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HOME
2 TONY WILSON PLACE
FIRST STREET
MANCHESTER M15 4FN

+44(0) 161 200 1500
INFO@HOMEMCR.ORG

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1681278

Registered office 2 Tony Wilson Place
Manchester M15 4FN. Charity No:
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**HOME announces ground-breaking production of
Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1936), for Spring 2023 –
presented by Watford Palace Theatre, starring Tracy-Ann Oberman**



***The Merchant of Venice* (1936)**

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Brigid Larmour

Presented by Watford Palace Theatre in association with HOME

Showing at HOME from: Wed 15 Mar – Sat 25 Mar, 2023

Press Night Thu 16 Mar 19:30

We are very excited to welcome Tracy Ann Oberman to our stage as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (1936). Directed by Brigid Larmour, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Watford Palace Theatre, this reinvention of a Shakespeare classic spotlights the rise of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, and how the East End community came together to stop them in the Battle of Cable Street on 4 October 1936.

This ground-breaking production reimagines Shylock as an East End matriarch, a widowed refugee from Russian pogroms. She is an immigrant, running a small business from a cramped house in Cable Street, working to give her daughter Jessica a better life. When aristocratic anti-semitic Antonio desperately needs a loan, he makes a dangerous bargain with this woman he has spat on in the street. Will Shylock, bitter from a life plagued by racism and abuse, take her revenge? This new production is a vivid evocation of our history, and a warning for our times.

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Tracy-Ann Oberman said, "I've always wanted to reclaim *The Merchant of Venice* in some way and wanted to see how it would change with a single mother as Shylock. My own great-grandma and great aunts were single mothers, widows, left in the East End to run the businesses and the homes, which they did with an iron fist. When I spoke about it to Brigid, she instantly got it, and said it gave a brilliant way into the problematic aspects of characters like Antonio and Portia. She saw them as aristocratic young Mosleyites, supporters of the British Union of Fascists led by Oswald Mosley. That led us to Cable Street, with pawn shops and moneylending under the counter of shmatter stalls and seamstress jobs, in the weeks leading up to Mosley's Fascist march against 'The Jew' in 1936. This adaptation will appeal to all immigrant families with strong matriarchs. Everything starts and ends at home and strong mothers have always understood this."

Dave Moutrey, CEO and Artistic Director of HOME, had this to say: "We are delighted to be presenting this production in association with Watford Palace Theatre. This is a new partnership for us and a valuable opportunity to work on this innovative and new production bringing new insights to this work. We look forward to sharing this important and powerful retelling of *The Merchant of Venice*."

Listings Information

Wed 15 Mar, 19:30
Thu 16 Mar, 14:00, 19:30
Fri 17 Mar, 19:30
Sat 18 Mar, 14:00, 19:30
Mon 20 Mar, 19:30
Tue 21 Mar, 19:30
Wed 22 Mar, 14:00, 19:30
Thu 23 Mar, 19:30 (CAP)
Fri 24 Mar, 19:30 (AD, BSL)
Sat 25 Mar, 14:00, 19:30

[Ticket and further information can be found here.](#)

HOME tickets on general sale Tue 1 Nov, midday.
Manchester Press Night Thu 16 Mar 19:30

The show will open at Watford Palace Theatre Day 28 Feb running until Day 11 Mar.
National Press Night Thu 2 Mar.

END

Notes to Editors:

For interviews and additional information, please contact Julia White, Head of Communications at HOME, on 0161 212 3463 or email julia.white@homemcr.org

HOME is Manchester's centre for international contemporary culture. Since opening in May 2015, HOME has welcomed over three million visitors to its two theatres, five cinemas, art gallery, book shop and restaurants. HOME works with international and UK artists to produce extraordinary theatrical experiences, producing an exciting mix of thought-provoking drama, dance, and festivals, with a strong focus on international work, new commissions and talent development. HOME's ambition is to push the boundaries of form and technology, to experiment, have fun, take risks and share great new art with the widest possible audience. The patrons of HOME are Danny Boyle, actress Suranne Jones, playwright and poet Jackie Kay CBE, artists Rosa Barba and Phil Collins, filmmaker Asif Kapadia, and actress and author Meera Syal CBE. www.homemcr.org | @HOME_mcr | Facebook HOME_mcr

