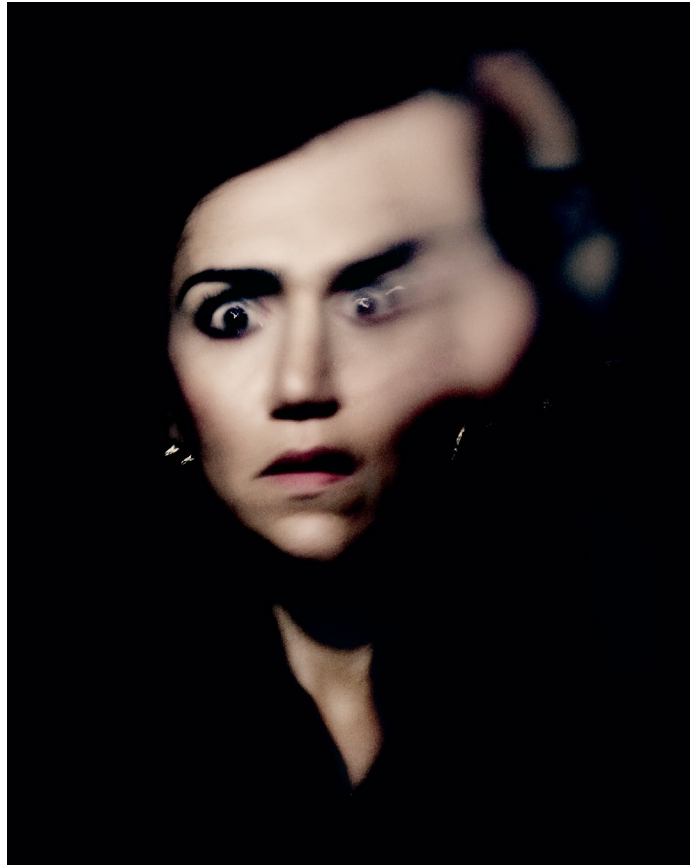


# **ALMEIDA THEATRE**

## Content Information Pack



### **Under the Shadow**

**Based on the film by Babak Anvari**

**Adapted by Carmen Nasr**

**Directed by Nadia Latif**

# The Production

Running time and interval:

The running time of the play is **2 hours and 15 minutes, including an interval.**  
The first part is 1 hour and 20 minutes, and the second part is 40 minutes.

Characters:



**Shideh**



**Iraj**



**Mrs Fakur**



**Mrs Ebrahimi**



**Mr Ebrahimi / Doctor**



**Pargol / Secretary**



**Mr Bijari / Director**

**The following three performers will alternate the role of Dorsa:**














**The following three performers will alternate the role of Mehdi:**



# The Production

Content Guidance:

*Under the Shadow* contains:

	<b>Strong language</b>		<b>Alcohol use</b>
	<b>Misogyny</b>		<b>Sudden blackouts</b>
	<b>Flashing and flickering lights</b>		<b>Burning of efsand seeds</b>
	<b>Haze</b>		<b>Jump scares</b>
	<b>Almonds and walnuts consumed on stage</b>		<b>Sudden loud noises including sirens</b>
	<b>Depictions of death, grief, war, bombing, political oppression, illness, and violence including against children, as well as a graphic description of injured soldiers.</b>		

For a more detailed breakdown of the timings of the above content, please see the following page.

# Sensory Timeline

## Act One:

26 minutes: **Sudden loud sirens.**

26 - 32 minutes: **Intermittent distant bombing.**

30 minutes: **Almonds and walnuts being consumed on stage.**

31 minutes: **Sudden and loud bombing.**

37 minutes: **Sudden partial blackout for approx. 3 minutes.**

40 minutes: **Mild jump scare.**

52 minutes: **Sudden blackout and siren.**

52 – 58 minutes: **Loud bombing.**

1 hour: **Succession of distant bombs, a sudden loud noise and a prolonged blackout, followed by haze.**

1 hour, 3 minutes: **Depiction of death.**

1 hour, 15 minutes: **Prolonged blackout. A torch shines through the audience. Substantial jump scare.**

