

China Plate present

A FAMILY BUSINESS

Written by Chris Thorpe

Developed with Rachel Chavkin and Lekan Lewal

Directed by Lekan Lewal



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SUPPORTED BY WARWICK ARTS CENTRE AND STAATSTHEATRE MAINZ AND USING PUBLIC FUNDING BY THE NATIONAL LOTTERY THROUGH ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



ABOUT THE SHOW

A show about how not to blow up the planet.

A Family Business links the global to the local. In a world with so much opportunity to connect, it's still easy to see to see global issues, like nuclear proliferation, as happening in an untouchable space, governed by political and diplomatic forces we don't have access to. But the people who manage these existential threats on a daily basis are still just that – people. At a time when Britain has recently announced an increase in our nuclear arsenal, the show looks at what it means to be an ordinary person tasked with representing a huge group of other ordinary people, and asks us to think about where an individual's humanity needs to exist within that to do the job effectively.

The show is about diplomats, activists, the global threat of nuclear weapons – but it's also about the audience who show up on any particular night. It's not about educating us to be anti-nuclear activists or diplomats – it's about examining the very particular experiences of representing other people that come with those roles. In every performance we put new audience members in the position of representing others, and think collectively about how that affects our attitude to the power imbalances in our own countries and communities, who we represent, globally and locally, and what we might want to do with that.

BACKGROUND

A Family Business reunites Chris Thorpe with Tony award-winning collaborator Rachel Chavkin, who he worked with on the award-winning and critically acclaimed shows *Status* and *Confirmation*. On this show, Rachel and Chris are joined by Director Lekan Lewal, a new and exciting addition to the creative team. Lekan is currently Resident Director on *Hamilton* and Associate Creative Director at HOME, Manchester.

Like *Confirmation* & *Status*, *A Family Business* is built around the idea of the real-world effects on individual and social decision-making of the cognitive biases and stories we carry unconsciously within us. *Confirmation* investigated this at the level of the individual, *Status* at the level of the national – *A Family Business* expands to look at what happens when those constructed stories of nationality have to communicate with each other at a global level and at the diplomats tasked with doing that.

Confirmation and *Status* both won Fringe First Awards at the Edinburgh Festival (2014 & 2018) and were both selected for the British Council Edinburgh Showcase (2015 & 2019). Between them Chris has completed 6 UK tours, 4 Edinburgh Festivals, 4 London runs and international tour dates including: Berlin, Mannheim, Mainz, New York, Vienna, Athens, Porto, Brisbane, Bucharest, Beirut, Nuremberg and Luxemburg.

This is the final show in a trilogy of plays examining the intersection between our individual humanity and our politics. *A Family Business* will see the development of a more ambitious design concept and, for the first time, an exploration of co-creating work with audiences. The audience will play a key role in the performance of the show, with the design involving two actors performing from within a glass box with their dialogue re-laid to certain audience

members through headphones. Certain parts of this dialogue will then be re-laid to the audience as a whole through these audience members.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS SO FAR

In March 2020 the team undertook a 1-week concept development R&D in New York during which Chris was connected with Veronique Christory (Senior Arms Control Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross, UN office) and a US Foreign Service Officer (name withheld) and conducted numerous research interviews and visited the UN offices. The research stage has to date involved conversations with:

- Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons & joint Nobel Peace Prize Laureate for ICAN's work, 2017
- Senior Co-Ordinator for International Relations & Arms Control for the Mexican mission to the UN
- Senior Arms Control Specialist for the Brazilian Mission to the UN
- Director, International Security Programme, Chatham House, UK
- Communications & Uptake Officer, Effective States & Inclusive Development Research Centre, University of Manchester
- Writer & director of *The Nuns, The Priests and the Bombs* – documentary feature on direct peace activism and the prosecution of activists

The script is also being developed through conversations with young people. Chris and Lekan undertook a workshop with the Manchester Royal Exchange's Young Company Collective in January 2021 with fourteen 17 – 21 year olds from areas less engaged in the arts and at a socio-economic disadvantage. The workshop explored their opinions on nuclear disarmament and international diplomacy - how diplomacy is structured and how they feel about diplomats speaking on their behalf.

Chris will hold more workshops with young people through networks in the UK, and associated with our national and international partners and China Plate's Young Producer network. These workshops will take the form of a discussion to further Chris' research and an exploratory session for the young people lead by a UN diplomat.

THE DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE 2021

APRIL: Script Development R&D with Manchester Royal Exchange

AUGUST: 1-week R&D with an international partner or UK venue

SEPTEMBER: 2-week Technical R&D at Staatstheater Mainz, Germany (tbc)

OCTOBER: 1-week Dramaturg R&D in New York

A Family Business will go into production in Spring 2022 ahead of a UK premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August.

FUTURE LIFE

We are exploring opening the show in June/July 2022 at an international partner's venue for a world premier and then moving the show to Edinburgh Festival 2022 for the UK premiere.

We would then be aiming to tour the show nationally and internationally from Autumn 2022.

ABOUT CREATIVE TEAM

CHRIS THORPE | WRITER

Chris is an award-winning writer & performer & Associate Artist at the Royal Exchange, Manchester – work for them includes *THERE HAS POSSIBLY BEEN AN INCIDENT* & *THE MYSTERIES*. Other theatre work includes *VICTORY CONDITION* & *THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS* for the Royal Court, *CHORUS* for the Gate Theatre & *HANNAH, BEOWOLF* & one of *AESOP'S FABLES* for the Unicorn. I regularly collaborate with Lucy Ellinson (*TORYCORE*), Portugal's mala voadora (*OVERDRAMA/HOUSE-GARDEN/DEAD END/YOUR BEST GUEST*) & Hannah Jane Walker (*THE OH FUCK IT MOMENT/I WISH I WAS LONELY*). He was a founder member of Unlimited Theatre & am an Associate of Live Art/Theatre company Third Angel.

