

## PRESS RELEASE

**10am Tuesday 8 December 2020**

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## **VITAL XPOSURE ANNOUNCE SIMON STARTIN AS NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

Ground-breaking Disabled-led theatre company **Vital Xposure** has today announced the appointment of **Simon Startin** as new Artistic Director. Startin takes over from Disability Rights activist, playwright and director **Julie McNamara** who founded the company in 2011 and leaves to join the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Startin will join Vital Xposure in March 2021 as the company celebrates its 10-year anniversary. He is an acclaimed actor, published playwright, director and activist, who last appeared on stage in *The Visit* at the National Theatre. He has also performed recently at Shakespeare's Globe, Arcola Theatre and Birmingham Rep as well as TV roles on BBC, Channel 4 and Paramount. He has been an Associate Artist of Theatre Royal Stratford East, London Bubble and Graeae; an alumni of the BAC 21st Century Leadership scheme, China Plate Enhanced Optimists course and a Graduate of the Young Vic Directors Program. He has directed at the Young Vic, RSC and Nottingham Playhouse. As an activist he has worked with many organisations to increase disabled representation on stage and screen.

Based in London, Vital Xposure gives life to extraordinary stories, allowing artists whose voices have been neglected and marginalised from the mainstream to communicate with audiences from all backgrounds, in work that is striking, provocative, inventive and inclusive. The company develops new writing, creates unique, vital work and forges relationships with, and new paths for, excluded communities. Previous productions include *Let Me Stay* (UK Tour, New Zealand, Brazil), *Pullen's Party* (Liberty Festival), *The Disappearance of Dorothy Lawrence* (UK Tour), *The Knitting Circle* (UK Tour) and award-winning documentary *Voices From The Knitting Circle*.

Julie McNamara will return to Vital Xposure for ***White Pariahs: Quiet Rebels***, a co-production with **Dervish Productions** that is co-written and co-directed by McNamara and **Hassan Mahamdallie**. This new play will bring the stories of white working-class women who married the men of the Windrush generation after WWII vividly to life. Featuring true life testimonies from the women who protected and nurtured proud mixed heritage families in a country driven by prejudice, this play will be a moving tribute to a quiet revolution that changed the face of society. *White Pariahs: Quiet Rebels* will tour in 2022.

**Simon Startin said of his new appointment at Vital Xposure, 'I am profoundly excited about taking the helm at Vital Xposure and building on the outstanding work of Julie McNamara. There has never been a more important time for society to hear the voice of disabled artists, who have been living at the sharp end of human fragility and resilience long before the rest of the world woke up to it. There is an urgent need for disabled theatre makers to proudly communicate not just the disabled experience but to take that perspective to universally question the times we live in. Under my leadership, the Vital Xposure commitment to hidden voices and social justice will continue to drive our work, but we will also begin to interrogate what participatory political theatre, led by disabled people, for the benefit of all, can achieve in the 21st century.**

*There is also still much work to be done in creating community and opportunities for disabled people within the wider theatre sector, and Vital Xposure will be looking to broaden our work with partner organisations to reframe the old narratives and forms that favour one community over another. We will further our commitment to working with artists of colour and other excluded communities, beginning with our production of 'White Pariahs: Quiet Rebels.'*

*I look forward, with the Vital Xposure team, to making our theatre spaces a fairer place to gather when we come out of tiers and lockdowns, and to sharing the stories and voices that connect us all.'*

**Outgoing Artistic Director Julie McNamara said 'I am thrilled that Simon has chosen Vital Xposure as his next life adventure. Simon comes with a wealth of experience in the creative industries and a highly respected body of work both in the mainstream and in Disability-led theatre. His is a uniquely imaginative voice that will bring fresh energy and ideas to the future direction of this extraordinary company. I am hugely excited and very curious to see what imaginative Disability-led leaps and bounds he will lead the company onto next. Indeed, I look forward with a sense of glee!'**