## Act Two:

16 minutes: **The burning of efsand seeds.**

20 minutes: **Misogynistic language.**

22 minutes: **Blackout.**

30 minutes: **Depictions of violence, including children. Flickering lights and abrupt lighting changes.**

31 minutes: **Prolonged blackout.**

35 minutes: **Prolonged blackout.**

# Plot Synopsis

## BRIEF SYNOPSIS

It is March 1988, eight years into the Iran-Iraq War and nine years after the Islamic Revolution that brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power. When Shideh's husband is conscripted to serve on the frontline, she is left alone in their Tehran apartment with her young daughter Dorsa as the city is bombed. As the war intensifies, Shideh and her neighbours face an impossible decision: whether to stay or leave. At the same time, something far more sinister appears to take hold of the building and its inhabitants.

## CHARACTERS AND RELATIONSHIPS

**Shideh Bozorgmehr** - barred from returning to her medical studies due to her anti-regime activity, she is wife to **Iraj**, a doctor sent to serve on the frontline as a medic, and mother to **Dorsa**.

**Mr** and **Mrs Ebrahimi** are the landlords in the building, a more traditional and devoutly Muslim couple, they are expecting a baby very soon. They have also had to take in **Mehdi**, Mr Ebrahimi's nephew, who was orphaned recently in a missile strike.

**Pargol** lives upstairs as a full-time carer for her father **Mr Bijari**, who is suffering from dementia. Also upstairs is **Mrs Fakur**, a former teacher and kindred spirit to Shideh.

Some of the actors play more than one character. We also meet the **Director of Admissions** to the University and his **Secretary**, as well as another **Doctor**, who is a friend of Shideh and Iraj.

## **SETTING**

The story unfolds in a detailed, naturalistic representation of a 1980s middle-class apartment in Tehran. The set shows an open-plan living and dining room with a partial view into the kitchen. A hallway and doors lead off to the unseen bedrooms and bathroom. On one side of the stage, the front door opens onto an unseen stairwell, with a large window overlooking the street outside.

The apartment is clean, smart, and comfortably furnished. The décor, including art, ornaments, and personal objects, hints at the couple's cosmopolitan background. Bookshelves are filled with medical textbooks in both Farsi and English, alongside family photographs of Shideh, Iraj, and a younger Dorsa. In the living area there is also a small toybox belonging to Dorsa.

## **RUNNING TIME AND INTERVAL**

The play lasts for 2 hours and 15 minutes including an interval that lasts about 15 minutes. Act One is about 1 hour 20 minutes, Act Two is about 40 minutes.

## **CONTENT AND THEMES**

### **ACT ONE**

- Loud war sounds (explosions, sirens, anti-aircraft fire, missile strikes)

- Strong language and swearing
- Emotional and psychological distress, grief, and family arguments
- Depictions of and references to dementia and incontinence
- Alcohol use (brief)
- Death, failed CPR, and intense grief
- References to authoritarian regime, political blacklisting, and imprisonment
- Child in distress (fear, nightmares, bedwetting)
- Sudden blackouts and lighting changes
- Supernatural horror, jump scares, and frightening visual effects (including sudden djinn appearances and audience-scanning torch sequences)  
Please note these effects also appear in Act 2.
- References to djinn and supernatural elements

## **ACT TWO**

- Intensified psychological distress, paranoia, and mental deterioration
- Verbal/emotional abuse (including aggressive threats involving a child)
- Child in peril and psychological torment
- Physical violence (a mother slapping her child)
- Sudden blackouts, flickering lights, and intense sound design throughout.
- The play explores maternal guilt, isolation, and the impact of war and oppression. The final scene features a highly emotional climax with strong supernatural horror elements.

**Please note that the play builds gradually. Content is generally more intense in Act Two, with the strongest psychological distress, supernatural horror, and emotional climax occurring at the end of Act One and in the final scene (Act Two Scene 8).**

## **SENSORY AND STAGING OVERVIEW**

### **Sound:**

- Loud war effects (explosions, sirens, anti-aircraft fire).

