

ALMEIDA THEATRE

PRESS RELEASE: Monday 18 September 2017

The Almeida Theatre today launches the second series of *Figures of Speech*, its major digital film project interrogating the vitality of speech, the power of performance, and what visionary leadership sounds like.

The first instalment of series two is released today with **Cush Jumbo** delivering **Malcolm X's** controversial 1965 speech '**The Language of Violence**' and continues with one film released each week over the next month featuring actors **Noma Dumezweni**, **John Heffernan**, **Derek Jacobi** and **Russell Tovey**. They will perform significant speeches from politicians, activists and philosophers throughout history. The new films continue to examine what leadership means and the power of the spoken word in the 21st century with an increased focus on rhetoric that initially received a hostile reaction and remains both divisive and provocative.

A divided politics, a divided country, a divided people.

We've never needed leaders more.

Figures of Speech places history's greatest speeches centre stage through an anthology of films read by a range of actors released online, building a concert of dynamic voices and ideas from across the world as a dramatic response to social crisis.

Series one, which launched in May, featured 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.

Figures of Speech is available for free via a dedicated mini-site: speech.almeida.co.uk

Alongside a growing anthology of films, the microsite features additional material exploring the speeches, the context within which they were first delivered and the choice to revive

them in 2017. The site features guest-authored articles and filmed reactions from each performer alongside an audience of people from local communities who have direct connections to the themes explored. To complement the films, inspiring young leaders aged 15 - 25 from across London have been invited to respond with a speech of their own, crafted through an Almeida Participation programme, inviting previously unheard voices to share the platform.

Series one of *Figures Of Speech* has so far received a combined total of 140,000 views, from both clips on the Almeida's social media channels and the full-length films on YouTube. Ian McKellen's reading of Harvey Milk's 'Hope Speech' has had over 66,000 views through social media and YouTube. Overall the Almeida reached over 650,000 people through their social channels alone with 60% of the conversation online about the project taking place outside the UK.

Figures of Speech is conceived by **Rupert Goold** and directed by **Anthony Almeida**. It is the Almeida's third major digital 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.

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For all press enquiries and images, contact Alexander Milward, Press and Media Relations Manager, on 020 7288 4911 or amilward@almeida.co.uk

Notes to Editors

Anthony Almeida is currently the Link Artist of the Royal Opera House. In 2015 he was the Resident Director at the Almeida 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 *Ink* (now running in the West End), *Richard III* (which was broadcast live to cinemas around the world in July 2016), *Medea*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Charles III* (which transferred to West End and Broadway) and *American Psycho* (opened on Broadway in April 2016). His new production of Mike Bartlett's *Albion* opens in October. 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 a television adaptation of his production of Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III* for BBC Two. Rupert was awarded a CBE for services to drama in the 2017 New Year's Honours.

Figures of Speech has been made possible by the generous support of the **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation** and a number of individual supporters.