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FULL CAST ANNOUNCED FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF DOUGLAS MAXWELL'S *THE WHIP HAND*

REHEARSALS BEGIN AT BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE TODAY

The full cast begin rehearsals today for the world premiere of *The Whip Hand*, a new play from celebrated Scottish playwright Douglas Maxwell – a Traverse Theatre Company and Birmingham Repertory Theatre co-production in association with National Theatre of Scotland, directed by Birmingham Repertory Associate Director Tessa Walker. Maxwell returns to the Traverse for the first time since his Festival 2013 production, *A Respectable Widow Takes to Vulgarly*, which went on to enjoy a successful run in New York.

A blistering and timely family drama set in Glasgow, the cast of five includes Scottish actor **Jonathan Watson** as Dougie, whose birthday party sets the scene. Best known for long-running television sketch show *Only an Excuse?*, and following recent appearances in the BBC's *Two Doors Down*, Watson returns to the Traverse Festival after last performing as Quizmaster in Rob Drummond's award-winning *Quiz Show*. **Louise Ludgate** plays Dougie's ex-wife, Arlene, and has previously starred in a trio of productions at the Traverse – *Sex and Drugs*, *Greta* and *Iron* – as well as various parts in Traverse projects *Class Act* and *First Bite*.

Completing the cast is **Joanne Thomson** as Dougie and Arlene's daughter, Molly; alongside **Richard Conlon** as Arlene's boyfriend, Lorenzo; and **Michael Abubakar** as Dougie's nephew, Aaron – all making their main stage Traverse debut.

The talented cast of five will deliver an explosive script exploring important themes of power, privilege, blood ties and our inescapable past. As Dougie's party gets underway, it emerges that it is he who has a surprise for them – a bombshell proposal which could compromise his daughter's future. With rising tension and a sense of the thriller – or, in Maxwell's own words, like "...a rolling stone down a hill – unstoppable – and going to cause mayhem" – *The Whip Hand* is a domestic drama in which no one escapes the fallout.

The Whip Hand will run Thursday 3-Sunday 27 August during Traverse Festival 2017, followed by Birmingham Repertory Theatre from Tuesday 5-Saturday 16 September.

Douglas Maxwell, Writer, says:

*"The Traverse during the Fringe is a place of magical quality – I've seen the bulk of the programme every year for twenty years. I even met my wife in that bar. And I've been lucky enough to have had many shows at Traverse since my first in 2001. Twenty of my unsolicited plays went through their system in the 90s and for five years it was my only open door. I've been their Associate Playwright; I've taught there, lectured there, read there and written there; they've taken me to Russia and to Montreal; sometimes I just hang around... It feels like my home turf. But a Trav 1 show during the Fringe is a first for me. The cast is wonderful. And the production brings together three companies that have played a big part in my life: The Traverse, Birmingham Rep and The National Theatre of Scotland. So it's more than a thrill to have *The Whip Hand* on this year – it's a rite of passage."*

Tessa Walker, Associate Director, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, says:

*"I have long been a fan of Douglas's writing, right from *Decky Does a Bronco*, so I'm beyond delighted to be working with him now on *The Whip Hand*. This is a brilliant play. I love that*

it starts in a place so far from where it ends up, that it manages simultaneously to be about the fractures in a family and about the state of a country, and that it's as funny and as heartfelt as it is moving and unsettling. To be working with three such wonderful theatre companies – all theatres that have such a rooted and unswerving commitment to new voices and new stories – to bring this play to life is a privilege, and that it sits within such an powerful and dynamic festival season at the Traverse is incredibly exciting."



Jonathan Watson

Louise Ludgate

Joanne Thomson

Richard Conlon

Michael Abubakar

LISTINGS:

Traverse Theatre

3-27 August (not 4, 7, 14 or 21), various times. Previews 3 & 5 August. Press day 6 August.

On sale: Traverse Box Office 0131 228 1404 / traverse.co.uk

Birmingham Repertory Theatre

5-16 September, various times

On sale: Birmingham Repertory Box Office 0121 236 4455 / birmingham-rep.co.uk

WRITER BIOGRAPHY, Douglas Maxwell

Douglas Maxwell has been one of Scotland's top playwrights since his debut in 2000. His recent work includes *Yer Granny* (a version of Roberto Cossa's *La Nona*) for the National Theatre of Scotland, *Fever Dream: Southside* for Citizens Theatre, Glasgow and *Charlie Sonata* for the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh.

His many other plays include *Decky Does a Bronco*, *Mancub*, *Promises Promises* (staged in New York as *The Promise*) and *A Respectable Widow Takes to Vulgarity*.

