

May to August season 2020 at the Finborough Theatre

The world premiere co-production direct from performances in Russia

BLISS

by Fraser Grace.

Based on *The River Potudan* by Andrey Platonov.

Directed and Designed by Paul Bourne. Sound and Music Composition by Michaela Polakova.

Presented by Menagerie and The Platonov International Festival in association with Neil McPherson for Finborough Theatre.

Cast: Robbie Aird. Lukas Lee. Patrick Morris. Caroline Rippin. Bess Roche.

"It's good to see you're alive.

Good to know not all the ghosts in the streets are enemies..."

A world premiere of a new play by multi-award-winning dramatist **Fraser Grace** in a British-Russian co-production, direct from performances in Russia, *Bliss* opens at the Finborough Theatre for a limited three-week season on Wednesday, 27 May 2020 (**Press Nights: Thursday, 28 May 2020 and Friday, 29 May 2020 at 7.30pm**).

1920. Russia. Winter.

When 'victorious' Nikita returns home from the brutal Russian civil war, he attempts to start a new life balanced precariously between his drunken father Mikhail, and his new wife Lyuba, the feisty young girl he remembers from his school days. When Nikita fails to consummate his marriage – all the while aware that he is being watched by a mysterious figure – he is sent into a spin of alternative universes. When he finally emerges in a new town further along the Potudan River, he is at first amusingly adopted and put to work by market traders, only to be then accused of a crime 'against the Soviet State'. And the local Communist Party Investigator is summoned...

Based on a short story by the brilliant but little-known Russian writer Andrey Platonov (1899-1951), *Bliss* is a colourful and strangely heart-warming kaleidoscope of song, laughter and magic, as the survivors of years of devastating war and political revolution all search for their 'bliss' in the cold toxic reality of life in post war Soviet Russia.

And they start to comprehend how a society needs time to recover from catastrophe, how real love has both passionate *and* practical faces, and how the future is only built by those who manage to survive their past...

Playwright **Fraser Grace**'s first play *Perpetua* was joint winner of the Verity Bargate Award, and his best-known work, *Breakfast with Mugabe*, was premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company in the Swan Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon, where it won the John Whiting Award for Best New Play and a Silver Sony Award when broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and the World Service – all directed by Antony Sher. *Breakfast with Mugabe* has since been revived in the UK and in the USA, where it was again shortlisted Off-Broadway for The Broadway Alliance Award for Best Play. His other plays include *Always Orange* (The Other Place, Stratford-Upon-Avon), *Kalashnikov: In the Woods by the Lake* (National Tour), *Tongues* (Menagerie National Tour), *King David Man of Blood* (Mercury Theatre, Colchester), *The Lifesavers*, nominated for TMA award for Best New Play (Mercury Theatre, Colchester,

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and Theatre503), *Frobisher's Gold* with Janet Suzman (Shaw Theatre), *Who Killed Mr Drum* (Riverside Studios), *Gifts of War* (Menagerie at Theatre503), and *Perpetua*, joint winner of the Verity Bargate Award (Soho Theatre and Birmingham Rep).

Writer **Andrey Platonov** (1899-1951) was a Soviet existentialist writer, and although he was a Communist, most of his works were banned in his lifetime because of their sceptical attitude towards collectivisation and Stalinist policies, as well as for its experimental, avant-garde form. His most famous novel is *The Foundation Pit*, although since his death, his novel *Soul* has emerged as one of the favourite novels of contemporary Russia. In 1920, he joined the Communist Party, and at the time of writing *The River Potudan* (on which *Bliss* is based), he was also working on the railways delivering troops and supplies and clearing snow. He continued writing prolifically, although for a period of five years he abandoned writing to work as an engineer stating that he could not spend his time "just contemplating". Stalin was ambivalent to Platonov's worth, calling him "a fool, idiot and scoundrel," but then later describing him as "a prophet and genius". Tatyana Tolstoya described him as "an extraordinary writer, perhaps the most brilliant writer of the 20th century".

