

24 July 2020

Literary apothecary Poetry Health Service (PHS) opens virtual doors

Founded by poet, playwright and performer **Hafsah Aneela Bashir**, the **Poetry Health Service (PHS)**, is a brand new, free creative service that prescribes contemporary poems as a tool for connection and healing.

PHS embodies and champions the importance of art in supporting our mental and emotional health. It features poems contributed by writers from across the world including: **Hafsah Aneela Bashir** (Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellow 2019/20), **Roger Robinson** (winner of the 2019 TS Eliot Prize), **Theresa Lola**, **Anthony Anaxagorou**, **Keisha Thompson**, **Shagufta Iqbal**, **Salena Godden** and USA-based poets: **Roya Marsh**, **Buddy Wakefield** and **Aisha Sharif**.

Users will be prescribed a complimentary poem following the completion of a colour-based flowchart. They will then be invited to respond to their poetry panacea with a Haiku of their own.

PHS is an Oldham Coliseum Theatre Homemakers commission, in partnership with HOME, Manchester. It will be available to access from **Thursday 30 July** via a dedicated website and phonenumber sharing a range of exciting, inspiring, heart-warming and healing poetry.

Founder Hafsah Aneela Bashir explains her relationship with poetry and the inspiration behind PHS: *“When my 25 year marriage came to an end and I began another a chapter in a new home, with a different landscape, it was Derek Walcott’s ‘Love after Love’ that reminded me to meet myself again and to ‘feast’ on my life and who I have become. When my children wanted to venture out to a life beyond us as parents and discover new chapters of their own, it was Kahlil Gibran’s ‘On Children’ that gave me comfort and tamed the pangs of a mother’s heart letting ‘the bending in the archer’s hand be for gladness’. When I lost three very important people together in a short space of time, it was through poetry that I challenged my grief, writing a poem titled ‘To You’ from my collection The Celox And The Clot – a way to channel all the love that had nowhere to go. When I faced challenges as a woman, I read Maya Angelou’s ‘Phenomenal Woman’ and the work of Audre Lorde. I loved the powerful simplicity of Mary Oliver’s ‘Wild Geese’ when my mind would get quite full – a beautiful reminder that we’re all part of something much bigger that announces our place ‘in the family of things’.*

“The fact that poetry has an ability to make sense of what you can’t put into words sometimes, is not new. That poetry can transcend and communicate something to another human regardless of our common or uncommon background across time and space, and then in that moment create an emotional change within us, feels like nothing short of a miracle to me. Especially in a world that

can leave many of us feeling isolated, cold and disconnected at times. Just take lockdown as an example. As the government introduced strict measures to keep us in our homes, I shared poetry and short stories everyday for 75 days straight. It was poetry that connected so many of us together.”

Winner of the Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship 2019, **Hafsah Aneela Bashir** was writer-in-residence with Manchester Literature Festival, is an Associate Artist with The Poetry Exchange, an Associate Artist with Oldham Coliseum Theatre and a Supported Artist at The Royal Exchange Theatre. Her play *Cuts Of The Cloth* was commissioned for PUSH Festival 2019. Her debut poetry collection *The Celox And The Clot* is published by Burning Eye Books. She has worked creatively with Manchester International Festival, Ballet Black Ldn, HOME Manchester, Manchester Literature Festival and ANU Productions Irl. Before Covid-19 she was developing her SICK! Festival commission, *Four Dholis And A Divorce* exploring mental health set in the South Asian community. She is currently writing the libretto for *The Bridge Between Breaths*, a Tête-à-tête commission in collaboration with Gareth Churchill and FormidAbility.

Contributing poet Shamshad Khan commented: *“I am so happy to be contributing to the Poetry Health Service as I know from experience how uplifting and healing poetry can be. As a poet and resilience coach I hope to bring together my skills and personal experience to soothe and uplift anyone who needs it. I know how important and valuable accessible arts and well being projects can be and how much difference they can make to our lives. Hafsah Aneela Bashir is a wonderful advocate for the arts and I’m very pleased to be contributing to her great project.”*

clare e. potter added: *“I’m glad to share a poem with the Poetry Health Service as it shows how poetry was a healing force for me in the first few days of lockdown when I felt adrift and afraid. Poetry is a conversation and it’s so important that users will be able to respond to the poems they hear and read on this platform by adding their own words. A chain of voices that remind us we are not alone.”*

The **Poetry Health Service (PHS)** opens to the public on Thursday 30 July at www.poetryhealthservice.com

PHS is an Oldham Coliseum Theatre Homemakers commission, in partnership with HOME, Manchester. Interaction design by Coney represented by Gareth Damian Martin & Tassos Stevens.

- Ends -----

Notes to Editor:

For further press information, please contact Shelly Ramsdale via email at shellyramsdale@coliseum.org.uk (please note I am currently working from home)

Oldham Coliseum Theatre

The Coliseum is a cultural and educational charity that works with over 150,000 individuals per year.

The Coliseum has a rich history in Greater Manchester dating back to 1885. It provides a wide variety of distinctive theatre performances and participatory activities for people from all communities in Oldham, Greater Manchester and beyond. It creates original productions each year which are presented at the Coliseum and on tour. Intrinsic to the town's on-going regeneration, the theatre works with its local communities and young people to develop creative programmes to facilitate learning, engagement and community cohesion.

www.coliseum.org.uk

Twitter @OldhamColiseum

Facebook /oldhamcoliseumtheatre

Instagram @OldhamColiseum

HOME, Manchester

HOME is Manchester's centre for international contemporary culture. Since opening in May 2015, HOME has welcomed over two 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

Twitter @HOME_mcr

Facebook /HOME_mcr