- Low, subtle underscore during tense and psychological moments that heightens anxiety and unease.
- Raised voices and emotional outbursts.

### **Lighting:**

- Sudden blackouts (Act 1 Prologue, Scene 7, 8. Act 2 Scene 5, 8)
- Flickering lights in transitions
- Several scenes are very dark or take place in near-total darkness (including extended low-light and candle/torch-lit moments).
- Torchlight that briefly passes over the audience.

### **Staging:**

- Most scenes feature Shideh (and often Dorsa) onstage, with other characters entering and exiting as neighbours or in other locations. There are occasional brief moments where the stage is empty.

## **SCENE BY SCENE SYNOPSIS**

## Prologue

**Content Warnings:** News references to war, violence and death; loud aircraft / plane, gunfire and bombing sounds.

A young boy stands in front of curtains that cover the front of the space. 'Tehran 1988' is projected on the curtains in English and Farsi. The sound of news broadcasts in Farsi and English about the war between Iraq and Iran, alongside the sounds of war. A plane flies overhead, the boy looks up to follow the sound, there is a blackout and he disappears.

### ACT ONE: Scene 1

**Content Warnings:** Strong language; raised voices; references to war, violence and authoritarian regime; loud sounds of sirens; inappropriate joke told by a child.

The curtains open to reveal the apartment. Shideh secretly works out to a Jane Fonda workout tape. She is interrupted by phone calls and a visit from her neighbour Mrs Fakur, who tells her she is on a list and is unlikely to be allowed back to university to complete her medical studies. While grieving this news, Shideh's daughter Dorsa returns from playing downstairs with Mehdi, an orphan who has been taken in by the building's landlords, the Ebrahimi family.

After Mrs Fakur leaves, Shideh begins throwing away her medical textbooks. Dorsa makes Shideh promise to keep the special book given to her by her mother, which Shideh locks away safely. Iraj returns from an overnight hospital shift and gifts Dorsa a doll, which she names Kimia.

A family lunch follows, which becomes tense when Dorsa tells an inappropriate joke she learned from Mehdi. This sparks an argument between Iraj and Shideh. We learn that Iraj has been conscripted to serve in Ilam on the frontline. Iraj and Shideh argue about their future under the war and the regime, and whether Shideh and Dorsa should stay in Tehran or go north for

safety whilst Iraj is in Ilam. An air-raid siren interrupts them, forcing the family to take shelter in the basement.

## Scene 2

**Content Warnings:** References to war; loud sounds of bombing; depictions of dementia, incontinence/soiling.

Shideh, Iraj and Dorsa shelter in the basement with the other building residents during a bombing raid. The neighbours debate whether to stay in Tehran or flee north for safety. Mr and Mrs Ebrahimi argue they should stay for political reasons, while Mr Bijari says they should remain because it is their home. Shideh and Mrs Fakur also want to stay, dismissing talk of missiles as rumours. Pargol wants to leave with her father, and Iraj urges Shideh and Dorsa to head north.

They hear anti-aircraft guns firing. A loud explosion shakes the basement. In the panic, Mr Bijari soils himself, prompting Dorsa to tell another crude joke.

## Scene 3

**Content Warnings:** Strong language; references to war; moments of heightened emotion and a child bedwetting.

Shideh unpacks her medical books from the bin bag and returns them to the shelves. Iraj has put Dorsa to bed and prepares to leave for the frontline. Before departing, he urges Shideh to take Dorsa north for safety; she promises she will if things get worse.

After Iraj leaves, the lights fail due to a power cut. Dorsa enters, having wet herself because she lost Kimia and was too scared to go to the bathroom without her. When Shideh asks why, Dorsa explains that Mehdi has told her about djinn, evil spirits that want to hurt them. Shideh dismisses the djinn as silly stories. The lights come back on and they leave to go to bed.

