



**Press Release:** 19 September 2011 - For immediate release

# ***The Beekeeper***

World Premiere receives National Lottery and Arts Council funding

Blackeyed Theatre Company will be supported by The National Lottery through Arts Council England for **The Beekeeper**, a new play by Michael Ashton, which premieres at South Hill Park, Bracknell in October, before performing in London in Spring 2012.

Ashton, who learnt to become a playwright courtesy of the Synergy Theatre Project while serving time in prison, is enjoying growing success for his work, including his previous play, *The Archbishop* and the *AntiChrist*, which is to be adapted into a film directed by Roland Joffe and starring Sidney Poitier.

It is December 1944 at Monowicze, one of the labour camps at Auschwitz. Amidst the desperation and inhumanity of the Holocaust, an incredible power struggle develops between Kommandant Richard Baer and one of his prisoners, Manachem Stressler, a German Jew who survives by harvesting honey from the camp's bee hives for his captors. With Russian tanks advancing to liberate the camp, Baer's growing despair pushes both men to their limits as they seek redemption and a return to their humanity. Based on real life events, **The Beekeeper** is the incredible story of two men, the nature of power and the strength of the human spirit.

Michael Ashton was a human rights lawyer and served in the army before being sent to prison in 2007, where his inspiration for **The Beekeeper** materialised. Michael says, "When I was sent to prison I was abandoned by everyone and I often used to ruminate on why I couldn't be forgiven. Am I so terrible? So wicked? Menachem Stressler is trapped in a situation that has become his life, his world, and in most respects, as a survivor, he is utterly selfish. He does not begin to focus on the fate of his loved ones until it seems that he may even survive the camp. Richard Baer is also trapped, by politics and ideology, and in the end only martyrdom is how he perceives freedom. I deserved to go to prison, but my punishment wasn't imprisonment. It was being trapped and confined and losing everything I loved. Trapped, helpless, redemption, forgiveness, the search for what it means to be human, these are the themes which pepper my work."

He continues, "I was keen to write something about the Holocaust which highlighted the fact that certain elements of the German psyche were as much trapped by the situation they found themselves in as were the inmates of the camps. It is the old analogy about being bitten by an angry dog - don't be surprised if the dog behaves like a dog. But I didn't want the story to be just yet another Holocaust

**Blackeyed Theatre, South Hill Park, Ringmead, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 0TU**



horror story. Tedious. People are inured to violence these days and if you want to see death just watch the news or go on You Tube. No, it had to be a different angle. Hence **The Beekeeper.**"

**The Beekeeper** will first be performed from 25 - 29 October at South Hill Park Arts Centre in Bracknell, with a London Fringe run being planned for Spring 2012. The play will be directed by Martin Jady.

**Pulse** is Blackeyed Theatre's initiative to encourage exciting new writing and provide writers with the chance to have their work produced in a professional environment and receive support and feedback for their future development. The scheme furthers Blackeyed Theatre's aim to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences, balance audience needs with groundbreaking ideas and create exciting, sustainable theatre.

Blackeyed Theatre is a nationally-renowned producer of challenging mid-scale touring theatre. Audiences can find out more at [www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk](http://www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk) .

**Ends.**

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