

PRESS RELEASE

5 REVIVES *PLAY FOR TODAY* FORMAT AND REVEALS FIRST FOUR COMMISSIONS

**BOLD ONE-OFF PRODUCTIONS ELEVATING NEW VOICES AND
CELEBRATING OFF SCREEN TALENT**

**SUE JOHNSTON, ANITA DOBSON, ALAN DAVIES, NIKKI AMUKA-BIRD,
JESSICA PLUMMER CONFIRMED TO STAR**

London, Sunday 17th August: Following the previously announced pilot, 5 has announced today the first four commissions and casting that will form its new *Play for Today* slate. LA Productions and Vertigo Films have been handed 2x60' orders respectively which are set to air on 5 later this year. The single dramas were greenlit by **Deputy Chief Content Officer and Head of Scripted, Paramount UK, Sebastian Cardwell** and **Paul Testar, Commissioning Editor, 5.**

Inspired by the iconic *Play for Today* format, each production will champion new voices and focus on bringing low-income talent into the spotlight behind the scenes in writing, directing and production roles.

Commenting on the *Play for Today* initiative **Commissioning Editor, 5, Paul Testar** said: "*Play for Today is synonymous with high quality standalone television dramas and we're incredibly excited to be reviving it with a new slate of single films on 5. What makes this particularly important for us as a public service broadcaster is the opportunity to support emerging talent behind the scenes – from writers and directors to production teams – especially those from lower-income backgrounds who haven't always had clear pathways into the industry. It's a chance to tell great stories while helping to shape the future of British drama.*"

Special Measures, from new screenwriter and playwright **Lee Thompson** kicks off the double order from LA Productions, is a state of the nation drama looking at the growing pressures facing schools in the UK. **Jack McLoughlin** (*Kate & Jake, The Death of the House Party*) will be making his directorial debut.

Jessica Plummer (*The Girl Before, Missing You*) will lead the drama; set in the heart of Liverpool. *Manor Lane High* is a school on the edge - underfunded and overwhelmed, the school's staff are stretched thin. Just before the school day begins, Drew, the exhausted head of English, abruptly resigns for good. Left reeling, Amy, the deputy head of English, must step in and steady the ship. But she barely has time to gather her thoughts— Chris, the frantic deputy head, breaks the news: Ofsted inspectors are arriving in 15 minutes for a surprise inspection. Caught between burnout and bureaucracy, can this fractured school survive the day?

The second production **Never Too Late** from Vertigo Films is an irreverent take on ageing, following a rebellious woman forced to start over in a retirement village. Set in a deceptively peaceful retirement village, this darkly comic drama follows sharp-tongued, fiercely independent Cynthia as she's reluctantly moved in by her daughter. Cynthia clashes with eccentric residents, oppressive rules, and the surprise reappearance of her old rockstar fling from the 1970s. What begins as a mission to get kicked out becomes something more complicated, as she's forced to confront long-buried secrets, strained family ties, and the unexpected possibility of starting over. It's a story about second chances, unlikely friendships, and how the messy, defiant reality that life – and love – don't end with retirement.

Anita Dobson (*Doctor Who*, *The Long Call*, *Inside No 9*, *EastEnders*, *Father Brown*) will lead the cast as Cynthia, **Nigel Havers** (*The Gentleman*, *Chariots of Fire*, *A Cruel Love: The Ruth Ellis Story*) will star as Frank, **Tracy-Ann Oberman** (*It's a Sin*, *EastEnders*, *Friday Night Dinner*) as Cynthia's daughter Amanda, **Nina Wadia** (*Count Abdulla*, *EastEnders*) as Heather, **Michael Fenton Stevens** (*Death in Paradise*, *The Sixth Commandment*) as Peter and **Natasha Williams** (*It's a Sin*, *EastEnders*) as Mary.

Directed by **Sara Harrak**, Iris Prize recipient 2023 for short film F*KED. Her latest Short film *Solers United*, was premiered at BFI FLARE in March 2025. **Simon Warne** and **Lydia Marchant** will pen the script. **Allan Niblo** and **Nathalie Peter-Contesse** are Executive Producers for both Vertigo projects alongside **Michelle Antoniadis** as Producer for both dramas; Screen International Star of Tomorrow, Edinburgh Festival Talent Lab alumni and winner of the Breakthrough Producer award at the British Independent Film Awards in 2021.

The next offering from LA Productions is **Big Winners**. It's a story about Edith and Arthur Thistle – for fifty-three years, they have managed to get by—never rich, never extravagant, but always together. That all changes in an instant when they win fourteen million pounds in the lottery. Arthur dreams of spending big, finally tasting the high life. But before the celebrations can begin, Edith drops a bombshell: she wants a divorce. *Big Winners* is about opportunity, who gets to seize the day and who gets left behind. A thrilling, funny, deeply emotional exploration of lives lived, and lives missed.

