...blackbird hour

Self-care guide & content warnings

What is this document?

This document contains information about ways to look after yourself before you watch, while you're at the theatre or after the play.

It also contains detailed information about the show to describe what you should expect when attending. This includes information about the content, the space, lighting and sound, and access information.

Please note that by discussing the content of the show, the below information will contain key plot points and descriptions of what happens in the performance.

We hope the information and resources in this document will help audiences experience the show, and support planning your visit.

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What is self-care?

Self-care is a choice to listen to our needs and look after ourselves, so we are able to keep going and live our best lives, despite the difficulties we experience in life and how they make us feel.

Thank you to Clean Break for bringing their care practices, including Self-Care Guides, to the Bush Theatre during our co-production of *Favour* (2022) Clean Break is a theatre company working with women with lived experience of the criminal justice system or at risk of entering it. **cleanbreak.org.uk**

"The concept of self-care comes from the Black Feminist movement. Self-care is important because it's about recognising that we experience discrimination and oppression because of how others react to who we are, or what we've experienced."- Clean Break

In writing this document, we were inspired by recent approaches taken by several other companies, especially the Nouveau Riche and Royal Court teams

This document has been created for ...blackbird hour, produced by Vital Xposure, a disabled-led theatre company.

About the show

The information below contains key plot points.
Skip this section if you want to avoid spoilers.

Eshe injured her knee in a car accident. She's broken up with her partner Ella and is in a moment of crisis. Eshe has remained alone in Ella's flat since. She is haunted by the memory of her mother, Sissy, and their complex relationship. It is the early hours of the morning. At the start of the show, Eshe writes a letter.

Eshe won't let Ella in the flat. Ella leaves Sissy's Good Days Box. Ella calls Michael and asks him to talk to Eshe Michael has known Eshe since childhood. They have history but the love he has for Eshe is not reciprocated.

Michael attempts to connect to Eshe and Eshe attempts to explain how she experiences the world. As Eshe's condition intensifies, Michael calls Ella to join them. As Michael and Ella argue over the best course of action, they discover Eshe's suicide note and realise she's taken an overdose.

Later, at the hospital, Ella and Michael discuss their relationship to Eshe. Michael says that he went out with Eshe the night of the accident because he needed to be with someone who understands what it's like to lose a parent. He had discovered his dad, who he never knew, had passed. A song plays as Eshe transforms into her new self.

Back at Ella's flat the days merge together in a cycle of medication and performing normality. Both Ella and Michael become more surreal as they attempt to control and 'care' for Eshe.

It has rained for five days
running
the world is a round puddle
of sunless water
where small islands
are only beginning
to cope
a young boy
in my garden
is bailing out water
from his flower patch
when I ask him why
he tells me
young seeds that have not seen sun
forget
and drown easily.

- coping poem by Audre Lorde

Content guidance

This show sees the protagonist in a state of trauma and explicitly engages with significant themes.

This show contains:

- Frequent use of strong language.
- Mild physical threat/intimidation.
- Use of racialized language, e.g. the n word. Words are spoken aloud and uncensored in captioning.
- Contains scenes of drug use (marijuana, prescription medication) and drinking/ alcohol abuse.
- Depictions of suicidal ideation, mental illness, and depression.
- Depictions of Psychosis and CPTSD
- Depictions of intentional overdose (survived).
- References to eating disorders / disordered eating and physical illness/injury.
- Themes of grief / bereavement (parents)
- Transgressions of consent boundaries, platonic and romantic (kiss), intense interpersonal conflict.

Sensory Guidance

This show contains:

- Smoking of herbal cigarettes – multiple times
- Burning of incense - once
- Use of haze
- Loud noises (e.g. there are moments of loud shouting, some SX rumbles)
- Flashing lights (Slow pulse of ceiling lights and on stage lamps)

Sensory Guidance (continued

- Beam Lights and Lasers. Due to the size of the studio, this hits the middle of front row.
- There are moments of lower light but these are brief.
- There is a blackout at the end of the performance.
- All performances of ...blackbird hour are performed under Chilled Performance conditions.

This show sees the protagonist in a state of trauma and explicitly engages with significant themes.

This means that:

- A relaxed attitude to noise in the auditorium; you are welcome to respond to the show in whatever way feels natural.
- To be able to freely enter and exit the auditorium when needed.
- A quieter chill-out space available before, during and after the performance. This is the foyer area outside the Studio.

There is only one audience exit to The Studio. Seating is unreserved and we encourage you to use the seating bank closest to the entrance if you want to easily step away. Please ask Front of House if you need support.

...blackbird hour contains heavy themes which are potentially triggering. We encourage you to read the content information, take time away from the space if needed, and respond however feels appropriate which may involve the exercises in this booklet.

