

Press Release

Under embargo until 10am, Wed 18 Sep 2024

barbican

Quiet Songs

by Finn Beames & Company

World premiere at The Pit, Barbican

22 October – 2 November 2024

Press night Thu 24 Oct, 7.45pm

- **RUTH NEGGA TO STAR IN WORLD PREMIERE OF QUIET SONGS BY FINN BEAMES AT THE BARBICAN**
- **FULL LENGTH PRODUCTION AWARDED BY OXFORD SAMUEL BECKETT THEATRE TRUST AND THE BARBICAN, SUPPORTING BOLD AND INNOVATIVE NEW PERFORMANCE**



Ruth Negga will star in world premiere of *Quiet Songs* by Finn Beames & Company.
Photographer Justin Coit

Barbican Centre announces today that Academy Award-nominated actor **Ruth Negga** will star in the world premiere of ***Quiet Songs*** by **Finn Beames & Company**, a new piece of music theatre for a single actor, a string quartet and an armoury of swords. As this year's winner of the **Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award**, which supports the development of artists making experimental new work, the company's prize-winning show receives a two-week run in the London venue's intimate studio theatre, The Pit, as part of the Barbican Centre's 2024 autumn programme. The production runs from 22 October to 2 November and tickets are on sale now, including £5 for 14-25 year olds with [Young Barbican](#) membership, via [barbican.org.uk](#)

Written, composed and directed by **Finn Beames**, *Quiet Songs* is an unflinching, semi-autobiographical portrait of adolescence. Told through a transfixing fusion of words, live music and meticulous staging, it follows what happens to a voice when it is cruelly pushed to breaking point, and how self-expression can be found beyond that.

A bullied teenager feels their voice breaking. Can it ever be fixed? In this coming-of-age tale about a young gay person seeking identity in an unkind world, musicians and their instruments become the storytellers. Sounding out the hidden depths of a human voice, the new show creates a beautifully unsettling world where string instruments are played with swords.

The profound meeting of sword and strings was developed from an initial research project in 2017, on

a residency with the armoury department at the Royal Ballet and Opera. Working with musicians and the organisation's Head Armourer, **Zoe Phillips**, Finn Beames found a way of expressing the uneasy fragility of a voice as it forms, and the fear and anxiety that is felt so acutely in teenage years.

Making her Barbican debut in the role of the teenage character simply known as Boy, *Quiet Songs* marks **Ruth Negga**'s first theatre performance in London since her 2011 appearance in the Irish classic, *Playboy of the Western World* (Old Vic). Across her prolific career, stage work includes her Ian Charleson rising star award-winning role in *Phèdre* opposite Helen Mirren (National Theatre), gender-blind Hamlet (The Gate, Dublin/ St Ann's Warehouse, Brooklyn) and most recently a Tony Award nomination for her portrayal as Lady Macbeth (alongside Daniel Craig in the title role) on Broadway. Now based in LA, Ruth has continued to seek out opportunities which challenge whose stories are traditionally represented on stage and screen, including her Oscar nominated performance as Mildred Loving (*Loving*, 2017) and BAFTA and Golden Globe nominated role in *Passing* directed by Rebecca Hall (2021).

Alongside Boy, four onstage musicians include **Fra Rustumji** (violin), **Chihiro Ono** (viola), **Hoda Jahanpour** (cello) and **Thea Sayer** (double bass). *Quiet Songs* is written, directed and composed by **Finn Beames**, with Set and Costume Design by **Samal Blak**, Lighting Design by **Bethany Gupwell** and Sound Design by **Tingying Dong** 董汀滢. **Zoe Phillips** is the production's Creative Armourer and Fight Direction is by **Bret Yount**.

Ruth Negga said:

"It's so hard to make work without funding. This is not news. The support and encouragement from initiatives like the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award is needed and necessary. Especially for work that is original in all aspects of the word. Nurture, care and attention... the time and space to be brave... the opportunity to bet on one's own originality... to risk authenticity. That all seems so in tune with what so much of Beckett and his work means to me".

The vividness of Finn's language struck me immediately. Not only because of its beauty lyrically and the sharpness of his imagery, but he is able to expertly and so fluidly locate the cruelty and the strange otherness of adolescence; a visceral, full body affair. How alien it can feel. How our bodies can be unreliable, vulnerable and often comical allies. The stakes are always high in our quest to belong, to be understood or at least to understand ourselves. But does anything ever actually feel as acute as it does in adolescence?

I look forward to collaborating with Finn, the brilliant musicians and armourer indeed in creating a truly multisensory experience. And I am very much looking forward to working at the Barbican for the first time. I have admired it from near and far for many decades and its commitment to exploring the bold and the brave."