#### Scene 4

**Content Warnings:** Depiction of authoritarian regime.

Shideh goes to the University to speak to the Director of Admissions but is met by his hostile secretary. Once the secretary learns Shideh's name, she tells her she should not return as it is very likely that she will not be seen. Shideh insists she will keep coming back every day until she is allowed to plead her case.

#### Scene 5

**Content Warnings:** References to war and violence; references to dementia; references to death; shouting; air raid siren.

Mrs Ebrahimi brings Dorsa home, having found Kimia in Mehdi's room. Shideh asks her to tell Mehdi to stop scaring Dorsa. Mrs Ebrahimi is taken aback and reveals that Mehdi has not spoken at all since witnessing his parents being killed by a missile. She believes he is possessed and that something is wrong in the building. Shideh laughs this off, but Mrs Ebrahimi urges her to stay vigilant.

After Mrs Ebrahimi leaves, Dorsa sets up a tea party. Shideh, wanting to rest, refuses to play. Pargol arrives and asks for Shideh's advice, explaining she is caring for her father Mr Bijari in the same way Shideh once cared for her mother. Pargol begs Shideh to convince Mr Bijari to move north, believing he will listen to her. Shideh promises she will, and Pargol leaves.

Shideh then agrees to play with Dorsa and asks what Mehdi told her. As Dorsa says Mehdi told her, "they were coming," they receive a call from Iraj. Loud explosions are heard on the line before it cuts off. Shideh turns on the radio for news. Angry that her mother has stopped playing, Dorsa upsets Shideh, who throws Kimia across the room. Dorsa threatens to break Shideh's Jane Fonda tape. They are interrupted by an air-raid siren.

#### Scene 6

**Content Warnings:** References to war; loud sounds of bombing; depictions of dementia.

The neighbours shelter together in the basement once again, and there is a tense conversation around whether to stay in Tehran or flee north. Pargol asks Shideh to speak to her father as they agreed, but Shideh is silent. As the sounds of bombing gets louder and louder – with no anti-aircraft guns in response – the group becomes increasingly afraid and on edge. Mr Bijari tells Dorsa a scary story.

### **Scene 7**

**Content Warnings:** Emotional distress; sudden missile strike/building damage; sudden blackout; depictions of failed CPR / onstage death and grief.

Back in the apartment, Shideh works out to her Jane Fonda tape. Dorsa enters and ignores her. Shideh apologises for throwing Kimia, and tries to get her to eat. As Dorsa eats and watches TV with Kimia, the sounds of bombing begin and grow closer. A missile strikes the apartment, tearing a hole in the ceiling.

Dorsa says she saw “them” and that “they’re here.” As Shideh tries to pull Dorsa out of the door, the neighbours burst in carrying an unconscious Mr Bijari. Pargol begs Shideh to save her father. Shideh attempts CPR, but Mr Bijari dies. Pargol wails as his body is taken away by a paramedic. Shideh remains in shock.

As day turns to night, Shideh notices the curtains blowing although the windows are closed. She hears footsteps upstairs in the Bijaris’ apartment, and the TV suddenly turns on by itself.

### **Scene 8**

**Content Warnings:** Emotional distress, sudden blackouts; jump scares; torch pointed into audience.

Shideh and Mrs Fakur clear debris from the missile strike. Shideh is in shock and feeling guilty about being unable to save Mr Bijari's life. Mrs Fakur reassures her, and they both have a drink of alcohol to calm their nerves. Shideh confesses she thinks there is a djinn in the apartment; Mrs Fakur laughs it off.

Dorsa emerges and says she has lost Kimia, claiming the djinn took it and that she needs to go upstairs to find it. Mrs Fakur dismisses this, but Dorsa suddenly develops a fever. Shideh puts her to sleep on the sofa. Mrs Fakur reveals her son in Paris has booked her a plane ticket to leave Iran the next day.

Pargol arrives, in deep shock. She is leaving to bury her father in Kurdistan. She begs Dorsa to tell everyone what she saw when the missile hit, and reveals that Mr Bijari only had his heart attack after seeing something horrifying that she couldn't see. Pargol confronts Shideh for not persuading Mr Bijari to leave. Mrs Fakur escorts her out.