Excessive flashing lights and loud/uncomfortable noises have been avoided. However, please note the performances are not sensory relaxed performances. The performance space is held for 15 minutes at the end of each performance for reflection and processing.

There is a breakout space avaliable in the Terrace Corridor.

Helplines & Support

Mind
Advice and support to empower anyone experiencing mental health problems. **mind.org.uk or 0300 123 3393**

Black Minds Matter UK
Free talking therapy and mental health advice for Black individuals.**blackmindsmatteruk.com**

With You
Provides free, confidential support with alcohol, drugs or mental health from both their local services and online. **wearewithyou.org.uk**

Rethink Mental Illness
Offers support through a diverse range of mental health services and support groups. **rethink.org**

Galop
Provides helplines and support for LGBTQ+ people who have experienced hate crime, sexual violence or domestic abuse. **galop.org.uk or 0800 999 5428**

Switchboard
Listening services, information and support for LGBTQ+ people. **switchboard.lgbt or 0800 999 5428**

Samaritans
Provides 24/7 emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide. **samaritans.org or 116 123**

Helplines & Support

BLACK MINDS MATTER
Provides free, 1:1, culturally relevant therapy for Black people in the UK.**blackmindsmatteruk.com**

BAATN
Support services for people who identify as Black, African, South Asian &; Caribbean. **baatn.org.uk**

Hub of Hope
UK-wide mental health service database. Lets you search for local, national, peer, community, charity, private and NHS mental health support. You can filter results to find specific kinds of support.
hubofhope.co.uk

Self-care suggestions

Watch with someone

Bring a friend or someone you trust to watch the play with you.

Talk to someone

If you find the content distressing, try talking to someone you trust, or contact one of the organisations suggested above.

Breathe

Breathing is a great way to help you feel calm. Breathe in for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding again. Repeat this for as long as you need.

Find some nature

Look out of the window or go for a walk if you can; experiencing nature can help us feel grounded.

Shepherd's Bush Green is only a minute's walk away, and the Bush has a terrace with outdoor seating.

Know if you need to step away

There is nothing wrong with deciding this isn't for you or it's too much.

Leave the auditorium, walk away, take a break. Do what feels right for you.

Self-care suggestions

Try a grounding exercise

Grounding exercises are things you can do to bring yourself into contact with the present moment.

There are many ways you can do this. Here are some ideas:

1. Notice five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.
2. Sit with your feet on the floor and back against your chair and either gently tap each leg or cross your arms and tap your shoulders.
3. Wash your hands or drink some water.

Self-Holding

Somatics

Somatics are a type of bodywork centering your internal physical perception and experience. It is an approach based on the soma, or "the body as perceived from within."

Exercise 1: **Diaphragmatic Breathing**

This exercise helps to activate your body's relaxation response. It involves deep breathing into the diaphragm rather than shallow breathing from your chest.

Steps

1. Lie down or sit comfortably.
2. Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.
3. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, allowing your belly to rise as you fill your lungs with air. The hand on your chest must remain as still as possible.
4. Exhale slowly out of your mouth or nose, allowing your belly to fall.
5. Repeat for several minutes.

Somatics (continued)

Exercise 2: **Grounding**

Grounding techniques can help you feel more connected to your physical presence in the world.

Steps

1. Stand up straight and feel your feet firmly grounded on the floor. Taking your shoes off for this exercise may make you feel more comfortable.
2. Take a few deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of your feet connecting with the earth.
3. Imagine roots growing from your feet, anchoring you to the ground as you feel connected to the earth
4. Start shifting your weight from left to right, swaying as a tree.
5. Shift your weight from front to back.
6. As you shift your weight, bring awareness to your center of gravity, located in the upper pelvic area and below the navel.
7. Bring your hands on top of your lower belly and feel your center.
8. Continue to sway from side to side and front and back while keeping the hands on your lower belly.

Somatics (continued)

Exercise 3: **Body Scanning**

This technique promotes increased bodily awareness and can help identify areas of tension or discomfort.

Steps

1. Lie down or sit comfortably.
2. Mentally scan your body from your toes to your head, noting any areas of tension or discomfort.
3. Spend a few moments focusing on each area and when you feel any tension, breathe deeply and exhale, allowing the area to relax.
4. When you feel the body part relax you can move to
5. the next one.
6. Continue this process until you reach your head.

Exercise 4: **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

This technique involves consciously tensing and then releasing different muscle groups in the body to promote relaxation.

Steps

1. Start at one end of your body (like your toes).
2. Tense the muscles as tightly as you can for about 5 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles and notice the sensation of release.
4. Continue to the next muscle group (like your legs)
5. and repeat the process.

Somatics (continued)

Exercise 5: **Self Hug**

This comforting exercise can help to soothe feelings of distress.

