

**THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF
4.48 PSYCHOSIS,
THE FINAL WORK BY ACCLAIMED BRITISH PLAYWRIGHT SARAH KANE,
RECEIVES ITS BAY AREA PREMIERE AT CAL PERFORMANCES
NOVEMBER 10 – 14 AT ZELLERBACH PLAYHOUSE**

BERKELEY, September 30, 2004 – Cal Performances welcomes Britain's renowned **Royal Court Theatre** in its critically acclaimed production of **Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis***, **November 10 – 14 at Zellerbach Playhouse**. A work that has been hailed “so stunningly staged and dangerously beautiful that it almost leaves a bruise” (*Time Out*, London), *4.48 Psychosis* was Kane's fifth and final play before her suicide in 1999 at the age of 28. Confronting the terror and isolation of madness head-on, this fierce censure of institutionalized medicine's inability to treat depression is at once harrowing and poetic. Directed by Kane's frequent collaborator **James Macdonald**, and featuring actors **Jason Hughes, Marin Ireland** and **Jo McInnes**, the Berkeley engagement marks the only Northern California performances of *4.48 Psychosis* on its American premier tour.

Since its early years, the Royal Court Theatre has been recognized internationally for championing the work of modern playwrights who have forged some of the most significant innovations in theater writing, among them Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, WB Yeats, John Osborne, Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, David Hare, Ann Jellicoe, and Caryl Churchill, among many others.

SARAH KANE

Sarah Kane's brief career as a playwright is bracketed by the tumultuous response to her first play, *Blasted*, and her tragic suicide. In 1995, *Blasted* was greeted by a barrage of scathing reviews denouncing it as “abject puerility,” “devoid of intellectual and artistic merit” and questioning why the play had been accepted by the Royal Court's esteemed play review committee. On the other side of the firestorm, established dramatists like Harold Pinter, who became a good friend of Kane's, criticized the detractors, maintaining that the play was “too

innovative, too complex and too good” for them (*Guardian*, London). During the following three years, three more of Kane’s plays premiered, each one producing a new round of impassioned opinions. Notoriety might have sat well with some young playwrights, but Kane was hurt and angry, feeling that her work was neither understood nor taken seriously. While her plays feature raw emotions and physical violence, people were often shocked when they met her, not expecting to find such a gentle and kind-hearted young woman.

Sarah Kane grew up in Essex with one brother in a home dominated by God and what Kane called “the full spirit-filled, born-again lunacy.” Her family’s Christianity was one of compassion and caring, however, rather than the Old Testament, “eye-for-an-eye” doctrine. Nevertheless, as an adult she rebelled against her religious upbringing and considered herself an atheist.

Devoted to the theater from childhood, Kane entered the drama program at the University of Bristol wanting to be an actress, but soon moved into directing once she realized how little control actors had over a play. When she subsequently discovered there were few plays that she wanted to direct, she began writing. Her first substantial work, *Sick*, consisted of three monologues about rape, eating disorders and gender identification. After graduation, Kane joined British playwright David Edgar’s MA writing program at Birmingham University, but she became disillusioned with the program, feeling her ideas were being crushed. She began writing *Blasted* while still in graduate school but kept the project secret. With the London premiere, she instantly became a cause célèbre.

Throughout her life Sarah Kane suffered from depression, increasing in severity as she entered her twenties. She checked herself into a psychiatric hospital shortly after finishing her fourth play *Crave*. She tried a variety of medications to no avail. In the last few years of her life she traveled extensively throughout Europe, immersing herself in workshops for students and in her writing. She died shortly after completing *4.48 Psychosis*. Before her death, a few of her harshest critics recanted, saying she was, in fact, a talented playwright who had discovered a revolutionary new theatrical form. At her memorial service, Harold Pinter called Kane a poet, stating he had never “heard a voice like hers, that she hardly knew where it was coming from

herself. It was a very startling and tender voice, but she was appalled by the world in which she lived and the world within herself.”