Shideh puts on cartoons for Dorsa and they both fall asleep on the sofa. Shideh wakes in the night to a scuttling sound from upstairs. There is a power cut, Shideh lights candles, but when she returns Dorsa has disappeared and the candles are mysteriously blown out. As Shideh searches the apartment with a torch, she catches a horrifying quick glimpse of a black creature with long fingers.

**Blackout. End of Act One.**

**INTERVAL**

**ACT TWO**

**Scene 1**

**Content Warnings:** Emotional distress; threat of physical punishment of a child; references to death (terminal illness); themes of abandonment.

Shideh calls Mr Ebrahimi to search the apartment. He finds no sign of a break-in and assures her no one is there. Before leaving, he asks her not to tell Mrs Ebrahimi about seeing the djinn, and reminds her to fix her car tyres, which are flat, leaving the car stuck in the garage. Dorsa's fever continues to worsen.

Mrs Fakur arrives to say goodbye and urges Shideh to take Dorsa to the doctor and then head north for safety. After she leaves, Shideh searches for her Jane Fonda tape and discovers it ruined in the bin. She accuses Dorsa of breaking it. Dorsa insists the djinn took Kimia, and now want something of Shideh's too. Dorsa runs to the front door, banging on it desperately to go upstairs and find Kimia. Shideh restrains her, Dorsa kicks her, and Shideh raises her hand as if to slap her. Dorsa runs off to her bedroom. Shideh throws the ruined tape away and exits.

## Scene 2

**Content Warnings:** Reference to death; references to authoritarian regime.

A doctor visits the apartment to assess Dorsa. He tells Shideh there is no sign of infection and believes the fever may be stress-related. He encourages her to take Dorsa north, out of the city, to recover. He also mentions that a former classmate of theirs, who was blacklisted, has been accepted back into university after appealing directly to the Director of Admissions. Shideh thanks him and he leaves.

## Scene 3

**Content Warnings:** Depiction of authoritarian regime; references to war and violence.

Shideh tries to force her way into the Admissions Office of the university, and is pushed back by the secretary. She desperately reiterates that she needs to

speak to the Director of Admissions. The secretary reprimands her for not being properly covered, reminding her that men are becoming martyrs on the frontline to protect Iranian values. She adds that if Shideh had shown more modesty and humility, she might have considered helping her.

#### **Scene 4**

**Content Warnings:** Graphic descriptions of war, violence and death; descriptions of djinn; burning of esfand.

Mrs Ebrahimi tells Shideh that Dorsa has become much more unwell while she was at the university. Shideh grows increasingly worried about her daughter's deteriorating health. Mrs Ebrahimi is convinced Dorsa's illness is caused by djinn in the building, and senses that Shideh is beginning to believe her. Mrs Ebrahimi explains that djinn travel on the wind and possess vulnerable people. Once they take a personal item, such as Dorsa's doll Kimia, they can follow the owner anywhere and torment them.

Mrs Ebrahimi has brought esfand for Shideh to burn, and offers to get a protective prayer locket for Dorsa. Shideh thanks her, saying she wants Dorsa to get better. Mrs Ebrahimi announces that she and her husband are leaving Tehran for the north and urges Shideh to do the same before exiting.

Shideh burns the esfand as night falls.

#### **Scene 5**

**Content Warnings:** References to death; references to djinn and haunting; strong and abusive language; suspense; sudden blackout; jump scare/ creature glimpse.

Shideh turns around and finds Mehdi standing in the apartment. He suddenly speaks, saying he has come to say goodbye to Dorsa before he leaves. Shideh invites him to play backgammon, as his mother used to play with him. Mehdi

asks if Dorsa has found her doll and warns Shideh that the djinn will take something of hers too, like the special book from her mother. He leaves, urging her to find Kimia before something bad happens.

The phone rings. It is Iraj, and we hear his voice as well as Shideh's. As the conversation continues, his voice becomes increasingly aggressive with vocal distortion. The line cuts out and Iraj's face appears to Shideh on the TV instead, where he becomes verbally abusive. Shideh screams and the TV cuts off.