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Watford Palace Theatre inspires and entertains through inventive, ambitious, and inclusive drama, new plays, musicals, dance, and family shows; Imagine Watford, a free annual festival celebrating a range of outdoor performance art; diverse stand-up; and a much-loved traditional pantomime. It reflects its diverse communities, and fully represents women, both onstage and behind the scenes, whilst celebrating and developing creativity and skill in the community and with young people, exhibited with Buffering, the first onstage performance by the Palace Young Company at Stage in the Park, and the Hertfordshire Film Festival produced in partnership with Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, the University of Hertfordshire, and CathARTic Art. The theatre's locally produced shows and home-grown talent have toured nationally and internationally, been seen on BBC iPlayer, won awards, and transferred to the West End. Central to WPT's vision is Resident Partner Rifco Theatre Company. Recent WPT productions include Jan Ravens in Talking Heads; an all-female Gaslight; the UK's first African-American Glass Menagerie; and Ayckbourn's Absurd Person Singular. World premieres include musicals Mushy and Miss Meena & the Masala Queens (with Rifco), and I Capture the Castle, and plays good dog by Arinze Kene (with tiata fahodzi), Poppy+George by Diane Samuels, Coming Up by Neil d'Souza, Jefferson's Garden by Timberlake Wertenbaker, and Jumpers for Goalposts by Tom Wells.

Tracy-Ann Oberman is an English television, theatre and radio actress and writer. Recent TV credits include BBC One anti-fascist thriller Ridley Road, Russell T Davies' award-winning Channel 4 series, It's A Sin, universally popular Doctor Who, hysterical Toast of London, Ricky Gervais' Netflix hit After Life, the critically acclaimed Friday Night Dinner, and Sky One's brilliant Code 404 opposite Stephen Graham and Daniel Mays and opposite Sanjeev Bhaskar and David Walliams in Sandylands. Memorable for her award nominated performance of Chrissie Watts in Eastenders and as Yvonne Hartman in Dr Who, Tracy Ann is no stranger to our screens and is a hugely popular British actress. Having trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama, Oberman spent four years with the Royal Shakespeare Company, before joining the National Theatre. Her extensive theatrical background includes appearing with Kenneth Branagh in David Mamet's Edmond, a run in the West End revival of Boeing-Boeing and the National Theatre's production of Earthquakes in London. Prior to this, she was seen performing to sell out audiences in the West End opposite Amanda Holden in Stepping Out and as the female lead in Fiddler On The Roof at the Chichester Festival Theatre. Oberman later returned to Chichester Festival Theatre to play in Noel Coward's Present Laughter. She has also been seen at the Menier Chocolate Factory in Hugh Whitmore's Pack of Lies, at the Harold Pinter Theatre in Party Time and Celebration as part of the sell-out Jamie Lloyd Pinter at the Pinter season of one-act plays on the tenth anniversary of the Nobel Prize winner's death, and as the lead in new play Mother of Him at The Park Theatre. For this role she was nominated for Best Actress at The Offies. Most recently she played Camilla Parker Bowles opposite Harry Enfield's Prince Charles at The Prince of Wales Theatre in The Winsors: the Endgame. She will soon be seen playing Shylock in the highly-anticipated Watford Palace Theatre adaptation of Merchant of Venice, a radical new production set in the East End at the time of the Battle of Cable Street. Oberman has performed in more than 600 radio plays. Tracy is also a column contributor for The Guardian and was a regular contributor to the Jewish Chronicle and Red Magazine. As a playwright she has written a number of well received Radio 4 plays, including Bette and Joan, Baby Jane and most recently That Dinner of 67 starring Kenneth Branagh which was nominated for best Single Drama at BBC Audi Awards. Oberman co-created Jews. In Their Own Words. for the Royal Court Theatre with Vicky Featherstone and Johnathan Freedland.

Brigid Larmour, a widely experienced director, producer and dramaturg, is Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Watford Palace Theatre. A text-based director, she has directed numerous Shakespeares, including a recent all-female Much Ado About Nothing at Watford Palace. She is currently directing the premiere of a new adaptation by Anne-Marie Casey of Louisa May Alcott's LITTLE WOMEN, a coproduction which opens at Pitlochry Festival Theatre in July and at Watford Palace Theatre in October. Other WPT credits include new plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker (Jefferson's Garden), Gary Owen (Perfect Match, Mrs Reynolds and the Ruffian, We That Are Left),

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Neil D'Souza (Coming Up), Charlotte Keatley (Our Father), Marks and Gran (Love Me Do, Von Ribbentrop's Watch) and Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti (Fourteen), as well as plays by Ronald Harwood and Alan Ayckbourn, and four pantomimes. She has a track record of supporting diverse voices, and casting women in traditionally male roles in Shakespeare. She championed and directed Charlotte Keatley's game-changing play My Mother Said I Never Should at Contact Theatre, Manchester in the 80s. From 1998- 2006 she was Artistic Director of West End company Act Productions, and adviser to BBC4 Plays.

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