Finn Beames, Artistic Director of Finn Beames & Company, said:

"Ruth is bringing extraordinary talent and extraordinary compassion to this role. This collaboration is a gift. I immediately felt the material was safe in her hands, and at the same time knew she would illuminate it in ways I never imagined possible.

The starting point for this project was my own voice, but I think anyone will be able to relate to the story of Quiet Songs. Our voices carry so much of who we are; what we choose to display or hide, and that which can't be hidden. This show is about powerful voices preying on quiet ones, and what it means to finally speak. I wanted to confront how difficult growing up can be, but still create something beautiful from the experience, an impulse I know will be especially recognisable to queer and disabled audiences."

Toni Racklin, Barbican Head of Theatre & Dance, said:

"We are delighted that Ruth Negga has joined Finn Beames & Company to take the central role in Quiet Songs, this powerful, experimental, prize-winning new work. Collaborating with the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust on this award has provided a crucial avenue for some of the UK's most

daring artists to create thrilling new productions that challenge what performance can be, who can make it and who it can be for, offering our audiences truly unique and groundbreaking experiences for over 15 years. We are very grateful to the Trust for their continued support and we look forward to Finn's extraordinary story coming to life through Ruth and the talented ensemble."

Finn Beames & Company is a changing group of collaborators making music-led work for live performance. Founder Finn Beames is a theatre maker whose practice combines text, music and staging. His stage work includes current project *Heavenly Bodies* (commissioned by Audrey Productions, supported by Bristol Old Vic) and *Man: 3 Plays by Tennessee Williams* (Genesis Future Directors Award, Young Vic). He is also founder and leader of the Aphasia New Music Group, a co-creative music project delivered with UCL's Communication Clinic which has mounted two London performances and a national tour to date.

The Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award (OSBTTA) supports the development of emerging practitioners engaged in bold, challenging and innovative performance. Since 2007, the Barbican and the OSBTTA have worked together annually to stage a new production, based on a prize-winning proposal, for The Pit or a site-specific location. Previous winners include ZooCo with *Perfect Show For Rachel*, HighRise Entertainment, IN BED WITH MY BROTHER, Alan Fielden with JAMS, Mars.tarrab, Dickie Beau, and You Me Bum Bum Train.

ENDS

Press Information

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Images

Images can be downloaded here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/hqyvk5qs4e9irvu7c7r6t/ADnDitu0CclGenUW-1awqZs?rlkey=mbohkctr19mnmkwmqpsvb45rn&st=3po0h7e5&dl=0>

LISTINGS

Finn Beames & Company: *Quiet Songs*

World premiere

Tue 22 Oct – Sat 2 Nov 2024 (12 performances)

Press night: Thu 24 Oct, 7.45pm

The Pit

7.45pm on Tue 22 Oct – Sat 2 Nov; 2.30pm on Sat 2 Nov

Audio Described performance: Tue 29 Oct, 7.45pm, with a Touch Tour available at 7pm. Audio Description provided by Caroline Burn.

Running time: TBC

Age guidance : 14+

Content guidance: Violence, self-harm, homophobia

£18 plus booking fee; £5 Young Barbican tickets available

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2024/event/finn-beames-company-quiet-songs>

Cast & Creative Team

Ruth Negga - Boy

Fra Rustumji - violin

Chihiro Ono - viola

Hoda Jahanpour - cello

Thea Sayer – double bass

Finn Beames – Writer, Composer and Director

Samal Blak – Set and Costume Designer
Bethany Gupwell – Lighting Designer
Tingying Dong 董汀滢 – Sound Designer
Zoe Phillips – Creative Armourer
Bret Yount – Fight Director

Claire Shovelton – Creative Producer
Ian Taylor – Production Manager for eStage
Graham Michael – Stage Manager

Funded by The Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust and co-produced by Barbican, London and Oedipa

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NOTES TO EDITORS

BIOGRAPHIES

Ruth Negga – Boy

Ruth can currently be seen starring opposite Jake Gyllenhaal in Apple's remake of *Presumed Innocent*, adapted by David E. Kelley. She has also recently starred in Dan Levy's directorial debut *Good Grief* for Netflix.

In 2022, Ruth was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play for her portrayal of 'Lady Macbeth' in her Broadway debut opposite Daniel Craig in Sam Gold's *Macbeth*. Previously, she was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress in a Motion Picture for her role in *Loving* opposite Joel Edgerton, which Jeff Nichols wrote and directed. Ruth's performance in the film earned her several other Best Actress nominations at the BAFTAs, Film Independent Spirit Awards and SAG Awards.