There is a tapping at the window. Shideh slowly opens the curtains, but no one is there. Dorsa calls out for her, saying she has been sick, and Shideh exits.

Blackout. The lights flash on briefly, revealing a sudden horrifying image of a creature in the apartment.

## **Scene 6**

**Content Warnings:** Emotional distress.

Shideh wakes on the sofa with Dorsa to find Mrs Ebrahimi standing over her. Dorsa has become even sicker and has now stopped eating. Mrs Ebrahimi places the prayer locket around Dorsa's neck and urges Shideh to leave with them for the north that night. Shideh finally agrees. Mrs Ebrahimi warns her they must be back by 5pm as Mr Ebrahimi will not wait. Shideh tells her she has one last important thing to do before they leave.

## **Scene 7**

**Content Warnings:** References to and depiction of authoritarian regime.

Shideh forces her way past the secretary with Dorsa and confronts the Director of Admissions. He orders Dorsa to be taken out so they can speak privately. Shideh pleads her case and begs to be allowed back into university. The Director asks whether her studies matter more to her than her daughter.

Shideh is stunned but continues to plead. He finally tells her she will never be permitted to return and orders her to leave.

## Scene 8

**Content Warnings:** Shouting; sounds of bombing; blackouts; suspense; frightening moments; mother slapping child; psychological torment of a child; supernatural possession-like elements; intense maternal grief and breakdown.

Shideh runs back into the apartment with Dorsa. They are now alone in the building. They search desperately for Kimia, as Dorsa is terrified to leave without her doll. Shideh sends Dorsa to check her room. When Dorsa returns, she shouts at her mother and they struggle.

There is a sudden knock at the door. Dorsa says she can see a lady that Shideh cannot. Books fly off the shelves by themselves. Dorsa claims the lady speaks to her, accusing Shideh of hiding Kimia and calling her a horrible mother. Shideh slaps Dorsa. Dorsa flees through the front door. As Shideh tries to follow, the door slams shut and locks.

Suddenly, Dorsa appears from the bedroom asking what is happening. Shideh, believing this is a djinn, threatens her with scissors and runs out. Dorsa is left alone.

Repeated blackouts follow. A djinn appears at the front door. The tablecloth moves on its own. Terrified, Dorsa calls for her mother as hands reach for her from inside the TV. A djinn in the shape of a pregnant woman in a chador

appears, holding Kimia. Dorsa moves towards her as Shideh bursts back through the door.

Shideh begs Dorsa not to go to the lady. Dorsa reaches for Kimia and takes the djinn's hand. Shideh desperately pleads with her, speaking of her loneliness and how much she misses her own mother. She tells Dorsa she loves her. Dorsa runs back into her mother's arms and the djinn disappears.

