

ALMEIDA THEATRE

Press release: Friday 30 October 2020

Almeida Theatre Artistic Director Rupert Goold announces a socially distanced season of three world premieres for Christmas 2020 and into 2021:

• **Running over Christmas 2020:**

- *Nine Lessons and Carols: stories for a long winter* – a new production devised by **Chris Bush**, **Rebecca Frecknall** and a company of six actors and musicians.

• **Opening in early 2021:**

- *Hymn*, a new play by **Lolita Chakrabarti**, featuring acclaimed actors **Adrian Lester** and **Danny Sapani**, directed by **Blanche McIntyre**.

- *The Maladies*, a new play by **Carmen Nasr**, performed by the **Almeida Young Company**, directed by **Diyan Zora**.

• **Also announced today:**

- **Digital screenings** of productions.

- The second year of the **Genesis Almeida New Playwrights, Big Plays Programme**.

- Two recent Almeida productions – *Albion* and *The Duchess of Malfi* – made available digitally exclusively for schools.

Rupert Goold said, “Having gratefully received a grant from the government’s Culture Recovery Fund, we are very pleased to be offering a season of work playing through Christmas and into 2021. The theatre has been reconfigured for social distancing, with a reduced capacity of 120 – about a third of our usual size. Acknowledging the context and timing of our re-opening, we decided that it was imperative to produce new work this winter: to provide employment to staff and freelancers, to welcome our audiences, supporters and local community back into the building, and to reunite our young artist groups. Considerable work has gone into ensuring that the theatre is safe for audiences and more information on those measures can be found on our [website](#). For those audiences who can’t make it to the Almeida, we will also be offering digital screenings for people to watch at home.

“In December, we welcome playwright Chris Bush to the Almeida for the first time to work with our Associate Director Rebecca Frecknall and a company of six actors and musicians to devise a new play titled *Nine Lessons and Carols: stories for a long winter*. It will reflect on a year of separation and the power of contact.

“After Christmas, we present two world premieres: Carmen Nasr’s *The Maladies*, about a break-out of unexpected mass hysteria, directed by Diyan Zora and performed by the Almeida Young Company, and Lolita Chakrabarti’s *Hymn*, a play about masculinity and ambition, featuring two of the UK’s great stage actors Adrian Lester and Danny Sapani and directed by Blanche McIntyre who returns to the Almeida following her production of *The Writer* in 2018.

“On top of this, we are delighted to be able to offer schools exclusive access to films of two recent Almeida productions – *Albion* and *The Duchess of Malfi* – in the hope that this will help to fill the void of school theatre trips. We are also launching the second year of our Genesis Almeida New Playwrights, Big Plays Programme – a group of seven brilliant, inventive and imaginative playwrights who will be with us for the next twelve months, attending masterclasses with creatives and developing their own commission for the Almeida.

“Lastly, a huge thank you to everyone that has supported us with encouraging messages and generous donations over the last seven months. Without them, we wouldn’t be in a position to present this season today.”

World Premiere

NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS

stories for a long winter

Created by Chris Bush, Rebecca Frecknall and the company.

Wednesday 2 December 2020 – Saturday 9 January 2021

Press performances: Wednesday 9 December, 2pm and 7pm

"In the dark times

Will there also be singing?

Yes, there will also be singing.

About the dark times."

(Bertolt Brecht)

This is not a Corona play.

This is a play about connection and isolation, about lighting a candle to see us through the longest night, about what we hold on to when we cannot hold each other.

Almeida Associate Director Rebecca Frecknall (*Summer and Smoke*; *The Duchess of Malfi*), playwright Chris Bush (*Standing at the Sky's Edge*; *Pericles*) and a company of six performers devise a new production reflecting on a year of separation and the power of contact.