His plays have been performed in translation in Germany, Norway, Hong Kong, New York, Chicago, Holland, Canada, Sweden, New Zealand, Wales, Japan, France, Belgium and South Korea, where his debut play *Our Bad Magnet* has run for over ten years.

His plays are published by Oberon books. His first collection of work focuses on his writing for younger audiences. As well as *Decky Does a Bronco* and *Mancub*, the volume also contains *Too Fast*, *The Mother Ship* and *Helmet*.

Douglas lives on the Southside of Glasgow with his wife and two daughters.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY, Tessa Walker

Tessa is an Associate Director at Birmingham Repertory Theatre where she has directed *A Christmas Carol* adapt. by Bryony Lavery, *The Mother* adapt. by Mark Ravenhill, *Circles* by Rachel De-Lahay, *Back Down* by Steven Camden, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* adapt by Adrian Mitchell, *Folk* by Tom Wells, *The Quiet House* by Gareth Farr and *Looking for John* by Tony Timberlake, which also plays at the Edinburgh Fringe from 3-27 August at The Assembly.

Other directing includes: *The Gatekeeper* by Chloe Moss (The Royal Exchange, Manchester), *The Glee Club* by Richard Cameron (Hull Truck), *The Company Will Overlook a Moment of*

Madness, adapted by Morna Pearson (The National Theatre of Scotland), *Dream Pill* by Rebecca Prichard and *Dancing Bears* by Sam Holcroft (Soho Theatre), *The Red Helicopter* by Robin French (The Almeida), *She From the Sea* by Zawe Ashton (LIFT), *Harm's Way* by Zawe Ashton (The Lowry, Manchester), *Black Crows* by Linda Brogan (Arcola Theatre), *Orange* by Alan Harris (Script Cymru), *Debris* by Dennis Kelly (Theatre 503, BAC Critics' Choice Season, The Traverse Edinburgh and Staatstheater Biennale, Germany)

She has also been the Literary Director at Paines Plough and a Literary Associate at the National Theatre of Scotland.

Notes:

1. **The Traverse Theatre** was formed in 1963 by a group of passionate theatre enthusiasts, founded to extend the spirit of the Edinburgh festivals throughout the year. Today, under Artistic Director Orla O'Loughlin, the Traverse nurtures emerging talent, produces award-winning new plays and offers a curated programme of the best work from the UK and beyond, spanning theatre, dance, performance, music and spoken word. The Traverse has launched the careers of some of the UK's most celebrated writers – David Greig, David Harrower and Zinnie Harris – and continues to discover and support new voices, including Stef Smith, Morna Pearson, Gary McNair and Rob Drummond. With two custom-built and versatile theatre spaces, the Traverse's home in Edinburgh's city centre is a powerhouse of vibrant new work for, and of, our time. Every August, it holds an iconic status as the theatrical heart of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Outside the theatre walls, it runs an extensive engagement programme, offering audiences of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to explore, create and develop. Further afield, the Traverse frequently tours internationally and engages in exchanges and partnerships – most recently in Quebec, Turkey and South Korea.
2. **Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company** is one of Britain's leading producing theatre companies. Its mission is to inspire a lifelong love of theatre in the diverse communities of Birmingham and beyond. As well as presenting over 60 productions on its three stages every year, the theatre tours its productions nationally and internationally, showcasing theatre made in Birmingham. The commissioning and production of new work lies at the core of The REP's programme and over the last 15 years, the company has produced more than 130 new plays. The theatre's outreach programme engages with over 7000 young people and adults through its learning and participation programme, equating to 30,000 individual educational sessions. The REP is also committed to nurturing new talent through its youth theatre groups and training for up and coming writers, directors and artists through its REP Foundry initiative. The REP's Furnace programme unites established theatre practitioners with Birmingham's communities to make high quality, unique theatre.
3. **The National Theatre of Scotland** is dedicated to playing the great stages, arts centres, village halls, schools and site-specific locations of Scotland, the UK and internationally. As well as creating ground-breaking productions and working with the most talented theatre-makers, the National Theatre of Scotland produces significant community engagement projects, innovates digitally and works constantly to develop new talent. Central to this is finding pioneering ways to reach current and new audiences and to encourage people's full participation in the Company's work. With no performance building of its own, the Company works with existing and new venues and companies to create and tour theatre of the highest quality. Founded in 2006, the Company, in its short life, has become a globally significant theatrical player, with an extensive repertoire of award-winning work. The National Theatre of Scotland is supported by the Scottish Government.