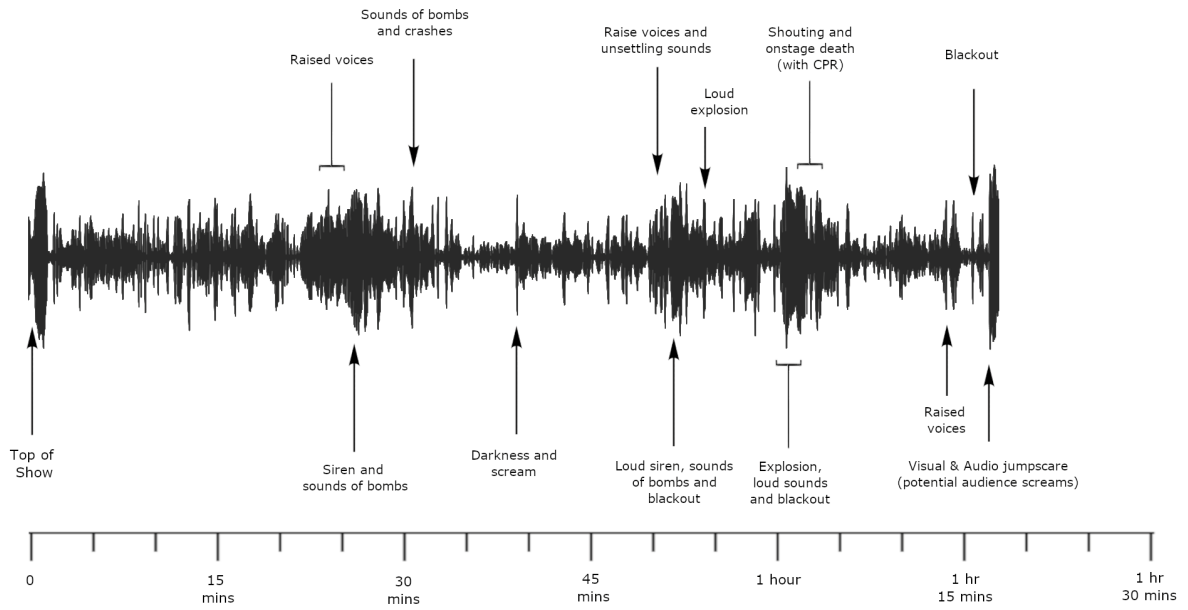
Daylight fades up. Dorsa's fever has broken. She asks if they can leave for the north; Shideh agrees. Dorsa reminds her to take the special book from her grandmother, but it has vanished. As they prepare to leave, the air-raid siren sounds. Shideh freezes, then decides to stay. She sits on the floor with Dorsa, promising they will leave as soon as the shelling stops. Dorsa asks for a story. As Shideh tells her a hopeful story of them escaping together, the lights fade and the shelling grows louder around them.

The lights snap to darkness. The play ends.

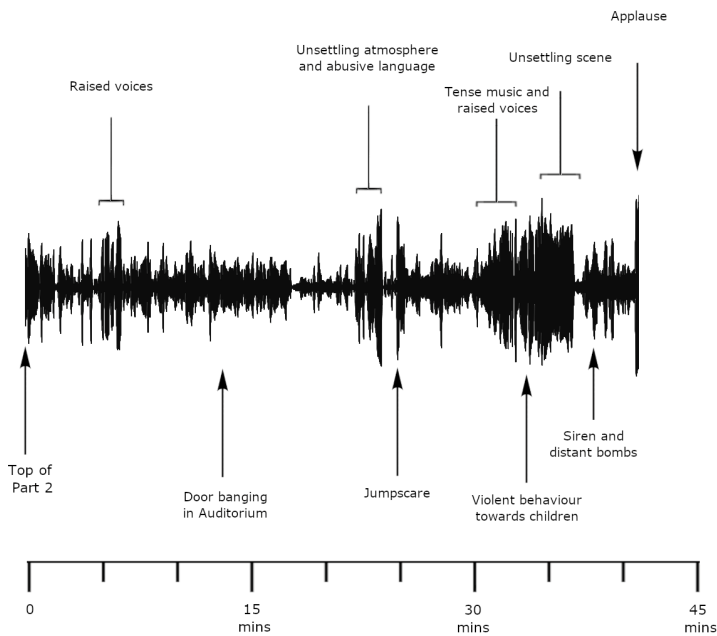
The lights brighten as the cast return to take a bow.

# Sonic Story

## Act One



## Act Two



# About the Almeida Theatre

## How to get here

The Almeida Theatre is on Almeida Street in Islington. The postcode is N1 1TA. It is a large, white concrete building and it is situated halfway up the road.

The outside of the theatre looks like this:



The nearest underground stations are **Angel** on the Northern line or **Highbury & Islington** on the Victoria line, and London Overground.



You can find more information on our website here:

[almeida.co.uk/your-visit/getting-here/](http://almeida.co.uk/your-visit/getting-here/)



## Highbury & Islington Station to Almeida Theatre

This is what **Highbury & Islington** station looks like outside.



Follow the path out of the station to the right onto Upper Street.  
The theatre is about 1 kilometre down the road on Almeida Street.

On your journey down from Highbury, you will pass these **landmarks**:



This is Union Chapel.