Sue Johnston (*Truelove*, *The Responder*, *The Royle Family*) and **Paul Copley** (*Downton Abbey*, *Last Tango in Halifax*, *The Archers*) will lead the cast as Edith and Arthur. **Alexa Davies** (*Cobra*, *Funny Woman* and *Raised by Wolves*). and **Mia Tormey** will star as Jade and Kaylee.

Writer **Martha Watson Allpress** (*Patricia Gets Ready*) is on board making her TV writing debut. Emma Turner will also make her debut as director.

Finally, from Vertigo Films is **Intruder** a real-time, single-location psychological thriller with the tension of a ticking bomb. Lenny Bray was once a national treasure - now he's just a man in a mansion, hiding from headlines and haunted by whispers. But when a young man shows up at his door late one night—barefoot, bleeding, and carrying a story Lenny hoped was buried—everything unravels. Across one harrowing night, Lenny and his wife Maggie must confront a

stranger's explosive accusations—and their own complicity in a past steeped in power, silence, and manipulation. Darkly comic and emotionally raw, this is a story about guilt, truth, and what happens when survivors come knocking.

Alan Davies (*McDonald & Dodds, Flack, Jonathan Creek*) and **Nikki Amuka-Bird** (*I, Jack Wright, Knock at the Cabin*) will star as husband and wife Lenny and Maggie with newcomer **Logan Merish** as Ben.

Directed by **Daniel Rands**, NFTS graduate and winner of the BBC and Toledo scholarships. His latest short film *Tapeworm* premiered at the NFTS 2024 showcase, earning acclaim for its bold storytelling, striking cinematography, and a BSC Emerging Cinematographer Award for Edward Hamilton Stubber, who is also the DOP on *The Intruder*. **David Whitehouse** is onboard as writer.

Production has begun across all titles with the first drama set to air on 5 at the end of the 2025.

ENDS

For further information, please contact:

Emily.Holmes@paramount.com

About 5:

5 is the home of award-winning content from the UK's third largest commercial PSB, a culmination of the creative transformation of Channel 5 over more than a decade. 5 is part of the Paramount Global family of brands.

Through a mix of live TV channels and bingeable boxsets, the free-to-air service allows UK audiences to watch or stream the breadth of programming from Channel 5 – including Milkshake!, its dedicated preschool brand – and a wide selection from the wider Paramount family of brands, including BET, CBS, Comedy Central, MTV, Paramount+ and more.

In keeping with its PSB remit, 5 tells the story of modern Britain by reflecting the lives of people across the UK, featuring well-known faces and fresh new talent. Its programme roster spans original UK drama, premium factual, true crime, science, news & current affairs and kids' content, which continue to attract critical acclaim.

Recent wins include BAFTA Television and RTS Awards for the documentary *White Nanny, Black Child* in 2024, along with a BAFTA nomination for *Endurance Race to the Pole*. Factual hit *The Yorkshire Vet* and the broadcaster's series on air fryers also won RTS Yorkshire awards, while Michael Palin received the Radio Times Special Judges Award for his Channel 5 documentaries.

About Vertigo Films:

Vertigo Films has produced and distributed over 50 feature films—including critical hits like *Monsters and Bronson*, Oscar-nominated *Ajami*, and UK box office No.1s *StreetDance 3D* and *The Sweeney*—as well as over 100 hours of high-end TV for major platforms such as Sky, Amazon, and Paramount+.

Renowned for discovering and launching new talent, Vertigo has given early breaks to names like Tom Hardy, Gareth Edwards, Vanessa Kirby, Sofia Boutella, and Issa Lopez. Alongside its prolific production work, Vertigo co-founded key industry ventures including Vertigo Releasing, Protagonist Pictures, and VFX firms Post Republic and Automatik, gaining deep expertise in marketing, international sales, post-production, and visual effects.

In 2022, Federation Studios acquired a majority stake in Vertigo to expand their global premium content slate.

About LA Productions:

LA Productions is a multi award winning, (BAFTA, Emmy, Pre Italia, Rose of Montreux etc.) independent film & TV production company based in the north of Liverpool creating broadcast quality drama and/or broadcast related projects for all UK TV channels. Founded in 2000 by industry stalwart Colin McKeown, the business offers a complete 'script to screen service' including all post production and has built a solid reputation for delivering cost effective high quality drama. LA Productions has been prolific in producing drama series for all broadcast channels, the most well known works include "Moving On" which ran for 13 series, "Broken" starring Sean Bean, and most recently "Granite Harbour" and "Unforgivable". From inception the business has produced a high proportion of its projects in Liverpool supporting the indigenous TV and film industry of the area with inward investment into the local economy and the sponsoring of local talent. LA has its own post facility, LA Post, handling post production on all in-house projects but also undertakes 3rd party post production work and hires out facilities to other external companies. LA Factual, was established to house and produce new factual content and programmes, and even won the RTS award for best Factual Entertainment programme for BBC Series "The Nail Bar Boys" and More4 Series "Ricky, Sue and a Trip or Two".