PRESS RELEASE   May 2014

Pippa Frith in association with the Royal Exchange Theatre present   **THEATRE**

HOAX My Lonely Heart

A cross-media project combining a dark, raw new musical with a graphic novel, *HOAX Psychosis Blues*, based on the true story of a fatal relationship with schizophrenia

Directed by Benji Reid | Written by Ravi Thornton

With music by Minute Taker

Royal Exchange Theatre (Studio), Manchester, 4th to 7th June 2014

PRESS NIGHT: 7.30pm, Thursday 5th June 2014

With staging characterized by Benji Reid's distinctive, highly energised and emotionally conflicting style of physical theatre, this innovative cross-media project is based on a poem written by Ravi Thornton's younger brother Roabbi, or Rob, who committed suicide in 2008 at the age of 31, after a long battle with schizophrenia. Rob wrote hundreds of poems expressing his varying state of mind, by turns honest, lucid and confused and the body of work constitutes an honest and compelling first person account of the experience of schizophrenia. The project has two main strands, a musical stage performance and a graphic novel, *HOAX Psychosis Blues*. A third strand is an academic research project into Medical Humanities.

With a score by multi-instrumentalist, singer songwriter and music producer Minute Taker, whose style of work has been described as "folk-tronica", with albums *Too Busy Framing* (2009) and *Last Things* (2014), the musical explores the poem *HOAX* itself, or rather those aspects of Rob's life that led him to write it. A poem about love's bite, bitternesses, and haunting regrets, the stage version is an intimate piece that delves deep into the emotions of that time, drawing from fact, and fragments of remembered conversations. The work is set over a six-month period, before Rob's diagnosis as a schizophrenic and leading to his first major psychotic episode.

The graphic novel picks up several months later, after Rob's diagnosis, with contributions from ten of the best comics and graphic artists in the world today, such as Brian Talbot (*The Adventures of Luther Arkwright*), Rian Huges (*2000AD*), Julian Hanshaw (*Observer* award winning *The Art of Pho*), Hannah Berry (*Britten and Brülightly*) and many more. Extracts from the graphic novel, as well as free downloads from the musical, are available at www.ravithornton.com/hoax.

Writer Ravi Thornton said "whilst chronologically one follows the other, I don't really think of the graphic novel as a sequel to the musical. My brother's manifestations of his illness were so immediate and yet at the same time so distant that I felt compelled to explore both of these extremes. Thus the musical is intense, whilst the graphic novel is much more reflective. Ultimately, both pieces are very honest – yet I've been careful not to lay everything bare. Some things I simply need to keep to myself, or rather to keep *for* myself. Whatever impression these works may leave on the world of Rob, I hope they do him justice. He was a flawed and troubled man with a painfully beautiful mind. But more than this, he was my brother."

Ravi Thornton lives in Manchester with her partner and daughter. A cross-media script writer, she is keenly interested in narrative environment as storytelling device, and an active advocate of collaboration. Her first graphic novel, *The Tale of Brin & Bent and Minno Marylebone,* illustrated by Andy Hixon and musically scored by Othon Mataragas, was published by Jonathan Cape in 2012. Her numerous awards

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include being Shortlisted for the *Observer* Graphic Short Story Prize, Winner of Best Debut Book, Broken Frontier Awards, Nominated for Bram Stoker Award and Winner of the Barry Reckord Bursary Award.

Director Benji Reid is an award winning visual theatre director with a background in contemporary dance and breakdancing, with a career that began working as the main dancer for Soul II Soul. He formally trained as a dancer with the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. In theatre Benji has worked widely with companies and artists like David Glass Ensemble, Trestle Theatre, Theatr Clwyd and Black Mime Theatre and Jonzi D. In 2000 Benji curated *The Illness*, a night of hip-hop dance theatre in Sadler's Wells, London. Benji hosted and performed *The Holiday* supported by Jim Parris and DJ Bizness. In 2005 Benji received the NESTA Dreamtime Fellowship, awarded to prestigious artists for their outstanding achievements and continuing development and was also nominated for the Art05 award for his work in the North West of England.

www.ravithornton.com | @ravithornton | www.facebook.com/writer.ravithornton

www.benjireid.com | @benjireid

Running Time: TBC **| Suitable for** ages 14+

Company Information
Cast: Tachia Newall (Rob), Olivia Sweeney (Helen), Stephen Myott-Meadows ("The Condition")
Written by Ravi Thornton   **Directed by** Benji Reid
Composed by Ben McGarvey (Minute Taker)   **Set Design** Jim Bond
Audio Visual Design Sumit Sarkar   **Researched by** Dr Matthew J. A. Green
Produced by Pippa Frith in association with the Royal Exchange Theatre
Supported by Arts Council England, The University of Nottingham and Ziggy's Wish

HOAX Psychosis Blues (graphic novel)
Illustators: Bryan Talbot, Rian Hughes, Julian Hanshaw, Karrie Fransman,
Mark Stafford, Hannah Berry, Rhiana Jade, Ian Jones, Leonardo M. Giron, Rozi Hathaway
Designed by Wayne Marsden   **Published by** Ziggy's Wish

Listings Information
4th to 6th June at 7.30pm, 7th June at 8pm
Royal Exchange Theatre (studio)
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