Cast: **Naana Agyei-Ampadu** (*Caroline or Change* – West End; *Measure for Measure* – Shakespeare’s Globe); **Katie Brayben** (*Beautiful: the Carole King Musical* – West End, winner of Olivier Award for Best Actress in a Musical; *King Charles III* – Almeida); **Toheeb Jimoh** (*Anthony* – BBC One; *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – Sheffield Crucible); **Elliot Levey** (*Three Sisters* and *Mary Stuart* – Almeida); **Maimuna Memon** (*Jesus Christ Superstar* – Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre; *Ghost Quartet* – Boulevard Theatre) and **Luke Thallon** (*Albion* – Almeida; *Leopoldstadt* – West End).

Chris Bush is an award-winning playwright, lyricist and theatre-maker. Her recent plays include *Standing at the Sky’s Edge*; *Faustus: That Damned Woman*; *The Last Noël*; *The Assassination of Katie Hopkins*; *Pericles* and *Steel*. Her other plays include *The Changing Room*; *Scenes From The End Of The World*; *A Declaration From The People*; *A Dream*; *The Sheffield Mysteries*; *Dickensian*; *Goodwill To All Men*; *We’re All In This Together* and *20 Tiny Plays About Sheffield*; *Larksong*; *Cards On The Table*; *Tony! The Blair Musical*; *Sleight & Hand*. She has won awards at the UK Theatre Awards two years in a row, the National Young Playwrights’ Festival, Perfect Pitch, Sunday Times Edinburgh Competition, and a Brit Writers’ Award.

Rebecca Frecknall is Associate Director at the Almeida Theatre. For the Almeida, she has directed *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Three Sisters*, *Summer and Smoke* (also West End and winner of two Olivier Awards including Best Revival) and worked as Associate Director on *Ink* at the Almeida/Duke of York’s Theatre and Movement Director on *Albion*. She was previously on the Almeida’s Resident Director programme. Away from the Almeida, her credits include *Sanctuary City* (New York Theatre Workshop) and Chris Bush’s *Steel* (Sheffield Crucible Studio). She was Resident Director at Northern Stage from 2015-2016 after winning the acclaimed RTYDS Bursary. During this time she directed *Idomeneus*; *What Are They Like?* and *Julie*. She has also worked with the National Theatre, RSC and Young Vic. She was the 2012 recipient of the National Theatre Studio’s Resident Director Bursary and was awarded one of the Young Vic’s Jerwood Assistant Director Bursaries in 2011.

World Premiere

THE MALADIES

by **Carmen Nasr**

Directed by **Diyan Zora**

Monday 18 January – Friday 22 January 2021

Press night: Tuesday 19 January

Performed by the Almeida Young Company (18-25)

I'm tired.

I'm tired of living in a world that's not mine.

1508. Strasbourg. A woman dances compulsively, soon hundreds join her.

1962. Tanzania. A schoolgirl's laughing fit spreads from village to village.

2011. USA. Cheerleaders are overcome by uncontrollable twitching.

2023. London. A group of women suddenly lose the ability to speak.

When a group of women in London mysteriously fall silent, no one can figure out why. The team at an all-female podcast decide to investigate and end up on a journey of discovery, uncovering more than they bargained for.

The Maladies is a new play by Almeida Genesis Writer Carmen Nasr (*Dubailand*), directed by Diyan Zora (*Chronicles of a City We Never Knew/Gather Ye Rosebuds*) and has been devised with the Almeida Young Company (18-25).

Carmen Nasr is a British-Lebanese playwright. In 2017 she was awarded the Channel 4 Playwright's Scheme alongside a year-long residency at the Finborough Theatre, where she remains a playwright in residence. Her first play *The House of my Father* was long listed for the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting in 2015. Her other plays include *Dubailand*, which was produced at the Finborough Theatre in 2017. *Let Kilburn Shake* was produced in 2019 at the Kiln Theatre, written for their Young Company. Her latest play *The Climbers* will premiere at Theatre by the Lake, directed by Guy Jones. She has been a member of the Orange Tree Theatre's talent development programme, the Writers Collective, and the Royal Court's Playwriting group.