**Jonathan Meth, Chair of Vital Xposure Board of Trustees 'We are delighted that Simon Startin will be the new Artistic Director of Vital Xposure. Simon brings extensive experience to the role and the board could not have wished for a better appointment to build on the pioneering work of Julie McNamara. We look forward with great excitement to Simon joining us in the New Year.**

*Where to start with Julie McNamara is almost as hard as where to finish. Julie's work straddles the length and breadth of the UK and beyond. But her impact is far wider. She uses her voice to speak for all those whose voices are unheard and whose stories are too often untold. That she can talk to anyone, as well as enable others to find their voices, belies the complexity and richness of her creative working processes – as theatre maker, as a disabled artist and as advocate, activist and leader. In forming and leading Vital Xposure over the past decade Julie has created a company dedicated to the embodiment of these qualities. On behalf of all those involved with Vital Xposure we wish Julie great success with her Australian adventure.'*

-ENDS-

For further information please contact Laura Myers [laura@thecornershoppr.com](mailto:laura@thecornershoppr.com) or Chloe Pritchard-Gordon at The Corner Shop PR [chloe@thecornershoppr.com](mailto:chloe@thecornershoppr.com)

## NOTES TO EDITORS

### **Vital Xposure**

Vital Xposure is leading national and international Disabled-led theatre company based in London. Founded in 2011 by Julie McNamara, a worldwide renowned Disability Rights activist, playwright and director, the company promotes hidden voices with extraordinary stories to tell, develops new writing and tours unique, creative work to theatres and communities. Vital Xposure's work has a strong visual aesthetic, blending moving images, reclaimed footage and provocative literary narratives. All productions, on stage and beyond, present an inclusive experience where access issues do not intrude upon the aesthetic of the piece. At the heart of the company's work is new writing and new ways of working, with time and space provided for research, development and exploration. The Vital Xposure team is committed to ensuring a safe, inclusive and collaborative environment in all productions, where artists feel supported through their own professional and creative journey with the team. Vital Xposure is one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations.

[www.vitalxposure.co.uk](http://www.vitalxposure.co.uk)

### **Simon Startin**

Simon Startin is a director, actor, published playwright and Disability Rights activist with a career spanning 29 years. He has been an associate artist of TRSE, London Bubble and Graeae. He is an alumni of the Battersea Art Centre 21st century leadership scheme, Young Vic director's placement and the China Plate Enhanced Optimists course. As an activist he has worked with many organisations including the BBC, National Theatre, RSC, Creative Diversity Network, Stockton Arc and London Theatre Consortium to increase disabled representation on stage and screen. As an actor he has appeared in 29 professional productions most recently at the National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, Arcola and Birmingham Rep, as well as TV roles on BBC, Channel 4 and Paramount. He has directed at the Young Vic, RSC and Nottingham Playhouse, and his 2015 production of "Cinema" for Zende was awarded British Theatre Guide's Best Small Scale touring production.

### **Julie McNamara**

Julie McNamara is the founder and out-going Artistic Director of Vital Xposure, one of the UK's leading Disability-led touring theatre companies within Arts Council England's national portfolio. As both an artist and an activist, hers is a unique voice in Disability Arts. McNamara has a life-long preoccupation with disavowed voices on the political periphery. Her particular interests are in voices from locked-in spaces (secure hospitals, mental health and criminal justice systems and discourses of madness on stage). She is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter - a Miegunyah Award winner, University of Melbourne 2019; winner of Best Documentary Over 30 minutes and Best of the Festival Award 2018 at Picture This... Film Festival, Calgary, Canada, 2018; Unlimited Award 2014; Southbank Show 2010; ITV and DaDa Writers 2009; Peabody Award for Documentary 2008. She has published widely in poetry anthologies and non-fiction discourses on Disability and Mental Health and has a substantial theatre production history both in the UK and on the international stage (Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Ireland, Serbia, USA, New Zealand). Recent works include *White Pariahs: Quiet Rebels*, co-authored with Hassan Mahamdallie, and the award-winning documentary: *Voices from the Knitting Circle*.



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