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OLNEY THEATRE PRESENTS THEIR SECOND U.S. PREMIERE OF THE SEASON  
WITH *OIL* BY ELLA HICKSON

Provocative UK drama examines mother-daughter dynamics through 162 years charting  
the rise and fall of fossil fuel

Olney, MD — January 30, 2019 — The American Premiere of Ella Hickson's *Oil* directed by Tracy Brigden begins its Olney Theatre Center run in the Multz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab on February 27 and runs through March 31. Invited Press Night is Saturday, March 2 at 7:45pm.

"After the success of *Labour of Love* - our other British import this season - we're extremely proud to present the American premiere of Ella Hickson's bold, blistering new play *Oil*," said Olney Artistic Director, Jason Loewith. "This is a real theater-lover's play: cutting-edge in both form and content, with a jarring and explosive combination of epic scale and intimate drama. It's one of the most thrilling plays I've seen this decade."

This "scorchingly ambitious," (*The Guardian*), genre-busting American premiere follows mothers and daughters over two centuries, from the dawn of the age of oil in 1889 to its "peak oil" demise sometime in the not-too-distant future. In five separate but connected playlets, a single mother named May defies the odds to provide for her daughter Amy by any means necessary. From Cornwall to Tehran, London, Baghdad, and back, the mother-daughter power struggle evolves and shifts, even as the resources that fuel it (and the rest of the world) begin to dwindle. Bursting with theatricality and big ideas about feminism, imperialism, and environmentalism, Hickson has established herself as one of the most daring playwrights in the U.K., *Oil* was named one of the "25 Best British plays since *Jerusalem*" by *The Guardian* theatre critic Michael Billington.

Tracy Brigden, who recently stepped down after 16 years as the Artistic Director of Pittsburgh's City Theatre Company, directs the cast of 10 actors and said, "*Oil* is an extraordinary play - at once a theatrical examination of the world's sometimes destructive dependence on this finite resource and a very personal portrait of a mother/daughter relationship. In this remarkable century-and-a-half-spanning play, Ella Hickson manages to brilliantly tie the ideas of imperialism, familial relations and female empowerment into one riveting and emotionally engaging evening of theatre."

Catherine Eaton (May) and Megan Graves (Amy) both make their Olney Theatre Center debuts as the mother and daughter whose relationship grows and shifts through the different historical periods of the five playlets. The rest of the ensemble plays a variety of roles throughout the course of the play in different eras. Chris Genebach, last seen as John Proctor in *The Crucible*, plays Joss, perhaps May's one true love in Cornwall of 1889. Maboud Ebrahimzadeh back at Olney after last year's *The Invisible Hand*, plays William Whitcomb, a gas company representative in 1889 as well as Mr. Farouk, a Libyan OPEC minister flexing new-found power in the post-colonial chaos of 1970. Eric M. Messner plays Thomas, a fellow-servant with May in 1908 in colonial Tehran while Christopher McLinden plays a suave British officer during the same period. Sarah Corey plays both Ana, an Iranian house-servant in 1907, as well as Aminah, a friend of Amy's and a fellow aid-worker with a secret in the year 2021, much of her dialogue is in Farsi and Arabic. Tuyet Thi Pham plays the representative of the Nangto Corporation who brings a new era of energy to Cornwall in 2051. Claire Schoonover plays Ma Singer, May's strict mother-in-law in Cornwall of 1889. Sam Saint Ours plays Nate, Amy's 1970 boyfriend in an age of sexual liberation.

Director Tracy Bridgen served as Artistic Director at City Theatre Company in Pittsburgh for 16 years leading the company to its prominent and respected place as a major incubator and producer of new plays and musicals. Joining her artistic team for the production as set designer is Luciana Steconi (*The Invisible Hand*), who teams with projections designer Daniel Brodie, co-costume designers Michael Krass and Robert Croghan, sound designer Kenny Neal and lighting designer Colin K. Bills to create a world that spans the globe from the late 19th Century to speculative future of 2051. Carlyn Aquiline is dramaturg for the project and Richard Lundy is the stage manager.

Oil

By Ella Hickson

Directed by Tracy Bridgen

February 26 - March 31, 2019

Press Opening: Saturday, March 2, 2019 at 7:45 pm

Regular performances are Wednesday-Saturday at 7:45 pm; matinees on Saturday and Sunday at 1:45 pm; Wednesday matinee on October 3 at 1:45 pm. There is no Saturday matinee performance on March 2. There will be an Audio-described performance for the blind and visually impaired on Wednesday, March 13 at 7:45 pm. There will be a Sign-interpreted performance on Thursday, March 21 at 7:45 pm.

Tickets begin at \$54. Discounts available for groups, seniors, military and students.

## Special Events:

- BEHIND-THE-SCENES: A Conversation with Ella Hickson  
Saturday, March 2 at 5:00 PM  
\$10/Free for Olney Theatre Center Members

One of the most daring British playwrights working today joins us to discuss her groundbreaking work ahead of the American Premiere of *Oil*.

- FREE FILM: *Lady Bird* (2017)  
When: Saturday, March 9 at 8:15pm  
Where: Historic Theatre  
Free

Inspired by the mother-daughter relationship in *Oil*, which spans centuries, Olney Theatre Center is screening *Lady Bird*, one of the best recent films featuring a mother and daughter for the ages. Writer-director Greta Gerwig earned an Oscar nomination for her film about an eccentric teen who's determined to get out of Sacramento and prove she can do something with her life. Best Actress Oscar nominee Saoirse Ronan (*Brooklyn*) plays the titular *Lady Bird* with aplomb, clashing spectacularly with her formidable mother, played by the wonderful Laurie Metcalf (*Roseanne*), also nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the Oscars. *Lady Bird* is Rated R.

- Post-show discussions will occur after the following Saturday matinee performances:
  - March 9, 16, 23, and 30

## ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Olney Theatre Center is an award-winning, nonprofit, Equity theatre now in its 81st Season. Our mission is to produce and present extraordinary theatre and performance from our four-theatre campus for diverse audiences in our community, and to educate the next generation of theatremakers. In recent seasons, Olney Theatre has had ten world or regional premieres, including Andrew Hinderaker's *The Magic Play* and *Colossal* (2015 Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical), and Jennifer Hoppe-House's *Bad Dog* (2015 Steinberg Award nominee). Olney Theatre won the 2018 Helen Hayes Award for Best Production of a Musical for *In the Heights* (co-produced with Round House Theatre). Olney Theatre Center is led by Artistic Director Jason Loewith and Managing Director Debbie Ellinghaus. For more information, please visit [olneytheatre.org](http://olneytheatre.org). Follow Olney Theatre Center on Twitter and Instagram @olneytheatre and on Facebook at [facebook.com/olneytheatre](https://facebook.com/olneytheatre).

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