Diyan Zora is a theatre director and writer. Her directing work includes *Chronicles of a City We Never Knew* (Gate Theatre); *Ms Y* (Young Vic 5 plays); *Gather Ye Rosebuds* (Theatre503 and tour); *Waiting for Summer* (Old Red Lion and tour) and *Twelfth Night* (Cockpit). As an Assistant/Associate Director, her work includes *Faith, Hope and Charity* and *Evening at the Talkhouse* (National Theatre); *LOVE* (National Theatre and Théâtre de L'Odéon, Paris); *The Ferryman* (Gielgud); *Wolf From the Door* and *Fireworks* (Royal Court). She is an Iraqi-born, London-based theatre director and writer. She is an associate artist of Manara Theatre Company. Her play *Gather Ye Rosebuds* won best new play at the Brighton Fringe Festival.

The Almeida is grateful to the individuals, companies, trusts and foundations that support the Almeida Young Company and wider Participation programme.

World Premiere

HYMN

by **Lolita Chakrabarti**

Directed by **Blanche McIntyre**

Friday 29 January – Saturday 27 February 2021

Press night: Thursday 4 February 7pm

“Man, sometimes it takes a long time to sound like yourself”

Miles Davis

Two men meet at a funeral.

Gil knew the deceased. Benny did not.

Before long their families are close.

Soon they'll be singing the same tune.

Benny is a loner anchored by his wife and children. Gil longs to fulfil his potential. They form a deep bond but as cracks appear in their fragile lives they start to realise that true courage comes in different forms.

Featuring music from Gil and Benny's lives, Lolita Chakrabarti's searching, soulful new play asks what it takes to be a good father, brother or son.

Directed by **Blanche McIntyre** (*The Writer*), *Hymn* features **Adrian Lester** (*Red Velvet*, *Hustle*) and **Danny Sapani** (*Killing Eve*; *Les Blancs*)

Lolita Chakrabarti is a playwright and actor. Her plays include *Life of Pi* (WhatsOnStage Award for Best New Play 2019, UK Theatre Award for Best New Play 2019); *Invisible Cities*; *Red Velvet* (Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright, Critics' Circle Award for Most Promising Playwright); *Message in a Bottle* for ZooNation/Sadlers Wells for which she was dramaturg; *The Greatest Wealth* – a series of monologues curated by Chakrabarti, including her own monologue titled *Speedy Gonzalez*; and *Last Seen* (an Almeida Theatre production with Slung Low). As an actor, her theatre credits include *Fanny and Alexander* (The Old Vic); *Hamlet* (Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company); *Last Seen* (Almeida Theatre); *Free Outgoing* (Royal Court) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (Donmar Warehouse). For screen, her credits include *Criminal*; *Riviera*; *Born to Kill*; *Beowulf: Return to the Shieldlands* and *The Casual Vacancy*. She can be seen on television next year in *Wheel of Time* and *Vigil*, and on stage in *Calmer*, her new play at Birmingham Rep.

Blanche McIntyre returns to the Almeida having previously directed *The Writer*. Her other credits include *Botticelli in the Fire* (Hampstead Theatre); *Tartuffe* (National Theatre); *Bartholomew Fair*, *A Winter's Tale*,

As You Like It and *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare's Globe); *The Norman Conquests* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Titus Andronicus* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (RSC); *Noises Off* (Nottingham Playhouse); *Welcome Home, Captain Fox!* (Donmar Warehouse); *The Oresteia* (HOME, Manchester); *Arcadia* (English Touring Theatre and Ambassador Theatre Group); *Accolade* (St James' Theatre); *Tonight at 8:30*, *Women in Power* and *The Nutcracker* (Nuffield Southampton Theatres); *Ciphers* (Out of Joint, Bush Theatre and Exeter Northcott); *The Birthday Party* (Royal Exchange Theatre) and *The Seagull* (Headlong Theatre, Nuffield Southampton Theatres and Derby Theatre – winter of Best Director at 2013 UK Theatre Awards); *Foxfinder* and *Accolade* (Finborough Theatre).

