

# PRESS RELEASE

**S T U D I O**

**ADDRESS**  
1501 14TH STREET NW,  
WASHINGTON, DC 20005

**CONTACT**  
202-232-7267  
STUDIOTHEATRE.ORG

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DAVID MUSE**  
**MANAGING DIRECTOR, REBECCA ENDE LICHTENBERG**

**CONTACT:**

Mike Fila  
Associate Director of Marketing and Communications  
[mfila@studiotheatre.org](mailto:mfila@studiotheatre.org)

**DATE:** November 24, 2020

**IN STUDIO-COMMISSIONED WORLD PREMIERE, IKE HOLTER OBSERVES A WORLD ON THE BRINK**

***I Hate It Here: Stories from the End of the Old World***

Written and Directed by **Ike Holter**

An audio play from Studio Theatre

Listen for free beginning **December 10, 2020**

As the world collectively plans to close the door (and maybe throw away the key?) on 2020, **Studio Theatre** offers a reflection on this complicated, unexpected, and consequential moment in history with the world premiere of ***I Hate It Here: Stories from the End of the Old World***, a Studio-commissioned audio play written and directed by **Ike Holter**. Audiences can **listen for free** on Studio's website from **December 10, 2020** through **March 7, 2021**. With sharp humor and keen observation, Holter uses vignettes, monologues, and song to take listeners from an office to a wedding, high school, outdoor brunch, front porch, and more to capture the many ways it feels to live in a world wracked by changes both personal and systemic.

"Ike's work is smart, funny, daring, and theatrical—a great match for Studio's first commissions of audio work," said Studio Artistic Director **David Muse**. "What he's created feels very new and very Ike. He describes this set of scenes and monologues as an album, a sampling of what it feels like to live through this moment, and I think people will really respond to his craft and ambition."

*I Hate It Here* is supported by Studio R&D, Studio's incubator for new work, and was part of the largest-ever round of commissions in the Theatre's history, awarded in spring 2020. As part of that initiative, Studio allocated funds specifically to support the creation of audio plays, part of its ongoing exploration of alternate modes of theatrical storytelling in response to the present moment.

*I Hate It Here* features a cast of Studio veterans—**Jennifer Mendenhall** (*Circle/Mirror/Transformation* and many others) and **Jaysen Wright** (*Wig Out!*)—alongside cherished current and former members of Chicago's theatre community, including **Sydney Charles**, **Kirsten Fitzgerald**, and **Tony Santiago**, as well as **Gabriel Ruiz**, now in New York, and **Behzad Dabu**, who is now based in Los Angeles. *I Hate It Here* is part of Studio In Your Ears, the Theatre's series of free audio dramas that also includes an adaptation of Sarah Burgess's political drama *Kings*.

Studio In Your Ears is generously underwritten by Board Chair **Amy Weinberg** and her husband **Norbert Hornstein**.

**ABOUT I HATE IT HERE: STORIES FROM THE END OF THE OLD WORLD**

An anthem for our time, *I Hate it Here* looks at the ways people do (and don't) deal with a world on the brink of explosion. Commissioned by Studio to create an audio work, award-winning Chicago writer Ike Holter brings his sharp humor to the complexities of stepping into a new decade with the odds already stacked against your favor.

## **ABOUT IKE HOLTER**

**Ike Holter** (Playwright and Director) is a Chicago playwright and winner of the Windham Campbell Prize for Drama, one of the most prestigious awards for writing in the world. He is the writer of several award-winning plays, including *Exit Strategy*, *Hit the Wall*, and *Lottery Day*, which have been seen all across the country. He was a writer for the Emmy-nominated *Fosse/Verdon* on FX, which won the Writers Guild of America Award for Best Long Form Adaptation. He is under commission at South Coast Rep and Playwrights Horizons.