4.48 PSYCHOSIS

4.48 Psychosis depicts an individual's desperate struggle with inner demons. The re-mounting of the Royal Court's 2000 production re-unites director **James Macdonald** and designer **Jeremy Herbert**. Macdonald divides Sarah Kane's free-flowing script into three voices, portrayed by two women and one man, with the principal character led through routine therapy and endless courses of medication in the hope of finding relief. The play, not without its own dark humor, draws the audience into the struggle against depression. Herbert's stark black and white stage features a mirrored ceiling tilted to reflect the audience, while video and sound create the sense that normal life is near but outside the main character's grasp. The writing consists of monologues and fragments of conversation; the voices are ambiguous--a doctor, a friend or the patient talking to herself. The title comes from Kane's belief that 4:48 a.m. is the time at which life's struggles are the clearest and, therefore, when people are most likely to commit suicide.

Kane wrote the play while in the midst of severe depression. That fact that she was able to write about what was going on in her own mind is striking: “As one character remarks, ‘Some will call this self-indulgence,’ but the sheer, blistering power and poetry is enough to stun even Kane's most determined detractors into silence” (*Time Out*, London).

ROYAL COURT THEATRE

The **Royal Court Theatre** is Britain's leading national theater company dedicated to new work by innovative writers from the UK and around the world. The theater's pivotal role in promoting new voices is undisputed. *The New York Times* recently named the Royal Court as the “most important theater in Europe.” Built in 1888, the Royal Court Theatre first began presenting radical new work in 1904 under the pioneering team of Harley Granville-Barker and John Vedrenne. Future greats such as Ibsen, Yeats, Hauptmann and Maeterlink premiered new works during their tenure, as well as George Bernard Shaw, whose plays formed the backbone of the repertoire. Granville-Barker's programming and pursuit of artistic excellence, often over

MORE

commercial expectations, coupled with his profound commitment to script left a legacy that can still be felt in the Royal Court's mission today.

Officially renamed The English Stage Company at the Royal Court in 1955 when George Devine and Tony Richardson took over the theater, the two renewed the venue's commitment to a writers' theater, a place where the dramatist reigned as the fundamental creative force. Devine sought to discover "hard-hitting, uncompromising writers whose plays are stimulating, provocative and exciting."

Beginning with the production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in May 1956, now seen as the starting point of modern British drama, Devine's policy ushered in a new generation of British playwrights. The first wave included Osborne, Arnold Wesker, John Arden, Ann Jellicoe, N. F. Simpson and Edward Bond with later seasons including plays by Bertolt Brecht, Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean-Paul, Marguerite Duras, David Hare, Caryl Churchill and Harold Pinter, among many others. Three of Sarah Kane's plays premiered at the Royal Court Theatre: *Blasted* (1995), *Cleansed* (1998) and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000).

In addition to the Royal Court Theatre's high profile productions, it facilitates international work at a grass roots level, developing exchanges which bring young writers to Britain and sending British writers, actors and directors to work with artists around the world. The Royal Court Young Writers' Programme also develops new voices with its bi-annual Festival and year around development work for writers under the age of 26.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for the **Royal Court Theatre** production of *4.48 Psychosis* **November 10-14** in **Zellerbach Playhouse** are priced at **\$65.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount. For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu.

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Wed. – Fri., November 10 – 12 at 8:00 p.m. **Zellerbach Playhouse, UC Berkeley Campus**
Saturday, November 13 at 2:00 & 8:00 p.m. Dana Court at Bancroft Way, Berkeley
Sunday, November 14 at 3:00 & 7:00 p.m.

Theater

Royal Court Theatre
Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*
James Macdonald, director
Jeremy Herbert, designer
Nigel Edwards, lighting designer
Paul Arditti, sound designer
Jason Hughes, actor
Marin Ireland, actor
Jo McInnes, actor

Program:

England's famed Royal Court Theatre brings playwright Sarah Kane's riveting drama about mental illness to Berkeley for seven performances.

Tickets: \$65.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door