

Actors bring stories of solidarity to the stage: Asylum Dialogues comes to four UK cities

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TOUCHING stories of real-life friendships between asylum seekers and British people are coming to the stage in four UK cities in June.

Asylum Dialogues, scripted by award-winning playwright Sonja Linden, is drawn from actual conversations, which reveal the moving, funny and poignant relationships between British people and refugees who have fled war and persecution.

John Catley, an accountant from Wolverhampton, whose story features in the play said: "I honestly used to say - send 'em all home. They shouldn't be here. It's an English country. They take all our money. Then this woman turned up to clean my office and turned the world upside down."

Asylum Dialogues is the brainchild of iceandfire theatre company's national outreach network Actors for Human Rights, which is touring Asylum Dialogues during National Refugee Week, supported by the national charity Refugee Action.

BAFTA-nominated actress Juliet Stevenson (Pierrepoint, Truly Madly Deeply, Bend it like Beckham) has performed with Actors for Human Rights.

She said: "We regularly hear about the terrible hostility that asylum seekers and refugees face. But we rarely hear the stories of British people who are standing shoulder to shoulder with those seeking sanctuary in the UK. Asylum Dialogues tells these inspirational stories and shows how small gestures of welcome can make a big difference."

Sandy Buchan, chief executive of Refugee Action said: "Given the way that issues around asylum are reported, you'd be forgiven for thinking that nobody in the UK would be willing to help asylum seekers and refugees through the difficulties they face. Asylum Dialogues demonstrates that if you scratch the surface, you will actually find countless examples of solidarity and humanitarianism."

The play will be staged for one night only in Liverpool, London, Derby and Bristol as part of national Refugee Week celebrations.

Actors for Human Rights has been touring its flagship production Asylum Monologues around the UK since it was launched at Amnesty International in June 2006, reaching over 9,000 people. Sinead Cusack, Dan Stevens (The Line of Beauty), Kwame Kwei-Armah, Hayley Atwell (Brideshead Revisited), Thusitha Jayasundera (The Bill) and Shobna Gulati (Coronation Street) are amongst the professional actors that support the network.

Christine Bacon, the Director of Actors for Human Rights, said: "As actors we can give faces and voices to the unseen and the unheard. We try to redress some of the misconceptions about asylum seekers and refugees with more accurate information and with personal stories that will appeal to many British audiences."

For more details about Actors for Human Rights, visit www.iceandfire.co.uk/afhr

Actors for Human Rights enquiries: Christine Bacon, T: 0791 351 3567 or 020 7377 5299 Email: actors@iceandfire.co.uk

Media enquiries: Julia Ravenscroft, press officer at Refugee Action, T: 0161 233 1956 or 07771 748 159, E: juliar@refugee-action.org.uk

What: Performance of Asylum Dialogues

Where and when:

BRISTOL June 14 @ Colston Hall, Colston Street, BS1 5AR @ 7:30 for 8pm. Followed with music by Israel-born double bass player Daphna Sadeh and her band the Voyagers. Tickets £8/6. To book:

www.colstonhall.org

LIVERPOOL June 17 @ Quakers Meeting House, 22 School Lane, L1 3BT @ 6:30 for 7pm. Tickets £5 on the door. To book: email liverpool@iceandfire.co.uk

DERBY June 20 @ Derby Dance, Chapel Street, Derby, DE1 3GU @ 6:30 for 7pm. Tickets £4/3 on the door. To book: call Derby Dance on 01332370911

LONDON June 22 - London @ Tricycle Theatre, 269 Kilburn High Road, NW6 7JR @ 6:15 for 6:30. Tickets:

£7/5. To book: www.tricycle.co.uk

Notes:

- One of Britain's most esteemed actresses, Juliet Stevenson first came to public attention with her tour de force performance in Anthony Minghella's *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1991). Stevenson has solidified her standing as one of Britain's best stage actresses, tackling roles from Yerma to Hedda Gabler and her award-winning portrayal of a victim of political torture who turns the tables on her tormentor in *Death and the Maiden* (1991). Juliet has appeared consistently on the English stage, as well as in films such as *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Emma*.
- Refugee Action's Refugee Awareness Project (RAP) is supporting Asylum Dialogues. Based in Nottingham, Bristol and Liverpool, RAP trains teams of refugee and British volunteers to visit local groups, give information on the asylum system and explain what a refugee's life is like. The project has worked with schools, community groups, statutory services and faith groups.
- Refugee Action is an independent, national charity working to enable refugees to build new lives in the UK. We provide practical advice and assistance for newly arrived asylum seekers and support their settlement through community development work. As one of the country's leading agencies in the field, Refugee Action has 25 years' experience in pioneering innovative work in partnership with refugees and advised more than 40,000 asylum seekers and refugees last year. Actors for Refugees is supported through Refugee Action's Refugee Awareness Project, which aims to increase public understanding of asylum through workshops, talks and other local events. For more information visit www.refugee-action.org.uk.
- Refugee Week is a UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK, and encourages better understanding between communities. Refugee Week 2008 takes place from 16th to 22nd June, visit www.refugeeweek.org.uk for more information.
- Christine Bacon, the Director of Actors for Human Rights, is originally from Australia where she coordinated a similar project which went on to be seen in over 500 different venues.