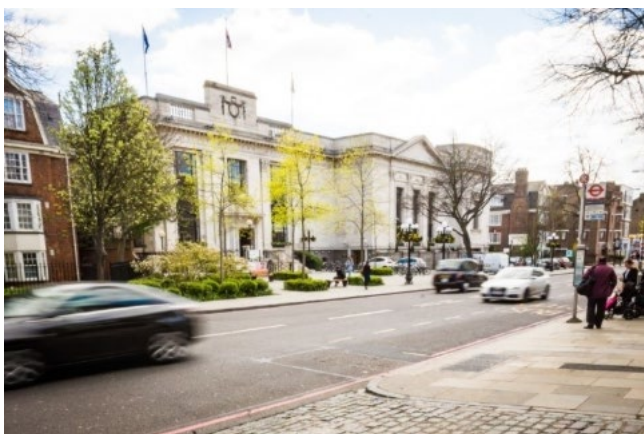
It is near bus stop G.



If you don't want to walk, you can get buses 4, 19, 30 or 43 and get off at St Mary's church - bus stop N – for the theatre.



This is where Upper Street crosses Islington Park Street and Canonbury Lane.



This is Islington Town Hall.



This is what Almeida Street looks like as you arrive at the theatre.



## Angel Station to Almeida Theatre



This is what **Angel** station looks like outside.

From Angel station, turn right onto Upper Street and cross the busy road at the pedestrian crossing.

Continue along Upper Street for about 1 kilometre.

The theatre is on the left on Almeida Street.

On your journey from Angel, you will pass these **landmarks**:



This is the main bus stop across the road from Angel station – bus stop Y.



If you don't want to walk you can get buses 4, 19, 30 or 43 and get off at bus stop P, opposite St Mary's church.



This is Islington Green.



This is St. Mary's Church.



This is what Almeida Street looks like as you arrive at the theatre.

# About the Almeida Theatre

Information about the theatre

You can watch a video tour of the building on our website here:

<https://almeida.co.uk/your-visit/access/>

Inside the main entrance of the theatre, there is a foyer where people can wait. This is what the foyer looks like.



It can get quite busy here before the start of the play.



When you arrive, the front of house team will greet you.



There are lots of staff available in the building if you have questions or if you would like directions to your seats. They are very happy to help you.

Almeida Theatre staff wear black t-shirts with white writing.




If you need help with your ticket, you can speak to the box office team. It can be quite noisy at the box office, and you may have to wait in a queue. Their desk looks like this.



If you have a digital ticket, you can find it in your email inbox, and it will look like this.

# ALMEIDA THEATRE

Romans, a novel  
Relaxed Environment



**Performance date**  
Wed 1 Oct

**Start time**  
7:30 PM

Section	Row	Seat
<b>CIRCLE</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>12</b>

Please use on street entrance


**Mr Al Meida**

**Order No: 1137734**

**£0.00** Ticket type: Complimentary

**Latecomers may not be admitted**  
[Click here to read our full terms and conditions](#)

Box Office **020 7359 4404**  
 Almeida Theatre, London N1 1TA  
[almeida.co.uk](http://almeida.co.uk)



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

The Front of House assistants will scan your ticket as you enter the auditorium.



The entrance to the stalls is via the ramp to the right of the foyer.



The entrance to the circle is on the outside of the building located to the right of the main entrance.



There is step-free access to the foyer and stalls. There is one accessible toilet at the back of the foyer.

This is the café and bar, where you can buy hot and cold drinks and food.





If you have any questions or feel worried about your visit, please do contact us at [access@almeida.co.uk](mailto:access@almeida.co.uk) or call our box office on **020 7359 4404**.

## Opening Hours

You can find our Box Office opening hours on our website here:

<https://almeida.co.uk/your-visit/booking-information/>

The Almeida Café & Bar opens two hours before every performance and remains open until 11 pm, with the kitchen closing 30 minutes before the show starts.

The auditorium opens 30 minutes before the performance begins – you are welcome to take your seats from then.