**A Tupperware of Ashes Audio Introduction**

Thank you for booking tickets to an audio-described performance of A Tupperware of

Ashes. Tanika Gupta (A Doll’s House, Lyric Hammersmith) and Pooja Ghai (Artistic

Director of Tamasha Theatre Company) reunite for their latest collaboration, following

the critically acclaimed The Empress. Meera Syal is Queenie in this vivid and heart-

breaking family drama about life, immigration and the Indian spiritual cycle of death and

rebirth.

The running time is approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including a 20 minute

interval.

Touch Tours will precede the audio-described performances, an hour and a half before

the start time. Patrons attending a touch tour should meet staff in the Dorfman theatre

foyer.

This introduction will be repeated live fifteen minutes before the performance begins.

This allows us to give you extra information about the production, if needed. This will

also enable you to familiarize yourself with the headsets.

Please note that this production contains smoke, haze, bright and sudden lights and

moments of total blackout. It contains discriminatory language, references to racism and

moments of violence/threatened violence, as well as themes of death, grief, abortion,

cremation, dementia and Alzheimer’s, including references and depictions of Covid and

care homes.

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**Some Background**

A Tupperware of Ashes tells the story of Michelin-starred chef and widowed matriarch Queenie, and her gradual decline following a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. Queenie and her husband Ameet moved to England from Calcutta in the 70s, and her illness takes hold within a network of differing cultural attitudes to death, the elderly, and, importantly, to cooking.

In the printed program, Tanika Gupta, the play’s writer, talks about her own parents, who were themselves Bengali. ‘For my parents,’ Tanika writes, ‘the pride of cooking and eating together reflected a longing for ‘home’ and family, the desire to keep hold of their Indian roots, combating homesickness and recreating their childhoods. To this day, the rituals around home-cooked Indian food bind families, friends, and the wider community.’ Many of these themes are explored in the play.

**Set, characters and costumes**

The action mainly moves between the domestic spaces of Queenie and her family, her restaurant, and more abstract locations in her memory and imagination. The story takes place against a high, spacious backdrop that is dramatically lit to suggest deep gold sunsets or cool twilights. The rear wall is textured like creased cotton paper, soft horizontal lines and folds that imply an ocean meeting the horizon - picking up different shadows and highlights with the changing lighting to create shifting atmospheres or convey Queenie's altering mental state. Three quarters of the way up this backdrop, a metre or so in front of it, are a cluster of taut horizontal lines, criss-crossing the space. Also shifting with the lighting, these at times appear to be laser beams of blue, cyan and white piercing the air. In other lights they become golden threads, and in some moments seem to be heavy bars casting ominous shadows on the backdrop.

This backdrop is framed by high walls on left and right, painted a soft aqua blue, with dado rail and picture rail running across them to hint at domestic interiors. However, the walls continue high above the picture rail, giving a dreamy, surreal note to the space.

A couple of metres in front of the backdrop are four steps running the entire width of the space, and providing a platform all along the top step. Unseen steps behind this platform lead down the rear side, allowing characters to emerge, sometimes as if climbing up out of a river or sea, and sometimes giving a more supernatural sense of emerging from out of time. Characters can be silhouetted on the top step, against the shifting light of the backdrop. The risers of the steps facing the audience are painted in graduating blues, from deep blue on the bottom step to very pale on the top. As well as providing a way for characters to come and go, the steps also function as seating.

The forward part of the performance space, meeting the bottom step, is formed of an apron stage with small thrust section at the centre front. The thrust section, about 4 metres wide, protrudes 1 metre in front, bringing it up to the front row of the stalls. Together apron and thrust form a squat T-shape floor space, where much of the action takes place. There’s an outer walkway, covered in red lino, which frames a slightly raised central area of clean wooden floorboards. Covering the left and right sides of this raised area are two grey-blue carpets, each about 2 metres square. Another carpet, in speckled grey and white, is positioned within the center of the thrust, over the wooden floorboards. These different floor areas allow the story to move fluidly between locations, creating family homes, the restaurant, streets and hospital corridors, or moments from the past and the present. There are two more entrances in the form of dark doorways at the far left and right, in the bases of the framing side walls, level with the lino floor.

A small number of furniture items are also moved around to shift location: a contemporary table with black box-frame legs and a wooden top, fits snugly into a table-shaped slot in the back steps, so that it can be pulled out when needed. Two small box-frame coffee tables also double as stools, which can be pulled up to the table to indicate desks, or dinner time. At these moments, the table is laid with a cloth of white with indigo blue pattern, and ochre napkins. Scatter cushions of colourful Indian silk are sometimes used on the floor, on the stools, or on the steps. Apart from these there are very few props and no set changes.

There is a cast of 8 actors - 4 women, and 4 men. The play is mostly set in contemporary Britain, and characters wear naturalistic outfits that would blend into today’s London, changing clothes with every scene. Characters are often barefoot, as they take off their shoes inside the house.