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

**Sydney Charles** (Ensemble) is an actor, activist, art maker, and creator. Her theatre credits include *The Color Purple* at Drury Lane Theatre, *Nina Simone: Four Women* at Northlight Theatre, *Flyin' West* at American Blues Theater, and *Lottery Day* and *Father Comes Home from the Wars* at the Goodman Theatre. Sydney can also be seen in television episodes of *The Haven*, *The T*, *Shameless*, and *The Chi*. She recently served as assistant director for *Bug* at Steppenwolf Theatre, and was associate director for the world premiere of *His Shadow* at 16th Street Theatre and *The Shipment* at Red Tape Theatre. She is an artistic associate with Firebrand Theatre. Sydney is represented by Stewart Talent and is a member of Actors' Equity Association and the Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists.

**Behzad Dabu** (Ensemble) is an actor, writer, producer, and activist based out of Los Angeles and Chicago. He is a proud company member at TimeLine Theatre Company, which presents stories inspired by history that connect with current sociopolitical issues. Behzad originated the role of Amit in *Samsara* at Victory Gardens Theater, for which he was nominated for a Jeff Award for Best Actor. He also originated the role of Abe in the Pulitzer Prize-winning and Tony-nominated play *Disgraced*, which he performed at American Theatre Company, the Goodman Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Seattle Rep, and the Mark Taper Forum at Center Theatre Group. His television credits include Simon Drake on *How to Get Away with Murder* (ABC), Amir on *The Chi* (Showtime), and Disney's *The Lion Guard*. He also appeared in episodes of *The Good Place*, *All Rise*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Drive Share*, and *You're So Talented*. His film credits include *Hoop*, *King Rat*, *Mondo Hollywoodland*, *Imperfections*, and *Older Children*. He has also been seen in various national commercials. He is a founding member of The Chicago Inclusion Project, which seeks to level the playing field and provide resources in the arts for people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and people with disabilities. He holds a BFA in Acting from Columbia College Chicago.

**Kirsten Fitzgerald** (Ensemble) is a member of the Artistic Ensemble and the Artistic Director at A Red Orchid Theatre in Chicago. Kirsten's recent acting credits include the world premieres of *Grey House* by Levi Holloway and *Pilgrims Progress* and *Traitor* by Brett Neveu at A Red Orchid, in addition to *Roe* and *Sweat* at the Goodman Theatre, *Lettie* and *Appropriate* at Victory Gardens Theater, and *Mary Page Marlow* and *The Qualms* at Steppenwolf Theatre. Her television credits include *The Exorcist*, *Sirens*, *Chicago Med*, *Chicago Justice*, *Chicago Fire*, *Underemployed*, and *ER*. Film credits include *Widows*, *Killing Eleanor*, and *Working Man*.

**Jennifer Mendenhall** (Ensemble) has been a DC-area actor for many years; Studio Theatre was one of her first artistic homes in the city. She has appeared in Studio's productions of *The New Electric Ballroom*, *Circle/Mirror/Transformation*, *A Beautiful View*, *Crestfall*, and many more. She met Ike Holter

at The Kennedy Center Playwrights Initiatives, where she served as a reader for many years. She is a company member of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, where her performances include *Cherokee*, *Clyborne Park*, *Measure for Pleasure*, *Grace*, *Lenny and Lou*, *Homebody/Kabul*, *Cooking With Elvis*, *The Day Room*, and many more. Most recently, she appeared as Q in *Handbagged* at Round House Theatre; *Hooded, Or Being Black For Dummies* at Mosaic Theater Company; *Cripple of Inishmaan* at Scena Theatre; *Pluto* and *Angels in America* at Forum Theatre; *After the Fall*, *Imagining Madoff*, *Apples from the Desert*, *The Accident*, and *Andy and the Shadows* at Theater J; *Ambition Facing West*, *The Monument*, *You Are Here*, and *Slaughter City* at Theater Alliance; *Teddy Roosevelt and the Treasure of Ursa Major* at The Kennedy Center; *dark play, or stories for boys* at the Humana Festival; and *Cradle of Man* at Florida Stage. As audio book narrator Kate Reading, she has recorded hundreds of books of all genres. Her awards include a Helen Hayes for Outstanding Lead Actress, a Mary Goldwater Award from Theatre Lobby, Audie Award from the Audio Publishers Association, the *AudioFile* Earphones Award, and Audio Book Reader of the Year from *Publisher's Weekly*.

