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FACTORY INTERNATIONAL, IMPROBABLE AND NICA BURNS PRESENT  
THE WEST END PREMIERE OF  
**TAO OF GLASS**

BY PHILIP GLASS AND PHELIM McDERMOTT

OPENING @SOHOPLACE FROM 24 JULY 2026

**Factory International, Improbable** and **Nica Burns** today announce the West End premiere of *Tao of Glass*, composed by **Philip Glass**, written by **Phelim McDermott**. The production originally opened at Manchester International Festival and will run at **@sohoplace theatre**, 24 July – 12 September 2026, with press night on Thursday 30 July at 7pm.

*An exploration of life, loss and a single question: Where does true inspiration come from?*

*Composer Philip Glass and performer-director Phelim McDermott (Improbable) have worked together on acclaimed opera productions in London, New York and beyond, and Tao of Glass is their most personal collaboration yet. Inspired by a dream, this West End premiere marries ten meditations on life, death and Taoist wisdom with ten brand new pieces of music from Glass, presented by McDermott with an ensemble of musicians and puppeteers.*

*Part-concert, part-performance, Tao of Glass is a storytelling tapestry, soundtracked by Glass's mesmerising music and shot through with Improbable's trademark theatricality.*

**Philip Glass** said, "I am pleased that Tao of Glass will receive its London premiere this summer. It's always a pleasure to work with Phelim. Tao of Glass is a true theater collaboration, the culmination of many years of deep admiration and respect for each other."

**Phelim McDermott** said, "Bringing Tao of Glass to @sohoplace feels like completing a full circle. This show was devised through a deeply collaborative process — Philip and I playing together in

downtown New York, riffing and discovering how music, story, and image could grow from the same source.

To now share his specially composed music in such a beautiful space — designed for intimacy, sound, and connection — feels perfect. @sohoplac has that rare combination of openness and focus that invites the audience into the dream with us: a place where imagination, storytelling, and sound can truly resonate.”

**Nica Burns** said, “An utterly original, fascinating piece of theatre with the most beautiful music, by world famous composer Philip Glass, performed by the exceptional Phelim McDermott accompanied by a talented ensemble of musicians and puppeteers. Perfect in the beautiful, intimate auditorium of @sohoplac. What an extraordinary and exciting collaboration by two internationally celebrated artists.”

**John McGrath, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Factory International** said: “*Tao of Glass* was a massive hit when it premiered at Manchester International Festival in 2019, and we’re really proud to have produced it and taken it around the world with *Improbable*. We’ve always wanted the show to be seen in London, and we are thrilled that it will be opening in the West End @sohoplac. Philip and Phelim are artists we are so proud to work with, and this is one of their most extraordinary creations.”

The creative team are Composer: **Philip Glass**, Writer & Co-Director: **Phelim McDermott**; Co-Director: **Kirsty Housley**; Designer: **Fly Davis**; Lighting Designer: **Colin Grenfell**; Sound Designer: **Giles Thomas**; Musical Director: **Chris Vatalaro**; Puppet Designer & Puppet Maker: **Lyndie Wright**.

Tickets are on sale now via [sohoplac.org](https://sohoplac.org).

Commissioned by Factory International, Manchester, *Improbable*, Perth Festival, Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen, Hong Kong New Vision Arts Festival and Carolina Performing Arts – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in association with Naomi Milgrom AO. *Tao of Glass* originally premiered at Manchester International Festival 2019.

#### **Philip Glass** | Composer

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Philip Glass is a graduate of the University of Chicago and the Juilliard School. In the early 1960s, Glass spent two years of intensive study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and, while there, earned money by transcribing Ravi Shankar’s Indian music into Western notation. By 1974, Glass had a number of innovative projects creating a large collection of new music for The Philip Glass Ensemble and for the Mabou Mines Theater Company. This period culminated in *Musician Twelve Parts* and the landmark opera *Einstein on the Beach*, for which he collaborated with Robert Wilson. Since *Einstein*, Glass has expanded his repertoire to include music for opera, dance, theater, chamber ensemble, orchestra and film. His scores have received Academy Award nominations (*Kundun*, *The Hours*, *Notes on a Scandal*) and a Golden Globe (*The Truman Show*). Glass’s memoir *Words Without Music* was published by Liveright Books in 2015. Glass received the Praemium Imperiale in 2012, the U.S. National Medal of the Arts from President Barack Obama in 2016, and 41<sup>st</sup> Kennedy Center Honors in 2018. Glass’s recent works include a circus opera *Circus Days and Nights*, *Symphony No.13*, and *Symphony No.14*.

