of Strangers*, *Sensitive Skin*, *Foyle's War*, *Holby City*, *Inspector Lynley Mysteries*, *Sirens* and *Life Begins*.

Radio includes *After Wonderland*, *Rhapsody*, *The Moonflask*, *Murder is Easy*, *Our Woman in Norton Tripton*, *The Resistance of Mrs Brown*, *The People Next Door* and *Siege*.

## The press on playwright Naomi Wallace

"She speaks to, and for, the body as eloquently as any American writer since Walt Whitman." *American Theatre*

"Absolutely compelling theatre." *Evening Standard* on *The Fever Chart*

"A shudderingly poetic meditation on the implacability of death and the universality of mourning." *The Scotsman* on *The Fever Chart*

"A taut, beautifully written elegy and it reaches out to us now like a prophecy." *The Observer* on *The Fever Chart*

## The press on playwright Ismail Khalidi

"A beautifully crafted work of art that balances the Lebanese-born playwright's passion for the politics of his homeland with a playful and irreverent comedic sensibility" *Wendell Brock, Atlanta Journal Constitution* on *Tennis in Nablus*

"Writing with an ear for contemporary language and a delightful sense of the absurd...Khalidi defuses the solemnity of his story by masking it with comedic zest. And yet he never negates the horror of the final twist." *Wendell Brock, Atlanta Journal Constitution* on *Tennis in Nablus*

"[Khalidi's] beautiful writing ranges from a kind of hip-hop spoken word to a Greek chorus to chilling hallucinatory interrogations." *Lydia Howell, Pulse* on *Truth Serum Blues*

## The press on director Caitlin McLeod

On *And I And Silence* at the Finborough Theatre –

★★★★ *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *Time Out*, *WhatsOnStage*, *Evening Standard*, Shortlisted for an Off-West End Award - Best New Play, *Time Out Critics' Choice*, *Evening Standard Critics' Choice*, named one of Lyn Gardner's Best Plays of 2011

"UNMISSABLE." *Lyn Gardner, The Guardian*

"Wise and powerful." *Ian Shuttleworth, Financial Times*

"Director Caitlin McLeod has fashioned an intense, gripping production... a potent reminder of the unbeatable power of theatre." *Evening Standard*

On *And I And Silence* at the Signature Theatre, New York City –

"Gracefully directed by Caitlin McLeod." *Time Out New York*

"A typically first-class production by the Signature, with the director Caitlin McLeod." *Charles Isherwood, The New York Times*

"Under Caitlin McLeod's direction, the four actresses infuse Wallace's work with deep feeling. [A] stark, elegiac drama." *The New Yorker*

On *BRENDA* –

★★★★ *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Stage*, *Female Arts*

"Visionary and magical." *The Telegraph*

"It tells you the truth about what it means to be alive." *Huffington Post*, Top Picks 2015

**PRESS NIGHTS: THURSDAY 1 AND FRIDAY 2 MARCH 2018 AT 7.30PM**

**PHOTOCALL: TUESDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2018 AT 1.00PM-1.30PM**

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Book online at [www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk](http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk)

No booking fees on online, personal or postal bookings

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# Press Information

**FINBOROUGH | THEATRE**

By Telephone –

Until 29 January 2018 – Box Office 0844 847 1652 (Calls will cost 7ppm plus your network access charge.)

From 30 January 2018 – Box Office 01223 357851. (Calls are free.) Lines are open Monday– Saturday 10.00am-6.00pm

**Tuesday, 27 February – Saturday, 24 March 2018**

Tuesday to Saturday Evenings at 7.30pm. Sunday Matinees at 3.00pm. Saturday matinees at 3.00pm (from 10 March 2018).

**Prices until 11 March** – Tickets £16, £14 concessions, except Tuesday Evenings £14 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £16 all seats. Previews (27 and 28 February) £12 all seats.

£10 tickets for Under 30's for performances from Tuesday to Sunday of the first week when booked online only.

£12 tickets for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on Saturday, 3 March 2018 when booked online only.

**Prices from 13 March** – Tickets £18, £16 concessions, except Tuesday Evenings £16 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £18 all seats.

Group Bookings – 1 free ticket for every 10 tickets booked.

Performance Length: Approximately 80 minutes with no interval.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

**Antonella Petrancosta** on e-mail [press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk](mailto:press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk) or **07512 609614**

Download press releases and images at <http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources.php>

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