Ruth can also be seen in the feature film *Passing* for Netflix opposite Tessa Thompson, adapted for the screen and directed by Rebecca Hall. She won the Independent Spirit Award for her performance and received Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations for Best Supporting Actress. She also previously starred opposite Brad Pitt in the Plan B/New Regency film *Ad Astra*, which James Gray wrote and directed.

On the small screen, Ruth starred as 'Tulip O'Hare' in the critically acclaimed AMC series *Preacher*, which Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg executive produced. She received rave reviews for her electrifying turn as the unpredictable and volatile 'Tulip,' a gifted criminal who is not afraid to steal, cheat or kill to get what she wants. In addition, Ruth won the Irish Film and Television Academy Award for Best Actress in 2012 for her portrayal of 'Shirley Basse' in the TV movie *Shirley*.

Ruth previously performed as the Prince of Denmark in Yael Farber's take on the Shakespearian play *Hamlet*. After an acclaimed sold-out run in October 2019 at The Gate Theatre in Dublin, Ruth reprised the titular role in her American stage debut in February 2020 at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York. Ruth and the production received stellar reviews and she was nominated for a Drama Desk Award.

Fra Rustumji – violín

Fra Rustumji is a freelance musician. She has played for: English Touring Opera (*La Bohème*; *Le Coq d'Or*; *Cenerentola* (leader); *The Coronation of Poppea* (leader); *Manon Lescaut*; *Rake's Progress*, Paraorchestra (*The Virtuous Circle*; *The Nature of Why*; *Trip the Light Fantastic*; *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*; *Kraftwerk:rewerk*), Multi-Story Orchestra (2012 - 2023), Akram Khan Company (*Xenos*), ENO/Gate Theatre (*Effigies of Wickedness*), Royal Opera House JP Young Artists at Wilderness Festival, Clod Ensemble, Le Gateau Chocolat, Joss Arnott Dance (*V for Viola and Dancer*), Chineke! Orchestra, Engines Orchestra, and Decus Ensemble, amongst others. She records regularly for film and TV / Netflix productions. She is a member of the Aphasia New Music Group.

Chihiro Ono – viola

Born in Chiba/Japan, Chihiro Ono is a London-based Japanese violinist/violist. Her range includes baroque, classical, contemporary, new, experimental music, and folkloric, noise, improvisation, field recording and art of sounds. Her live and broadcast performances as a chamber musician include major festivals and venues, with ensembles including Apartment House; Birmingham Contemporary Music Group; CHROMA; Ensemble Modern;

Klangforum Wien; London Mozart Players and Tokyo Symphony Orchestra and composers G.Aperghis; F.Cerha; P.Eötvös; B.Ferneyhough; H.Lachemann; S.Reich and more. Since 2018 Chihiro has developed her work as a sound artist through commissioned pieces, collaborating and producing for live-performance, radio, film and theatre with various like-minded artists, such as ARCO, Forced Entertainment and Waste Paper Opera. She is a selected artist for [Sound and Music's In Motion 2024 Composers](#). Her creative work draws on influences from a rich variety of repertoires, encompassing folklore, field recording, improvisation, Western and Eastern musical/theatrical methods, elements, techniques and philosophies, with her own extremely strong visions on sounds.

Hoda Jahanpour – cello

Hoda is an Iranian-Slovak cellist, songwriter, and composer. She has performed with notable orchestras such as the BBC Philharmonic, Hallé, and Manchester Camerata. Later this year, she will premiere a new piece she composed for her string quartet and will tour India, performing Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* alongside other chamber music. Hoda loves to explore how the cello can express various musical languages. Some highlights include performing jazz and Middle Eastern fusion music at Manchester Jazz Festival, with Abel Selaoe in Italy at the Stauffer Music Festival, and working with saxophonist and composer Nubya Garcia at a collaborative music-making residency.

Thea Sayer – double bass

Since moving to London in 2017, Thea has performed with many major UK orchestras such as Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, English National Opera, London Symphony Orchestra and Royal Birmingham Ballet, performing in concert venues across the world including Royal Festival Hall, Barbican Centre, Royal Albert Hall, Lincoln Centre in New York and Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. As a freelance musician, further recording and performing includes West End productions such as *Hadestown*, to working with artists like Stormzy, Ghetts, Celeste and LUXE, as well as playing with various chamber ensembles. Recently, she was a London Philharmonic Orchestra's Foyle Future First Artists for the 2022/23 season as well as a recipient of the Royal Opera House's Diversity Scheme for 2023.

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Theatre Productions](#).

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