**Gabriel Ruiz's** (Music Director; Ensemble) New York credits include *Blood and Gifts* at Lincoln Center Theater. Chicago credits include *You Got Older*, *The Rembrandt*, *The Way West*, *How Long Will I Cry?*, and *The Motherf\*\*ker with the Hat* at Steppenwolf Theatre; *Next to Normal*, *Company*, and *Arcadia* at Writers Theatre; *The Wolf at the End of the Block* and *White Tie Ball* at Teatro Vista; *The Upstairs Concierge* at the Goodman Theatre; *Cry it Out* and *Mansfield Park* at Northlight Theatre; *Photograph 51*, *Agamemnon*, and *Man in the Ring* at Court Theatre; *Native Gardens* at Victory Gardens Theater; *Singin' in the Rain* and *City of Angels* at The Marriott Theatre in Lincolnshire; *Creditors* with Remy Bumppo Theatre Company; *Working* at Broadway Playhouse at Water Tower Place; *Richard III* and *Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater; and *Arabian Nights* at Lookingglass Theatre Company. Gabriel's regional credits include *Native Gardens* at Cincinnati Playhouse, *Harvey* at Milwaukee Rep, and *Why Torture Is Wrong...* at Forward Theater Company. His television and film credits include *Chicago P.D.*, *Chicago Fire*, and *Chicago Justice* on NBC, *APB* on Fox, *Electric Dreams* for Channel 4, and *Boss* on Starz.

**Tony Santiago** (Ensemble) has appeared in *The Wolf at the End of the Block* and *Put Your House in Order*, both by Ike Holder, as well as *The Hairy Ape* and *The America Play*. His producing credits include *The Jungle*, *Romulus*, *The Mixtape Project*, *The Midnight Society*, *Good Friday*, and *Queer, Ill + Okay*. His directing credits include *A Story Told in Seven Fights* at The Neo-Futurists and *Empower!* with Lyric Opera of Chicago. Tony is the Executive Producer of the pop-up production company The Roustabouts, where his acting credits include *Winehouse*, *A Tribute To Amy*, *Stay Lit*, and *Put Your House in Order*. Tony is the curator for Theater on the Lake and the Theater and Programs Manager for Arts + Public Life at the University of Chicago.

**Jaysen Wright** (Ensemble) has appeared in Studio Theatre's productions of *Wig Out!*, *Choir Boy*, and *The Rocky Horror Show*. Other credits include *The Royale*, *Now Comes the Night*, and *Take Me Out* at 1st Stage; *The Royale* at Olney Theatre Center; *Jubilee* and *Smart People* at Arena Stage; *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Everyman Theatre; *Actually* and *Sons of the Prophet* at Theater J; *Macbeth* at Folger Theatre; *The Wiz* and *A Christmas Carol* at Ford's Theatre; *Choir Boy* at Marin Theatre Company; and *Measure for Measure*, *Wallenstein*, and *Coriolanus* at Shakespeare Theatre Company. Upcoming performances include *The Till Trilogy* at Mosaic Theater Company and *Acoustic Rooster* at The Kennedy Center. He received a BA in Theatre from Grinnell College and an MFA in Acting from Indiana University.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION TEAM**

**Sivan Battat** (she/they) (Assistant Director) is an Iraqi-Jewish theatre director, cultural worker, community organizer, and educator based in New York. Recent credits include *Who the F\*ck is Ahmed* by Michael Zalta for the Rough Draft Festival at the Laguardia Performing Arts Center, *She He Me* by Raphael Khouri for National Queer Theatre, *Coexistence My Ass* by Noam Shuster at Harvard University

and National Tour, *Pie Shop Play* by Alice Pencavel for the Corkscrew Festival, and *East o', West o'!* by Michelle J. Rodriguez for Ars Nova's ANTFest. Sivan is the former Artistic Apprentice at Studio Theatre, and has worked as an assistant/associate with directors including Whitney White, Sam Gold, Rebecca Taichman, Neil Pepe, and Gaye Taylor Upchurch, among others. As a cultural worker, Sivan has worked with NYC-based Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) in numerous capacities, most recently creative directing the first ever JFREJ Mimouna, a celebration of identity and ritual, and curated *Salon al-Mahjar*, a performance salon for queer and trans MENASA artists.