Steps

1. Cross your right arm over your chest to feel your heartbeat, place your left hand on your right shoulder.
2. Apply gentle pressure and rock side to side.
3. Take deep, calming breaths as you hold this self-hug.

Exercise 6: **Shaking Out Tension**

This exercise can help to release physical tension and release excess energy that may have been produced due to stress.

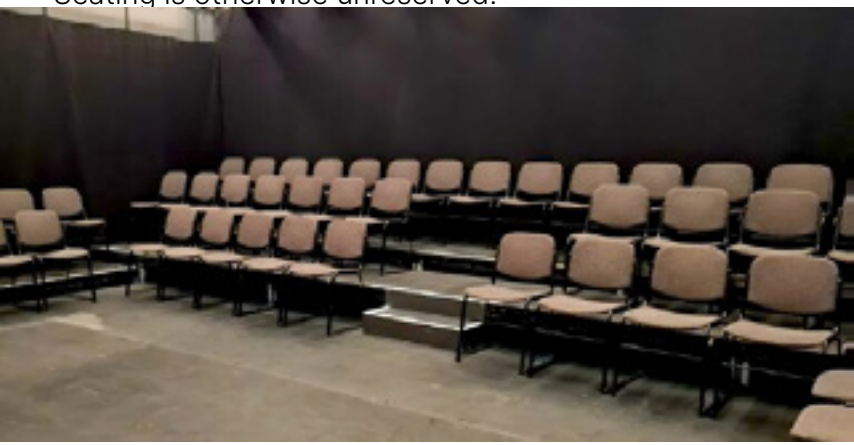
Steps

1. Find a space where you feel comfortable.
2. Stand up and start shaking your body, starting with your hands and gradually incorporating your arms, torso, and legs. Imagine you are shaking off dust or sand on your body.
3. Shake for a few minutes, then slowly wind down. Bringing your body back to balance.
4. Notice how your body feels once you've stopped shaking.

The performance space

...blackbird hour will take place in the Bush Theatre Studio, which is the smaller of our two performance spaces.

Access to the Studio is on the ground floor and the floor is level. There is step free access to the front row. A wheelchair space is available to book for every show. Seating is otherwise unreserved.



Access information

The Bush Theatre building has two theatre spaces – the Holloway Theatre and the Studio – as well as our Library Bar. There are two entrances to the building:

The first entrance is via the Bush terrace to the right-hand side of the building, accessible via a ramp suitable for wheelchair users and buggies or via three steps. There is a red automatic double glass door.

From here the Box Office is to the left and the Library Bar and Gianni and Michael Alen-Buckley Script Library are beyond the Box Office around the corner. The Studio is immediately to the right, down a corridor with floor-to-ceiling windows. The Holloway Theatre entrance is just beyond the bar and to the right of the Script Library.

Access information

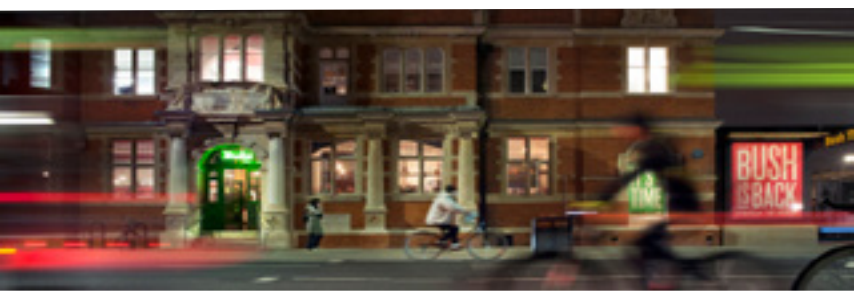
If you enter through **the front entrance** on Uxbridge Road through the porch up some steps, the theatre's Library Bar is straight ahead on the right, the Script Library is to the left, and the Box Office and Studio to the right. The entrance to the Holloway Theatre is straight ahead on the left.

The toilets are situated on the first floor and are accessible via stairs or the lift. There is also an **accessible toilet** on the ground floor beneath the stairs which access patrons have priority to use.

The Bush Theatre aims to be as accessible as possible in everything we do. The whole building is accessible for wheelchair users, a hearing loop is available, and Assistance Dogs are welcome at every performance.

...blackbird hour performances include integrated creative captions.

Discounted tickets for disabled bookers and free tickets for essential companions are available.



Captioning

All performances of ...blackbird hour are captioned. Captioning has been overseen by a Deaf captioning consultant. The best viewing position for the captions will be the middle seating bank. If you use the downstage ends of the side seating banks there will be restricted visibility of captions. Please ask Front of House can assist you.

To listen to a pre-show audio introduction to the characters, set and world of the play, please click here [duration 14 minutes].

If you have any questions or would like more information, don't hesistate to get in touch with our team:

email:
boxoffice@bushtheatre.co.uk

phone:
020 8743 5050