Director and Designer **Paul Bourne** is Artistic Director of Menagerie in Cambridge, as well as Co-Artistic Director of Divadlo 6-16 (Prague), Associate Director of the Meyerhold Theatre (Moscow), and Associate Artist of the Platonov Festival (Voronezh, Russia). Direction and Designing includes *Frobisher's Gold* (Shaw Theatre), *Stand By Your Van* (Pleasance Edinburgh), *Egusi Soup* (Soho Theatre, Birmingham Rep and Nottingham Playhouse), *Out of Your Knowledge* (National Tour), *Swimming* (Pleasance Edinburgh), *In The White Highlands* (Soho Theatre), *Hard Sell* (Theatre503 and Jatka 78, Prague), *Animal Farm* (Voronezh Theatre, Russia) and *Correspondence* (Jatka 78, Prague).

Menagerie is a 20-year award-winning new writing theatre company based at The Cambridge Junction. Its international co-productions of plays – including work by Steve Waters, Janice Okoh, Tim Etchells, Fraser Grace and Naomi Wallace – have been seen in Cambridge, London, Edinburgh, St Petersburg, New York, Prague, Frankfurt, Belgrade and Voronezh, Russia.

The cast is:

Robbie Aird | Nikita

Trained at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Theatre includes *Romeo and Juliet* (Vault Festival) and *Out For The Season* (INK Festival).

Lukas Lee | Investigator

Trained at the Guildford School of Acting.

Theatre includes *The Soldier* (Salisbury Playhouse), *Journey's End* (Belgium), *Christmas Carol* (National Tour), *Not Dead Enough* (National and Irish Tour), *She Stoops to Conquer*, *All's Well That Ends Well* (Changeling Theatre Company), *The Sessions: Live at Abbey Road* (Royal Albert Hall, and National and Irish Tour), *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest* (National Tour) and *Henry IV* (Waterloo East Theatre).

Patrick Morris | Mikhail and Vlass

Trained at Exeter University and San Francisco Mime Troupe.

Theatre includes *bloominauschwitz*, winner of Best New Play (Brighton Fringe), *Out of Your Knowledge* (Pleasance Edinburgh), *Frobisher's Gold* (Shaw Theatre), *Hard Sell* (National and International Tour), *Medea* and *Pushing Daisies* (Foursight Theatre), *Top Secret* (New International Encounter), *Henry VI* (Public Theatre of New York), *Counting the Ways*, directed by Joseph Chaikin (New York), *Springtime*, *Oscar and Bertha* and *Drowning* (Magic Theatre, San Francisco).

Patrick is Co-Artistic Director of Menagerie and has directed and developed work with Fraser Grace, Steve Waters, Naomi Wallace, Tom Stoppard, Claire MacDonald, Hisham Matar and Maria Irene Fornes among many others.

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Caroline Rippin | Paulina and Zhenya

Trained at Bretton Hall.

Theatre includes *The Great Austerity Debate* (National Tour), *What Country, Friends, Is This?* (Hotbed Festival), *The Summer Before Everything* (Oxford Playhouse), *Pictures of You* (Soho Theatre), *A Workhouse Christmas* (Jumped Up Theatre), *Let Newton Be* (Menagerie), *Four for Jericho* (The Cambridge Junction), *Stand By Your Van* (Pleasance Edinburgh), *A Sudden Visitation of Calamity* (Hotbed Festival and Soho Theatre), *Frobisher's Gold* (Shaw Theatre), *Stormin' Jack Norman* (Theatre503), *Michelle and The Landlady* (Menagerie National Tour), *Motherf**ker Island* and *In the White Highlands* (Cambridge Drama Centre), *Blogger* (Teatro Piccolo), *Peer Gynt* (Wakefield Opera House) and *White Nights* (The Spot, Covent Garden).

