

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

PRESS RELEASE

8 May 2017

Today, at 12pm, the Almeida Theatre launches *Figures of Speech*, a major new digital film project interrogating the vitality of speech, rhetoric, and what visionary leadership sounds like.

*Figures of Speech* will place history's greatest speeches centre stage through a series of films read by a network of actors and young leaders released online, building a tapestry of dynamic voices and ideas from across the world as a dramatic response to social crisis.

At a time of political turmoil, unprecedented world events and an increasingly divided society, what does inspiring leadership sound like? In 2017 the Almeida will revisit the words of powerful and often surprising orators to remember. *Figures of Speech* creates a platform for a wider interrogation of what leadership means and the power of the spoken word in the 21st century.

Viewers can hear speeches delivered by American politician **Harvey Milk** spoken by **Ian McKellen**; **Nelson Mandela** spoken by **Lucian Msamati**; **Virginia Woolf** spoken by **Fiona Shaw**; AIDS activist **Elizabeth Glaser** spoken by **Nicola Walker**; and Labour Party Politician **Neil Kinnock** spoken by **Ashley Walters**. With a network of actors adding dynamic voices to the project, the Almeida will harness the power of performance to explore big political and social ideas.

*Figures of Speech* films will be available for free – one film released each day for five days, with further slates of films following later in the year – through a dedicated microsite.

**All *Figures of Speech* material is available at [speech.almeida.co.uk](http://speech.almeida.co.uk)**

Alongside a growing anthology of films, the microsite will feature additional material exploring the speeches, the context within which they were first delivered and the choice to revive them in 2017. The site will feature guest-authored articles and filmed reactions from each speech's performer alongside an audience made up of people from local communities that have direct connections to the themes explored. To complement each speech, inspiring young leaders aged 15 - 25 from across London have been invited to respond to *Figures of Speech* and deliver a speech of their own, crafted through an Almeida Participation programme, inviting previously unheard voices to

share the platform.

*Figures of Speech* is conceived by **Rupert Goold** and directed by **Anthony Almeida**.

*Figures of Speech* is the Almeida's third marathon theatre event, following day-long durational readings of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in 2015, which inspired audiences of over 50,000 people across the UK and around the world.

## **ENDS**

**For all press enquiries and images, contact Susie Newbery, Press and Media Relations Manager, on 020 7288 4911 or [snewbery@almeida.co.uk](mailto:snewbery@almeida.co.uk)**

## **Notes to Editors**

**Anthony Almeida** was Resident Director at the Almeida in 2015 where his work as associate director included: *The Odyssey*; *The Iliad*; *Oresteia* (also West End); and *Game*.

**Rupert Goold** is the Almeida's Artistic Director where he has previously directed *Richard III*, which was broadcast live to cinemas around the world in July 2016, *Medea*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Charles III* and *American Psycho*, which opened on Broadway in April 2016. He was Artistic Director of Headlong from 2005 until 2013 where his work included *The Effect*, *ENRON*, *Earthquakes in London* and *Decade*. Other theatre credits include *Made in Dagenham* in the West End; *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* at the Almeida; *Macbeth* at Chichester Festival Theatre, in the West End and on Broadway; and *No Man's Land* at The Gate, Dublin and in the West End. He has twice been the recipient of the Laurence Olivier, Critics' Circle and Evening Standard Awards for Best Director. He was Associate Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company from 2009 to 2012 and was Artistic Director of Northampton Theatres from 2002 to 2005. On film he directed the BAFTA nominated *Richard II*, part of *The Hollow Crown*, and *Macbeth* for the BBC, feature *True Story*, starring James Franco and Jonah Hill, and an adaptation of his production of Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III* for BBC Two, which will air in May. His production of *Ink*, a new play by James Graham, opens in June. Rupert was awarded a CBE for services to drama in the 2017 New Year's Honours.

***Figures of Speech*** has been supported by a number of generous individual Almeida supporters.