Adrian Lester plays Gil. His theatre work includes *Cost of Living* (Hampstead Theatre); *Othello* (National Theatre – winner of Evening Standard Award for Best Actor); *Red Velvet* (Tricycle Theatre, West End and New York – Winner of Critics' Circle Award for Best Actor); *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (West End); *Henry V*; *Sweeney Todd* (National Theatre); *Hamlet* (Theatres des Bouffes du Nord); *Company* (Donmar Warehouse – Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Musical); *As You Like It* (Cheek By Jowl) and *Six Degrees of Separation* (Royal Court). For television, his work includes *Life*; *The Rook*; *Curfew*; *Trauma*; *Riviera*; *Undercover*; *London Spy* and *Hustle*. His film work includes *Mary Queen of Scots*; *Grey Lady*; *Euphoria*, *Jimi: All Is by My Side*; *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Primary Colors*. Directing work includes *Of Mary* (Winner of Best Short Film at PAFF); *Hustle* and *Riviera* on television and *The Greatest Wealth* (The Old Vic) and the forthcoming *Calmer* (Birmingham Rep). He was recently made a CBE.

Danny Sapani plays Benny. He previously appeared at the Almeida in *Big White Fog*. His other theatre credits include *Invisible Cities* (Manchester International Festival); *Les Blancs*, *Medea*, *Home*, *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*, *The Overwhelming*, *His Dark Materials*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Machine Wreckers* and *Richard II* (National Theatre); *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Young Vic); *Anderson's English* (Out of Joint); *Wig Out* and *Neverland* (Royal Court); *The Green Fields Beyond* (Donmar Warehouse) and *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare's Globe); For television, his work includes *Halo*; *Killing Eve*; *Harlots*; *Mother Father Son*; *Black Earth Rising*; *Traitors*; *Broken*; *The Crown*; *Chewing Gum*; *Bastard Executioner*; *Penny Dreadful*; *The Fear*; *The Town*; *Blackout* and *Misfits*. His recent film credits include *Black Panther* and *Trance*.

GENESIS ALMEIDA NEW PLAYWRIGHTS, BIG PLAYS PROGRAMME

The **Genesis Almeida New Playwrights, Big Plays Programme** is an annual programme that supports emerging and mid-career writers to develop new plays for larger stages giving them the space and time to experiment with form and scale. Each writer on the programme is commissioned to develop one new play and will be given dramaturgical support from the Almeida's Literary Manager and artistic team. During the year the writers will also attend twelve masterclasses led by established British and international playwrights, directors, designers and other creatives, and be given a five day R&D workshop to develop their commission.

The Genesis Almeida Writers Programme is made possible by the support of the **Genesis Foundation**.

The Genesis Almeida Writers for 2020/21 are:

Zia Ahmed

Emma Dennis-Edwards

Phoebe Eclair-Powell

Yasmin Joseph

Carmen Nasr

Molly Taylor

Temi Wilkey

The Genesis Foundation was founded by John Studzinski CBE in 2001. Over the past 20 years, the Foundation has donated a total of more than £20 million to the arts. Through its funding and partnership model, it has enabled opportunities for thousands of young artists in theatre and music, building both their experience and their resilience. The Foundation's main focus is on partnerships with leading arts organisations such as the Young Vic, National Theatre, Almeida Theatre, LAMDA and The Sixteen, and on training programmes that equip emerging artists for life as a creative professional. In 2020, it launched the Covid-19 Artists Fund, an Emergency response to help freelancers facing hardship, and the £1 million Genesis Kickstart Fund, to create future-facing projects for outstanding freelance talent in the creative sector across the UK.



FOR SCHOOLS

Released digitally exclusively for schools, are films of the Almeida productions of Mike Bartlett's *Albion*, directed by Rupert Goold and Rebecca Frecknall's production of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

Albion was filmed in front of a live audience in February 2020, and aired on BBC Four in August. It was produced for the BBC jointly by the Almeida Theatre and Illuminations for The Space in association with BBC Television.

The Duchess of Malfi was filmed in front of a live audience, during its run at Almeida from 30 November 2019 – 25 January 2020. It was filmed and produced by Robin Fisher.