#### **Phelim McDermott** | Writer & Co-Director

Phelim is a founder member of *Improbable* and the company’s co-artistic director. In addition to *Tao of Glass* *Improbable* credits include: *70 Hill Lane*; *Lifegame*; *Animo*; *Coma*; *Spirit*; *Sticky*; *Cinderella*; *The Hanging Man*; *Theatre of Blood* (in collaboration with the National Theatre); *Panic*; *Beauty and*

*the Beast* (in co-production with ONEOFUS); *The Tempest* (a co-production with Northern Stage and Oxford Playhouse); *Opening Skinners Box* (a co-production with Northern Stage and West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Lost Without Words* (a co-production with the National Theatre), *My Neighbour Totoro* (RSC and Nippon TV at Barbican) winner of six Olivier Awards including Best Director and Best Entertainment of Comedy Play and five WhatsOnStage Awards also including Best Director. Opera credits with Improbable include: Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* (ENO, LA Opera); *The Perfect American*, the Olivier and Grammy Award-winning *Akhnaten*, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (ENO and Metropolitan Opera, NY); *Aida* (ENO) and; *Bambino*, an opera for babies (originally co-produced with Manchester International Festival and Scottish Opera, now with LA Opera); *The Hours* (Metropolitan Opera). Other productions as director include: the Olivier Award-winning *Shockheaded Peter*; *Alex* (The Arts Theatre); *The Ghost Downstairs* (Leicester Haymarket); *Dr Faustus, Improbable Tales* (Nottingham Playhouse); *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; *The Government Inspector* (West Yorkshire Playhouse) and Artistic Collaborator on *She's Leaving Home* (produced by 20 Stories High). *Phelim* is a recipient of the International Society for the Performing Arts' Distinguished Artist Award, NESTA Fellowship and OBIE Award Winner for Outstanding Achievement in Off Broadway Theatre for 70 Hill Lane.

### **Kirsty Housley | Co-Director**

Kirsty is a director, writer and dramaturg working across theatre, film and digital. Recent work includes *RISE* (opening of Bradford City of Culture with Dynamo/Steven Frayne); *Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth* (National Theatre Connections, as writer) *Public Interest* (Common/Wealth, as dramaturg); *Cutting The Tighrope: The Divorce of Politics and Art* (Arcola Theatre/Edinburgh International Festival); *ECHO* (Royal Court, as dramaturg), *Drive Your Plow Over The Bones Of The Dead* (Co Director, Complicité); *Jekyll & Hyde* (National Theatre tour); *Horse* (Matthew Herbert/Edinburgh International Festival/Barbican); *Hope* (Clean Break), *Can I Live?* (Complicité Theatre, as Dramaturg); *Extinct* (Theatre Royal Stratford East); *The Long Goodbye Livestream* (Riz Ahmed/MIF/BAM), *Avalanche: A Love Story* (Barbican/Sydney Theatre, as dramaturg) *Rich Kids: A History of Shopping Malls in Tehran* (Traverse Theatre/Sundance Film Festival/Under The Radar fest NYC); *Mephisto: A Rhapsody* (Gate Theatre); *Tao of Glass* (Manchester International Festival/Royal Exchange); *I'm A Phoenix, Bitch* (Battersea Arts Centre); *The Believers are But Brothers* (Javaad Alipoor Company), *Misty* (Bush/West End, as dramaturg). *Myth* (RSC, also as co writer) and *The Encounter* (co director with Simon McBurney for Complicité).

[www.sohoplace.org](http://www.sohoplace.org)

Instagram: **sohoplace**

Facebook: **sohoplace**

X: **sohoplancelondon**

### **BOX OFFICE INFORMATION**

#### **Box Office**

[www.sohoplace.org](http://www.sohoplace.org)

0330 333 5961

4 Soho Place | London | W1D 3BG

Access Bookings/Customer Ticketing Enquiries: 0330 333 5962

Group Bookings: 0330 333 5963

**@sohoplace**

**24 July – 12 September 2026**

Press Night: Thursday 30 July at 7pm

### **Ticket prices**

From £25

Groups and education rates available

Fair access: 50% off across all bands

### **Access @sohoplac**

BSL interpreted and Audio Described: Saturday 15 August, 2.30pm

Captioned performance: Friday 21 August, 7.30pm

Chilled performance: Saturday 29 August, 2.30pm

Audio Described performance: Thursday 3 September, 7.30pm

@sohoplac has wheelchair access on stalls level and wider seats available for patrons with access needs.