**Luisa Sánchez Colón**'s (Stage Manager) New York theatre credits include *Shipwreck* (audio play), *The Line* (virtual play), the Under the Radar Festival, *Mojada*, *White Noise*, *Miss You Like Hell*, and *Oedipus El Rey* at The Public and *Greater Clements* at Lincoln Center Theater. Other New York theatre credits include *The Paper Hat Game*, *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, and The Fire This Time Festival. She worked on the national tour of *Biscuit* and *Dog Loves Books*. Internationally, she worked on the Royal Court Theatre's production of *Hangmen*.

**Mikhail Fiksel** (Sound Designer) is a designer, composer, musician, and DJ, based in Chicago and Brooklyn. He previously designed and composed for Studio Theatre's production of *The Wolves* and served as sound designer for Studio's earlier In Your Ears production of *Kings*. His other theatrical credits include productions with The Public Theater, Signature Theatre, Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Victory Gardens Theater, Writers Theatre, The Geffen, The Old Globe, Playwrights Horizons, The Civilians, Pigpen Theatre Co., La Jolla Playhouse, South Coast Rep, Manhattan Theatre Club, Center Theatre Group, Albany Park Theatre Project, and Third Rail Projects. Mikhail's audio work includes multiple audio plays and podcasts with Make-Believe Association, where he is Head of Audio Production, as well as projects with Audible, WBEZ, and All Classical Portland. He is a member of USA and the Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association.

**Adrien-Alice Hansel** (Dramaturg) is the Literary Director at Studio, where she has dramaturged the world premieres of *Queen of Basel*, *The Remains*, *No Sisters*, *I Wanna Fucking Tear You Apart*, *Animal*, *Red Speedo*, *Dirt*, *Lungs*, and *The History of Kisses* as well as productions of *Cry It Out*, *Translations*, *Curve of Departure*, *The Effect*, *Wig Out!*, *Straight White Men*, *Cloud 9*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Constellations*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *Bad Jews* (twice), *The Apple Family Plays*, *Invisible Man*, *Sucker Punch*, *The Golden Dragon*, and *The New Electric Ballroom*, among others. Prior to joining Studio, she spent eight seasons at the Actors Theatre of Louisville, where she headed the literary department and coordinated project scouting, selection, and development for the Humana Festival of New American Plays. She is the co-editor of eight anthologies of plays from Actors Theatre and editor of eight editions of plays through Studio. Adrien-Alice holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama.

**Noel Nichols** (Sound Engineer) is a sound designer, engineer, and artist based in the New York area and hailing from Arizona. Noel's design credits include *ain't no dead thing*, *We are Proud to Present a Presentation...*, and *How to Relearn Yourself* at Yale Cabaret; *Fun Home* and *In His Hands* for the Yale School of Drama; *Latinos Who Look Like Ricky Martin* at Verano Cabaret; *Ghost Card* for Fullstop Collective; and *Counting Pebbles* for Faultline Ensemble. Select engineering credits include *The Prisoner* at Yale Rep, the 2019 Carlotta Festival of New Plays at the Yale School of Drama, and *Sundown Yellow Moon* and *Underground Railroad Game* at Ars Nova.

## STUDIO THEATRE

Studio Theatre is Washington's premier venue for contemporary theatre, "where local audiences will find today's edgiest playwrights" (*Variety*). One of the most respected midsized theatres in the country, Studio produces exceptional contemporary drama in deliberately intimate spaces. Drawing inspiration from great ensembles—where people work together with a spirit of generosity and professional rigor—Studio brings characteristic thoughtfulness and daring to its work onstage and off, through its new work incubator and

engagement, education, and workforce training initiatives. Studio serves nearly 75,000 people each year, including more than 1,000 youth and young adults through community engagement initiatives. Founded in 1978, the quality of Studio's work has been recognized by sustained community support, as well as 70 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in professional theatre.

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