Direction includes *Doghead Boy and Sharkmouth Go To Ikea*, *Blacklight* and *Oran's Message* (Menagerie) and *Return Of The Vanishing Peasant* (Mercury Theatre, Colchester).

Bess Roche | Lyuba

Trained at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Theatre includes *Legless* (Southwark Playhouse and Theatre503), *Precieuses Ridicules* (Cockpit Theatre), and writing and performing *The Bachannals* (Etcetera Theatre and Edinburgh Festival).

The press on playwright Fraser Grace

On *Breakfast With Mugabe* at the Royal Shakespeare Company

"Short, tense and devastating." Kate Kellaway, *The Observer*

"There's black comedy and a ticking tension in the power-play between the two men." Paul Taylor, *The Independent*

"We are often told that political theatre is one-sided, partial and unfair. But I recommend the sceptics to take a look at Fraser Grace's compelling 90-minute play." Michael Billington, *The Guardian*

"Fraser Grace's taut meditation on guilt and power...in Mr Grace's capable hands, Mugabe rightfully deserves a seat alongside Macbeth, Richard III and other tragic, power-siphoning Shakespearean anti-heroes." Catherine Rampell, *New York Times*

On *The Lifesavers* at Theatre503

"Anyone interested in child-protection issues, or who simply craves an ingenious, thought-provoking night out on the fringe, should see this." Dominic Cavendish, *The Telegraph*

"Grace...is a fiercely intelligent writer, and this is a gripping play." Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

"In the anxiety that gives his writing a shuddering energy, he catches something of the mood of our own uncertain times." Sam Marlowe, *The Times*

On *Perpetua* at Birmingham Rep

"Fraser Grace's play won the Verity Bargate Award, and a worthy winner it proves to be...this drama has got you by the throat and is squeezing hard." Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

"A gripping play...I don't remember the last time my heart was in my mouth as much as it is here...as the first major for this writer it marks the arrival of a significant talent." *The Birmingham Post*

The press on Director Paul Bourne

For *HOTBED* at Theatre503

"The evening is a mini theatrical treat; sometimes good things come in small packages." *British Theatre Guide*

"Witty scripts directed and delivered with energy and style." *Evening Standard*

"A dizzying trio of comical, moving and sometimes disconcerting pieces." *West End Wilma*

"Fast and furious." *WhatsOnStage*

"A night of theatre that is fast paced, innovative, and inspiring." *One Stop Arts*

For *Why Can't We Live Together?*

"A beautifully simple script that exposes the fragility of love and marriage." *British Theatre Guide*

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“The writing is crisp and witty and the timing is impeccable in this fast-paced show.” *UK TheatreNet*

For *Somniloquy*

“Eerily beautiful and oddly poetic.” *Time Out*

“A brilliantly twisty piece. It’s funny, it’s thought-provoking and it’s worth the price of admission alone.” *WhatsOnStage*

For *How to Begin*

“A joy and thrillingly refreshing.” *Reviewsgate*

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PRESS NIGHTS: THURSDAY, 28 AND FRIDAY 29 MAY 2020 AT 7.30PM

PHOTO CALL: WEDNESDAY, 27 MAY 2019 AT 1.00PM–1.30PM

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk. No booking fees on online, personal or postal bookings

Box Office 01223 357851. Calls are free. There will be a 5% booking fee. Lines are open Monday– Saturday 10.00am–6.00pm

Wednesday, 27 May – Saturday, 13 June 2020.

Tuesday to Saturday evenings at 7.30pm. Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3.00pm.

Prices until 7 June 2020 – Tickets £18, £16 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £16 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £18 all seats. Preview (27 May) £14 all seats.

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

£14 tickets for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on Saturday, 30 May at 7.30pm when booked online only.

Prices from 9 June 2020 – Tickets £20, £18 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £18 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £20 all seats.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Livvy Perrett on e-mail press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07889 794858**

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

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