**NEWS RELEASE Embargoed until 10am Wednesday 24th April**

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| **New rap infused play inspired by *Educating Yorkshire’s* Mushy announced**   * **Rifco Theatre Company’s *Mushy: Lyrically Speaking* will follow Musharaf Asghar’s journey from school boy stammerer to celebrity** * **Written by Artistic Director Pravesh Kumar and rapper Raxstar** * **The show will tour from 6 September to 12 October, finishing in Yorkshire a stone’s throw from Thornhill Community Academy where the documentary was filmed**   **PRESS NIGHT: Watford Palace Theatre Tuesday 10th September**  **@RifcoTheatre | #MushyPlay | Insta: @rifcotheatre |** [**www.rifcotheatre.com**](http://www.rifcotheatre.com) |

**In an uplifting tale of finding a voice, this new production follows the real-life story of Musharaf Asghar, who won the heart of the nation when he overcame his debilitating stammer in the Channel 4 documentary *Educating Yorkshire.*** *Mushy: Lyrically Speaking*recounts the story known and loved by the public of a young man overcoming the odds with the help of an inspirational teacher, then asks what happened next as the teen was hit by the highs and lows of overnight fame. With music playing a crucial role in helping Mushy to find his voice, the show will use rap and lyrical narration written by rapper Raxstar, and the book has been written by Rifco Theatre Company’s Artistic Director Pravesh Kumar. *Mushy: Lyrically Speaking* is a Rifco Studio production presented by Rifco Theatre Company and Watford Palace Theatre.

Musharaf Asghar, also known as ‘Mushy’, was the star of Channel 4’s reality TV series, *Educating Yorkshire*.  In amongst the chaotic comprehensive he was a 16-year-old impeded by an acute stammer which threatened to mute him. But thanks to his enthusiastic teacher, Matthew Burton, Mushy was at last given a voice. The show’s finale revealed an empowered Mushy who spoke to his entire year for the very first time, no longer debilitated by his stutter – his teachers, fellow pupils and the show’s 4m viewers (plus the 7m more who watched the YouTube clip) were brought to tears. Comedian Jack Whitehall called him a “hero”, and Jessica Ennis tweeted that the show made her cry. Mushy now attends events up and down the country as a motivational speaker, a young, positive, Muslim role model.

**Musharaf Asghar said**, “I’m really excited that Rifco Theatre Company is telling my story, everybody remembers the headphones moment but nobody really knows what happened afterwards. That one moment has changed my life and I hope that I can be an inspiration to other people like me.”

**Writer Pravesh Kumar is the Artistic Director of Rifco Theatre Company.** His theatrical directorial debut was in 1999 with a UK tour of *Bollywood - Yet Another Love Story* and he has gone on to achieve critical acclaim for Rifco Theatre Company’s productions including *Pyar Actually*, *The Deranged Marriage, Laila The Musical* and *Britain’s Got Bhangra*. His first short film, *Gods On Mountains* was nominated for the Satyajit Ray Short Film Award in 2009. He was Associate Director on the musical *Wah! Wah! Girls*, which opened in the West End as part of World Stages.

**Pravesh Kumar said, “**I first saw Mushy on a viral video online and his story really moved me. I started to think about what actually happened to him after the television programme, what is his story now? I contacted him and on the phone his confidence just really shone through and his stammer had almost gone. I met with Mushy and Matthew Burton over a few months and started to collect their stories, they were both so honest and forthcoming.  We then took all the research into a workshop with actors and found that music played an important part of the narrative, and a new play infused with rap and lyrical narration was born. I'm genuinely excited about *Mushy: Lyrically Speaking,* it's a rare story about a boy finding his voice.”

**Director Ameet Chana,** best known for his roles in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *EastEnders,* alongside his work on Sunrise Radio’s weekend breakfast show, was recently appointed Rifco’s Associate Director to work with Pravesh Kumar on the Rifco Associates programme and Rifco Digital projects. **This is Ameet’s directorial debut.**

**Lyricist** **Raxstar** is a British Rapper from Luton Town who first came to prominence in 2005 with the song “Keep It Undercover” produced by long-time collaborator Sunit Music. Duality is an integral part of his identity as a British Asian, and his perspective allowed him to create songs like “Jaaneman”. The mixtapes Lost Ones (2008), Spring Cleaning (2010), About A Girl (2011) and Late On Time (2012) continued to showcase his work ethic, versatile subject matter and lyrical prowess. 2018 saw the release of debut studio album Glass Ceiling with features from Arjun, Pav Dharia and Humble the Poet. He kicks off 2019 with his most personal project to date, Artbreak.

**Rifco Theatre Company was founded by Pravesh Kumar in Slough in 1999, and has been Resident Company at Watford Palace Theatre since 2011.** The company develops new plays and musicals that are authentic, topical, thought-provoking, rich and entertaining which celebrate and reflect contemporary British Asian experiences, culture and society. Rifco is committed to diversifying the kind of work in British theatres through five strands: **Rifco Theatre Company**, touring new plays and musicals for the middle scale, **Rifco Studio** for a smaller scale; **Rifco Associates** to develop new talent; **Rifco Digital** to create and distribute content online; and **British Asian Festival**, the biennial, multi-artform celebration of British Asian talent.

