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News

A Hard-Hitting Production Finds Asylum Seekers at Wolverhampton's Arena Theatre and Birmingham's MAC Theatre

A penetrating production about the plight of asylum seekers in Britain comes to the Arena Theatre in Wolverhampton and the MAC, as a theatre company comprising British and Balkan artists examines the frustrations and adversities of asylum seekers in Britain.

The University of Birmingham's Dr Gëzim Alpion will stage his production, *If Only the Dead Could Listen*, at the Arena Theatre in Wolverhampton on Tuesday, 11th March 2008 and at the MAC Theatre in Birmingham on Wednesday 12th March. The play looks at how East European asylum seekers are integrated into society.

The play is based on Dr Alpion's book *Vouchers* which deals with the topic of refugees and asylum seekers. The main plot surrounds a Kosova Albanian refugee fleeing to the UK after his Serbian girlfriend is murdered.

If Only the Dead Could Listen explores the sensitive issue of immigration without the political correctness of today's society. The audience is invited to 'eavesdrop' into the intimate sorrows of those people often seen as statistics, spongers, or a threat. The characters are naive idealists: they lay bare before the audience their hopes, frustrations and personal tragedies. They do not pity themselves; this bold new writing gives the opportunity to see what it means to be stranded in a strange land.

Dr Alpion says: 'The play deals with the issue of asylum seekers in Britain and the limbo in which they can find themselves due to

shortcomings of the system and misunderstandings on both sides of the cultural divide - as such it has topical relevance and the issues are treated sensitively and with humour.'

Albanian-born academic and playwright, Dr Alpion, is an expert in the media representation of asylum seekers at the University of Birmingham's School of Social Sciences. The production is the result of a collaborative project between academics and artists from Britain and from across Eastern Europe (Croatia, Serbia and Albania) who are all connected to universities across the UK.

Director Marcus Fernando is a University of Birmingham graduate; lead Croatian actress, Tina Hofman, lived through the conflict in former Yugoslavia and teaches drama at Birkbeck College; while former production advisor, Serbian-born Dr Duška Radosavljević, has worked as a Dramaturg at Northern Stage, Newcastle University and at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and currently holds a Teaching Fellowship in the Drama Department at the University of Bristol.

Sponsored by the Arts Council England, *If Only the Dead Could Listen* premiered successfully at the MAC Theatre in Birmingham in February 2006 and Mr Fernando says: 'We are confident we will repeat the success of the 2006 world première'.

The play will be performed as part of *Evolved* – a festival of new work by Black, Albanian and Asian artists to be showcased at the Arena Theatre, the MAC Theatre and Black Country Touring venues from 4 – 15 March 2008. The play contains strong language and is suitable only for 14-year olds and over.

Tickets are priced at £5 each with concessions at £3. They can be bought from the:

Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton: Tickets & Information: +44 (0)1902 321 321; <http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/arena>

MAC Theatre, Birmingham: Tickets & Information: +44 (0)121 440 3838; <http://www.macarts.co.uk/?page=home>

For further information also visit: www.ifonlythedeadcouldlisten.co.uk

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Notes to Editors

Dr Gëzim Alpion (Playwright), of the Department of Sociology at the University of Birmingham's School of Social Sciences, is a renowned academic, writer, playwright, reviewer, journalist, and a media, political and culture analyst. He has given talks and lectures across the world and his work has appeared in many scholarly journals and other publications. He is the author of the acclaimed *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* (Routledge: London & New York, 2007; Routledge: New Delhi, 2008). Dr Alpion's other books include: *Vouchers* (2001), *Foreigner Complex: Essays and Fiction about Egypt* (2002), and *Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa* (2008). The American edition of *If Only the Dead Could Listen* will be published by Globic Press, Chapel Hill, NC, in March 2008.

Marcus Fernando (Director) A University of Birmingham graduate, Marcus has worked as a performer and director with some of the world's leading theatre companies including the National Theatre. Most recently he directed Edward Albee's *Seascape* in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Marcus and the playwright Gëzim Alpion have been working on the current project for over two years.

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