

PRESS RELEASE

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Menagerie Theatre Company in association with Neil McPherson for Finborough Theatre presents:

Bliss

A story about love in the aftermath of conflict based on the short story by 20th century Russian dissident Andrey Platonov

Written by Fraser Grace | Directed by Paul Bourne
Adapted from Andrey Platonov's *The River Potudan*

17 May – 11 June, Finborough Theatre

PRESS NIGHT: Thursday 19th and Friday 20th May, 7.30pm

"Short, tense and devastating." *The Observer* (on Fraser Grace's *Breakfast With Mugabe*)
@BlissThePlay1 | #BlissThePlay | www.menagerietheatre.co.uk

Written by Fraser Grace (*Breakfast with Mugabe*, RSC) and based on a short story by censored writer Andrey Platonov, *Bliss* tells the tragic yet heart-warming tale of a young couple trying to build a life against the odds in the aftermath of civil war. Andrey Platonov (1899–1951) was heavily censored in his lifetime for writing works that focused on hardship and the truth of human experience rather than Stalin's propaganda. *Bliss* shows the ruins of 1920s Russia, where 'victorious' soldier Nikita returns home battered and worn to his drunken father and to Lyuba, a girl he remembers from before the war. Against a backdrop full of unexploded ordnance and the ghosts of the lost, Nikita and Lyuba must pick their way to some kind of future.

Bliss is based on Soviet existentialist writer Andrey Platonov's *The River Potudan*. Platonov wrote politically controversial works that were mostly censored in the Soviet Union until the 1980s. He insisted on focusing on the terrible price people paid every day for their leaders' grandiose visions. Stalin is reputed to have written "scum" in the margin of one of his stories titled *For Future Use*, and to have said to Alexander Fadeyev, who would later become Secretary of the Writers' Union, "Give him a good belting—for future use!" Platonov's work has just recently been rediscovered by Russia and the west, and an annual festival is now held in his hometown, where *Bliss* premiered in 2019. *Bliss* was due to have its UK premiere in February, and has been rescheduled due to Covid.

Fraser Grace is an award-winning writer and dramatist. His first play *Perpetua* was joint winner of the Verity Bargate award, and his best known work, *Breakfast with Mugabe*, was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan Theatre, Stratford. It won the John Whiting best play award when it transferred to the West End and a Silver Sony Award when broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and the World Service. Other plays include *Always Orange* (The Other Place, Stratford-Upon-Avon), *Kalashnikov: In the Woods by the Lake* (National Tour) and *Tongues* (Menagerie National Tour).

Fraser Grace said, "I stumbled across Platonov's story *The River Potudan* about ten years ago – and it dug its claws in. I was gripped by the starkness of the world, the austerity of the writing – and the desperate/funny pragmatism that helps Nikita and Lyuba set about building a life in the awful aftermath of war. The resulting play, *Bliss*, reminds us that survivors of war carry barely comprehensible damage inside themselves. It's a theme that is always relevant, and painfully so now."

Menagerie is an award-winning new writing theatre company based at Cambridge Junction. Over the past 20 years, 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, Dublin, Istanbul, St Petersburg, New York, Prague, Frankfurt, Belgrade and Goa, India. In March 2022, a special reading of their 2014

MOBIUS.

The Lower Vestry
St George's Bloomsbury
6-7 Little Russell St
London WC1A 2HR

play *The Summer Before Everything*, which was taken verbatim from experiences of Ukrainians living with war, raised £1,600 for WithUkraine.org.

Running Time: 2 hours 30 minutes (including interval) | Suitable for ages 14+

Company information

Adapted from *The River Potudan* by Andrey Platonov

Directed by Paul Bourne

Written by Fraser Grace

Set design by Paul Bourne

Sound design by Michaela Polakova

Cast

Nikita Jesse Rutherford

Lyuba Bess Roche

Dad / Vlass Patrick Morris

Zhenya / Paulina Caroline Rippin

Tramp / Investigator Jeremy Killick

Listings information

17 May – 11 June

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Rd, London, SW10 9ED

Monday – Saturday 7.30pm, Saturday and Sunday matinees 3pm

£25 - £20 (£10 for U30s 17 – 21 May | www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk | 020 7244 7439

Supported by Arts Council England, the Golsoncott Foundation, the Leche Trust and the Maria Björnson Memorial Fund