With Rachel Bagshaw he wrote the award-winning *THE SHAPE OF THE PAIN*, recently adapted for the BBC as part of their Culture In Quarantine series. His short film for the Royal Court & the Financial Times about the climate crisis, *WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY?* was released in September 2019. Awards include Fringe Firsts for *STATUC*, *NEUTRINO*, *THE OH FUCK IT MOMENT* & *THE SHAPE OF THE PAIN*; the Premio Franco Enriquez 2018; & selection for Berlin Theatertreffen's Stuckemarkt for *THERE HAS POSSIBLY BEEN AN INCIDENT*.

RACHEL CHAVKIN | DRAMATURG

Rachel is a New York based director/dramaturg/writer, and the founding Artistic Director of the TEAM. Rachel received the 2019 Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, and Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Director of a Musical for *Hadestown*. She is a director, writer, and dramaturg, as well as the founding Artistic Director of Brooklyn-based ensemble the TEAM (theteamplays.org) whose work has been seen all over London and the U.K. including the National Theatre, the Royal Court, and multiple collaborations with the National Theatre of Scotland.

In addition to her awards for *Hadestown*, Chavkin is a recipient of a Tony Award nomination for Best Direction of a Musical, three Obie Awards, a Drama Desk Award, multiple Lortel Award nominations, two Doris Duke Impact Award nominations, and the 2017 Smithsonian Award for Ingenuity along with Dave Malloy. Her first film, *Remind Me*, was an official selection of the Venice and Beverly Hills Film Festivals. Upcoming: feature film *Shrew's Nest* (Paramount). Proud NYTW Usual Suspect and Member SDC.

LEKAN LEWAL | DIRECTOR

Lekan is currently Resident Director on *Hamilton* (West End), Associate Creative Director at HOME, Manchester and Associate Artist at the Hackney Showrooms. He was an Artistic Director (Up Next) at Battersea Arts Centre (2017-2019), an Old Vic 12 Director (2016-17) and Resident Director at Derby Theatre with the Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme (2015-2017).

Recent directing includes: *Wild East* (Young Vic, Genesis Future Directors Award), *The Fear* (Mountview/The Bunker), *Assembly* (Company Three), *Superblackman* (Battersea Arts Centre), *Voices in the Dark* (The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse), *Betrayal* (Derby Theatre, Best Director in the Stage Debut Award), *Hybrasil* (Old Vic), *Sucker Punch* (LAMDA), *Stories To Tell In The Middle Of The Night* (Summerhall), *Last Journey* (Pentabus/ Latitude).

CHINA PLATE | PRODUCER

China Plate is an independent theatre studio that works with artists, venues, festivals and funders to develop, make and present engaging, entertaining and accessible new work. Their productions have won multiple industry awards including 5 Fringe First Awards and 3 The Stage Edinburgh Awards and been nominated for an Olivier Award and multiple Offies. Using performance to engage and inspire, they take shows into theatres, village halls, schools, on to the streets and to festivals in the UK and internationally. In 2019, they created, toured and programmed work for over 33,000 people across 134 venues (nationally and internationally), with a diverse programme of shows and events. In 2020 we produced 129 digital events/workshops reaching 31,788 audience members.

REVIEWS FOR STATUS



- ★★★★ *Guardian*
- ★★★★ *Time Out*
- ★★★★ *The Scotsman*
- ★★★★ *The Stage*

FRINGE FIRST AWARD WINNER, Edinburgh Festival Fringe – 2018

"...a dense and provocative barrage of reflections on a world in flux and our place within it." *The Guardian*

"As ever with Chris Thorpe, the words are eloquent, the music essential and powerful, and the performance full of a brilliant, prowling precision..." *Scotsman*

"...a searching, meticulously crafted, beautifully written piece, full of fragile conclusions about nationhood and privilege." *The Stage*

"Status is a sophisticated, hugely confident show, meticulously crafted in Thorpe's bracing monologue and directed with assurance and remarkable insight by Rachel Chavkin..." *ArtsDesk*

"...a scintillating, rigorous critique of something we often take for granted" *Fest Mag*

"Thorpe's metaphysical road trip is grittily real, uncomfortably surreal, densely poetic" *Edinburgh Reporter*

REVIEWS FOR CONFIRMATION



★★★★ *Guardian*
 ★★★★ *Independent*
 ★★★★ *The Scotsman*
 ★★★★ *The Times*

FRINGE FIRST AWARD WINNER, Edinburgh Festival Fringe – 2014

“...an 80 minute-show that makes the brain both hurt and buzz...Confirmation is a show that lets nobody off the hook: not us, and definitely not Thorpe”, *The Guardian*

“Rachel Chavkin’s fast-moving, kinetic production offers us an absolutely compelling performance from a man who is fast becoming one of the most powerful performers in the UK”. *The Scotsman*

“Thorpe and director Rachel Chavkin energetically take a liberal Fringe audience to the edge of the abyss of belief and hang them over the side in a conversation for our times.” *The Independent*

“...Thorpe is out to climb outside of his own head, to experience an opinion he loathes as if it were truly his own.” *The Times*

“Chris Thorpe stares into the abyss so you don't have to.” *Time Out*

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