The films will be made available on request. Please contact: participate@almeida.co.uk for more information.

ENDS

For all press enquiries contact Alexander Milward, Press and Media Relations Manager
amilward@almeida.co.uk

For images click [here](#).

A number of measures have been put in place to keep audiences safe. You can find more information [here](#).

BOOKING DATES FOR *NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS*

Bronze, Silver and Gold Friends – Friday 6 November 12pm

Almeida Friends – Tuesday 10 November 10am

General sale – Thursday 12 November 10am

Tickets for *The Maladies* and *Hymn* will go on sale later this year.

ALMEIDA LISTINGS INFORMATION

Address Almeida Theatre, Almeida Street, London, N1 1TA

Box Office **Online** almeida.co.uk

Phone 020 7359 4404

Nearest Tube: Angel / Highbury & Islington

Performance times

Nine Lessons and Carols and Hymn

Evening performances at 7.30pm

Wednesday and Saturday Matinees at 2.30pm

The Maladies

Performances at 8pm

Website almeida.co.uk

Twitter @AlmeidaTheatre

Facebook facebook.com/almeidatheatre

Instagram @almeida_theatre

PRODUCTIONS **NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS**

Wednesday 2 December 2020 – Saturday 9 January 2021

Press performances: Wednesday 9 December 2pm and 7pm

THE MALADIES

Monday 18 – Friday 22 January 2021

Press night: Tuesday 19 January

HYMN

Friday 29 January – Saturday 27 February 2021

Press night: Thursday 4 February 7pm

Access ***Nine Lessons and Carols*** Audio Described performance:

Saturday 2 January 2:30pm

Nine Lessons and Carols Captioned performance:

Monday 4 January 7:30pm

(Further access performances to be announced)

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Almeida:

Since 2013, the Almeida has been led by Artistic Director Rupert Goold. During his tenure, notable productions have included *American Psycho: a new musical thriller* (transferred to Broadway); *Ghosts* (transferred to the West End and won three Olivier Awards); *Chimerica* (transferred to the West End and won five Olivier Awards); *1984* (transferred to West End, Broadway and Australia); *King Charles III* (transferred to the West End, won the Olivier Award for Best New Play, transferred to Broadway, toured the UK and Sydney, and was adapted for BBC television) and *Oresteia* (transferred to the West End and won the Olivier Award for Best Director). Recently, there have been West End transfers for *Ink* directed by Goold (also Broadway), Associate Director Rebecca Frecknall's production of *Summer & Smoke* (winner of Best Play Revival and Best Actress at the 2019 Olivier Awards) and Robert Icke's productions of *Hamlet* (also screened on the BBC) and *Mary Stuart* and his production of *The Doctor* transfers to the Duke of York's Theatre in 2021. The Almeida was named London Theatre of the Year at The Stage Awards in both 2015 and 2018.

The Almeida Theatre is a registered charity and is dependent on the support of individuals, companies, trusts and foundations. The Covid-19 crisis has had a profound impact on our finances, halting income from ticket sales and commercial activity for more than six months. We will need to raise more than £2m in the next 12 months to secure the future of the theatre, realise our artistic ambitions and connect with the widest possible audience.

The Almeida is grateful to its Principal Partner Aspen, in its third term as the Almeida's most significant corporate supporter. Aspen was established in 2002 and is a leading global insurance and reinsurance company. www.aspen.co

The Almeida is grateful for the support of Arts Council England and to the government for its Culture Recovery Fund grant. #HereForCulture

About the Almeida Young Company:

The Almeida Young Company is a year round ensemble which aims to create the theatre artists of the future. Each year it brings together young theatre makers to create vibrant work inspired by big ideas.

There are two Young Company groups: 14–18 years and 18–25 years. The groups meet weekly to explore acting, writing and devising techniques, as well as working with a wide variety of outside practitioners to explore bold ways of telling stories and create urgent and exciting theatre.

The Almeida is grateful to the individuals, companies, trusts and foundations who support the Almeida Young Company and wider Participation programme.