Queenie’s family are all of Indian descent. Queenie herself is a woman well into her sixties, steely, and energetic, her vibrant brown eyes outlined with black kohl. Her black hair is worn up for the first half, with strands of frizz escaping from it. We first meet her in a navy blue linen button down shirt and loose trousers, wearing an extra long red scarf. In the next scene, over the same loose trousers paired with blue fabric trainers, she’s wearing a navy kurta - a long loose collarless shirt - with a pattern of lighter blue flowers. In the first half, she wears various other outfits - donning a silky white dressing gown for a day at the spa - but her everyday-wear is always loose-fitting, navy blue, and paired with the same practical trainers. She wears a navy trenchcoat, and has a large blue leather handbag, in which she carries a pink pineapple-patterned diary, full of post-it notes.

As Queenie’s Alzheimers progresses, her movements lose their self-assurance. Moments of incomprehension - staring off, distracted and lost in her own thoughts - become more frequent, and she wears a small frown of confusion as she tries to cover up what she doesn’t know. In the second half, we see her as a young woman in Calcutta, wearing a light blue patterned kurta over cream linen trousers. Her hair is down in a plait that falls over her shoulder. This is what she wears for the majority of the second half, as her illness progresses, her bright eyes become dull and half closed, and her posture becomes slack.

Throughout her illness, the memory of husband Ameet keeps her company, unseen by the other characters, dividing her attention between present and the past. Ameet is full of youthful exuberance; we first meet him frolicking in the sea in only a pair of boxer shorts. He has a full head of lustrous black hair, and wears a pair of black framed spectacles. Although he’s played by an actor in his sixties, we meet Ameet at various ages - as suggested by the outfits he wears. Sometimes he’s a young man in a burgundy suit from the 70s, with flared trousers and a loose blazer worn over a shirt with a long, pointed collar. At other times he’s in his ‘dad’ persona, in a knitted green cardigan over beige slacks and brown loafers.

They have three children, all in their thirties. The eldest, Raj, is a tall man with tousled wavy hair and short stubble. His clothes are casual but neat, in keeping with his job as an English teacher. We first meet him in a pink rollneck jumper with green trousers.

Queenie and Amit’s second son is Gopal. He’s clean-shaven, with a strong jaw-line and neatly combed black hair. Gopal is a lawyer, and dresses in casual, preppy clothes - when we first meet him, a white polo-shirt, an apple watch on his wrist, and beige chinos.

The youngest daughter is Kamala. Shorter than her brothers, and with an air of practicality, she has long hair, which she wears scraped off her face - sometimes with the rest of her hair down, sometimes in a messy bun. We first meet her in a sage green button-down shirt and blue jeans. Kamala is a doctor, and she accompanies her mother to an appointment wearing her NHS lanyard.

Queenie’s friend and confidant is Indrani, also from India. She’s the same age as Queenie, with her thick silver hair slung up elegantly on the back of her head in a claw clip. She dressed glamorously, with rings on every finger, and loose, light-coloured clothes that often combine Indian with English fashions - tan trousers and white trainers with a light blue kurti, for example.

The rest of the characters in the play are all played by two actors, a man and a woman. One, a white man with a high forehead, plays all the male parts. First of all, Dr Young, who diagnoses Queenie. He’s in a suit, with thinning hair and wire-framed glasses, and continually reaches for tissues to stem a runny nose. Later, a frazzled-but-friendly solicitor in a check shirt and retro patterned red and brown tie takes Queenie through some paperwork. In the second half, Pavel looks after Queenie, wearing a uniform of grey scrubs and white trainers.

The other actor, a woman with brown skin and black hair, takes the other roles. She plays Jamila, who works with Queenie at the restaurant. Jamila has a pink hijab, a white chef’s jacket with the restaurant’s logo, two mangos, embroidered onto it, and checkered navy and white trousers. In the second half, a bureaucrat at the Indian Embassy stands behind a desk in a beige blouse, pencil skirt, and black pumps, a pair of glasses worn on a chain around her neck. The sibling’s cousin Sanjivani also appears briefly, her hair down, wearing sunglasses with a pink sari.

These two actors also play other characters, who will be described as they appear.

Queenie is played by Meera Syal

Her husband Ameet, Zubin Varla

Queenie’s eldest son Raj is played by Raj Bajaj

Her other son, Gopal, by Marc Elliott

Their sister Kamala, by Natalie Dew

Queenie’s best friend Indrani is played by Shobna Gulati

Stephen Fewell plays The Doctor, Jeff, Pavel, and various other roles

And Avita Jay plays Jamila and other roles

Sound Designer - Elena Peña

Composer - Nitin Sawhney

Lighting Designer - Matt Haskins

Set and Costume - Designer Rosa Maggiora

The Director - Pooja Ghai

Writer - Tanika Gupta

**Section 4: The Access mailing list and upcoming performances**

Our National Theatre at Home streaming platform has a wide range of audio-described

productions available including Till the Stars Come Down, The House of Bernarda Alba, and Dear Octopus. You can subscribe to the service for a monthly fee or rent

productions one at a time. To find out more, and stream the productions with audio

description, visit https://www.ntathome.com/audio-described-and-british-sign-language.

To book tickets for shows at the NT at the adjusted Access rate, please subscribe to our

Access List. For more information and to sign up, visit

https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/access/access-list, call 020 7452 3961, or

email boxoffice@nationaltheatre.org.uk.

We hold an allocation of tickets for members of our access list for every show. If any

performances listed on our website are shown as “Sold Out”, tickets may still be

available: please log in to your NT account to access tickets, or call the Box Office

access line on 020 7452 3961.