[access@sohoplac.org](mailto:access@sohoplac.org)

### **Ticketing @sohoplac**

@sohoplac has contactless ticketing for every performance. Tickets will be issued electronically 48 hours prior to the performance.

[boxoffice@sohoplac.org](mailto:boxoffice@sohoplac.org)

### **Cloakroom @sohoplac**

The theatre has a large cloakroom that can be used by all patrons free of charge. Out of respect for patrons and the auditorium, we request that large bags are checked into the cloak room.

### **Feedback @sohoplac**

We welcome all feedback on patrons' experience with the venue and encourage patrons to email us

[feedback@sohoplac.org](mailto:feedback@sohoplac.org)

### NOTES TO EDITORS

#### **FACTORY INTERNATIONAL**

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios.

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year.

Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester.

Aviva Studios was designed by the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), with Ellen van Loon as lead architect – their first major public building in the UK. Its development was led by Manchester City Council, with backing from HM Government and National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Ultra-flexible in design, the building is based around large, open, adaptable spaces that can be

constantly reconfigured, enabling artists to develop and create large-scale work of invention and ambition of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world. A unique canvas to make, explore and experiment, audiences can enjoy the broadest range of art forms - from major exhibitions and concerts to intimate performances and immersive experiences.

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

[factoryinternational.org](http://factoryinternational.org)

### **IMPROBABLE**

Now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, Improbable is an award-winning theatre company which defies categorisation. Led by co-artistic directors Phelim McDermott, Lee Simpson and Matilda Leyser. At the heart of Improbable's artistic practice is improvisation. Whether in performance, rehearsal or development, the practice and philosophy of improvisation is at the core of the creative process and has created an extraordinary body of work across 3 decades.

Other recent on-stage collaborations and projects have included: *My Neighbour Totoro*, Royal Shakespeare Company, Nippon TV (winner five What's On Stage Awards and six Olivier Awards including Best Director for McDermott); *The Hours*, Metropolitan Opera; *Akhmaten* (Olivier Award winner for Best Opera Production, Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording), English National Opera; *Perfect Show for Rachel* created by Zoo Co at Barbican (winner Off West End Award, Access); *An Improbable Musical*, Royal & Derngate, Northampton. We were awarded Producer of the Year at The Stage Awards in 2023.

Beyond our work on stage, we use Open Space Technology to create and hold diverse and deeply democratic spaces that bring communities together to work on urgent issues. We do this for the theatre sector through our Devoted & Disgruntled programme and work with other sectors and organisations more widely to support important conversations to happen through Open Space For Hire and Improbable For Business. Improbable leads M/Others Who Make, an international network for women and non-binary people who care about creating, and create whilst caring.

### **NICA BURNS / @SOHOPLACE**

Nica Burns CBE is a multi-award winning producer of over 100 productions. Artistic Director at the Donmar Warehouse from 1983 to 1989 and Production Director of Really Useful Theatres from 1993 to 2005. She founded Nimax Theatres in 2005 with her business partner Max Weitzenhoffer and is Chief Executive and co-owner of the Palace, Lyric, Apollo, Garrick, Vaudeville and Duchess. Nica was made a Fellow of University College London in 2007 and elected President of the Society of London Theatre 2008-2010. Since 1984 she has been Director of the most prestigious live comedy prize in the UK, the Edinburgh Comedy Awards.

In October 2022 she concluded a 12-year design and build journey opening @sohoplacE, the first new West End theatre in 50 years. @sohoplacE is a new model, an art house theatre in the West End with inclusion at its heart. Since opening its productions have received two Oliver Awards, and a further six nominations. Previous productions include *Marvellous*, *As You Like It*, *Medea*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Little Big Things*, the award-winning *Red Pitch*, *Death of England: The Plays*, *White*

*Rabbit Red Rabbit, A Christmas Carol (ish), the Olivier-nominated Kyoto, the sold-out The Fifth Step and Every Brilliant Thing.* Now in its 4<sup>th</sup> year its upcoming productions include *Marie and Rosetta*.

Nica's awards include 2013 Private Business Woman of the Year and an OBE for services to theatre. Post Covid, Producer of the Year at the 2021 The Stage awards, a Commendation for Exceptional Theatre Making During Lockdown at the Critics Circle Awards, Evening Standard Special Award for Theatre, Special Award for Services to UK Theatre at the WhatsOnStage Awards. In 2024 she was voted number 2 in The Stage's top 100 most influential figures in theatre coming second to the National Theatre team.

In 2018 Nica was presented with an OBE by her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and in June 2024 she was awarded a CBE in the King's Birthday Honours.

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