The productions media partner is Star Plus. Star Plus is the UK’s leading Asian TV channel on Sky 705, Virgin Media 803, YuppTV. Star Plus is a Hindi language HD general entertainment channel with English subtitles, offering a variety of top rated shows including chart topping dramas, reality, talent shows, international format such as The Voice & MasterChef & has been the top choice for the UK’s loyal 4mn+ Asian diaspora. Star Gold is a dedicated Bollywood movie channel on Sky 729, Virgin Media 801. Star Bharat is available on Sky 704 and Virgin Media 802 & YuppTV.

Sarika Shankarnarayan, Vice President Marketing for Star UK, Europe & South Africa says, “Star Plus is pleased to come on board as the media partner to *Mushy: Lyrically Speaking*, produced by Rifco Theatre Company. At Star we believe powerful stories inspire & connect people and we hope *Mushy: Lyrically Speaking* does the same by bringing alive contemporary British Asian narrative in a manner that is both thought-provoking & richly entertaining.”

**Company information**

**Book by** Pravesh Kumar **Lyrics by** Raxstar

**Director** Ameet Chana **Designer** Eleanor Bull

**Lighting Designer** Robbie Butler **Composer and Sound Designer** Arun Ghosh

**Cast**

TBC

**Listings information**

**6 September to 12 October**

**6 – 15 Sept Watford Palace Theatre**

20 Clarendon Rd, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD17 1JZ

www.watfordpalacetheatre.co.uk | 01923 225671

**26 – 28 Sept Birmingham Rep, Studio**

Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2EP

birmingham-rep.co.uk | 0121 236 4455

**1 – 5 Oct Arcola, London**

24 Ashwin St, Dalston, London E8 3DL

www.arcolatheatre.com | 020 7503 1646

**8 – 12 Oct Leeds Playhouse**

Playhouse Square, Leeds LS2 7UP

Leedsplayhouse.org.uk | 0113 213 7700

**Notes to Editors**

**Rifco Theatre Company**

Artistic Director, Pravesh Kumar founded Rifco Theatre Company in 1999. The company is an Arts Council funded National Portfolio Organisation, and since 2011, has been Resident Company at Watford Palace Theatre.

Rifco develops and produces new plays and musicals, touring nationally to some of the UK’s most prestigious regional theatres. They present theatre of scale and spectacle that is authentic, topical, thought-provoking, rich and entertaining which celebrates and reflects contemporary British Asian experiences, culture and society.

Their success lies in understanding their audience. A vital part of creating new work is through listening and working alongside British Asian communities. Kumar’s work is ‘homegrown’ and he believes in gently challenging perceptions and warmly reflecting the communities he knows.

Rifco is committed to diversifying the kind of work seen in our British theatres. We do this by commissioning British Asian playwrights and working with as many diverse actors, designers, directors that we can find. The company defines its work through five programme strands:

Rifco Theatre Company – new plays and musicals for the middle scale

Rifco Studio – new plays for the smaller scale

Rifco Associates – talent development programme

Rifco Digital – new creative content for distribution online

British Asian Festival – biennial, multi-artform celebration of British Asian talent

**Watford Palace Theatre**

**Watford Palace Theatre** aims to inspire and entertain through inventive, ambitious and inclusive drama, new plays, musicals, dance and family shows; free outdoor festivals; diverse stand-up; and a much-loved traditional pantomime. It aims to reflect its diverse communities, and fully represent women, both onstage and behind the scenes celebrating and developing creativity and skill in the community and its young people. The theatres locally produced shows and home-grown talent have toured nationally and internationally, been seen on BBC iPlayer, won awards and transferred to the West End.  Watford Palace Theatre - inspiration on your doorstep.

Great stories that entertain, provoke and inspire, on stage and in the streets.

Recent productions include *Absurd Person Singular, Much Ado About Nothing*, *Broken Glass*, *Glasses*, *Miss Meena & the Masala Queens*, *I Capture the Castle*, *good dog*, *Folk, Wipers*, *Poppy+George*, *Coming Up, Jefferson’s Garden*, *Love Me Do*, *An Intervention*, *Shiver*, *Virgin, Override*, *Jumpers for Goalposts*, *Our Brother David*, *Our Father* and *Family Business*. Creative Associates are central to Watford Palace Theatre’s vision these include Resident Partner Company Rifco Theatre Company; Creative Associate Companies tiata fahodzi; Scamp Theatre and Up In Arms; and Creative Associates Kate Flatt; Shona Morris; Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti; Charlotte Keatley; Gary Owen, Ruari Murchinson and Timberlake Wertenbaker.

*Media partner: Star Plus. Supported by Arts Council England.*