FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 10, 2016

Media Contacts:
Mia Cariño, (310) 440-4544
Elena Bonomo, (310) 440-4578
communications@skirball.org

Skirball Cultural Center announces

TOURETTESHERO PRESENTS
BACKSTAGE IN BISCUIT LAND

Groundbreaking performance celebrates neurodiversity and inclusion both on and off stage

Wednesday, June 8, and Thursday, June 9 | 8:00 p.m.

$20 General | $16 Skirball Members | $12 Full-Time Students
Tickets: skirball.org/biscuit-land, (877) SCC-4TIX, or on site

LOS ANGELES, CA—The Skirball Cultural Center announces the Los Angeles premiere of Touretteshero Presents Backstage in Biscuit Land on Wednesday, June 8, and Thursday, June 9, at 8:00 p.m. Exploring spontaneity, creativity, and disability, the two-woman solo show—devised and performed by theater artists Jess Thom and Jess Mabel Jones—weaves together comedy, puppetry, singing, and incredible tics. Thom has the neurological condition Tourette's Syndrome which prompts her to say “biscuit” 16,000 times a day and has given her a unique perspective on life. A hilarious, inspiring, and pioneering work, Backstage in Biscuit Land welcomes people of all shapes, sizes, and abilities to enjoy theater.

The Skirball’s two-night run of Backstage in Biscuit Land coincides with National Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month, established to raise awareness of and reduce stigma associated with the neurological condition. The LA engagement is the final stop of Touretteshero’s debut North American tour, made possible in part by support from the British Council. The tour will also bring the production to BRIC Arts | Media House in New York City, Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, and the San Francisco International Arts Festival.

Backstage in Biscuit Land—a runaway hit at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where the show premiered in 2014—is not only about Thom’s personal experiences living with Tourette’s but also, more broadly, about theater itself. Having once been excused from her ticketed seat in a theater and moved to a sound booth, Thom resolved to “look for the only seat in the house I knew I wouldn’t be asked to leave: the stage.” From this vantage point, Thom has sought to help redefine the theatergoing experience, inviting the audience to make noise and move around during the show.

“When I first saw Jess Thom in the Dialogue Festival at London’s Ovalhouse Theatre in 2014, it was a revelation,” said Andrew Horwitz, Skirball Vice President and Director of Programs. “Shortly after
joining the Skirball in January, I learned that Jess was planning a tour, and I was excited for the opportunity to bring *Backstage in Biscuit Land* to LA audiences. Jess’s humor and creativity completely transformed my understanding of disability and expanded my thinking about diversity and inclusion—two values that are central to the Skirball’s mission. Relaxed performance is a movement that has been growing over the past few years, particularly for serving audiences with autism—and now Tourette’s—and we are proud to bring this experience to the Skirball.”

Salette Gressett, Arts Manager USA of the British Council, remarked, “Jess Thom is a leading example of the radical innovation coming from the UK’s arts sector that is shifting notions of disability in ways that are new to American audiences. She is a key inspiration for theaters adopting the relaxed performance (RP) model, which the British Council is introducing to US venues this year with the UK’s leading RP training specialist.”

Gressett added, “Touretteshero brought the house down last year at the British Council Showcase in Edinburgh, and Jess Thom has become the UK’s media darling with appearances on BBC and comedian talk shows. She is instantaneously lovable—hilarious, adorable, bonkers, and a genius all in equal measure.”

Because Thom is neurologically incapable of staying on script, no two shows are ever the same. Thom and Jones (who goes by “Chopin” on stage) use this unpredictability to their comedic advantage. Surrounded by a slew of props, including a trash bin and a plastic circular saw, the two performers introduce the audience to Biscuit Land, where misconceptions about Tourette’s are dispelled and topics of conversation may or may not range from geraniums to penguins.

As a result, performances are what Thom calls “extra live,” a term that emphasizes the creative benefits of her performance style and underscores her belief that “making theater more inclusive makes it better—for disabled people and nondisabled people” (*American Theater*). At the Skirball, performances will be held in the Ahmanson Hall ballroom, rather than a traditional seated auditorium, to ensure accessibility by audience members of all abilities. Performances will feature ASL interpretation.

Note: As Jess is one of the ten percent of people with Tourette's Syndrome who have swearing tics, performances may include the involuntary use of words that some audience members may find offensive. Recommended for ages fourteen and up.

**About Touretteshero**

Touretteshero is the multiplatform project cofounded by artist, performer, playworker, and fundraiser Jess Thom and her creative partner Matthew Pountney. Its aim is to celebrate and share the creativity and humor of Tourette’s in an accessible way, with the widest possible audience.

**Praise for *Backstage in Biscuit Land***

“Jess Thom’s condition lends her show an absurdist edge Samuel Beckett would be proud of.” —*The Guardian*

“A celebration of neurodiversity and the poetic energy of Tourette’s.” —*The Stage*

“Like the best comedy, it makes you look at the world in a different way. Remarkable.” —*Independent*
“Hugely uplifting and entertaining.”—Exeunt Magazine

THIS PROGRAM IS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY SUPPORT FROM THE BRITISH COUNCIL.

About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is dedicated to exploring the connections between 4,000 years of Jewish heritage and the vitality of American democratic ideals. It welcomes and seeks to inspire people of every ethnic and cultural identity. Guided by our respective memories and experiences, together we aspire to build a society in which all of us can feel at home. The Skirball Cultural Center achieves its mission through educational programs that explore literary, visual, and performing arts from around the world; through the display and interpretation of its permanent collections and changing exhibitions; through an interactive family destination inspired by the Noah’s Ark story; and through outreach to the community.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to exhibitions: $12 General; $9 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; $7 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always free to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Exhibitions are free to all visitors on Thursdays. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org. The Skirball is also home to Zeidler’s Café, which serves innovative California cuisine in an elegant setting, and Audrey’s Museum Store, which sells books, contemporary art, educational toys, jewelry, and more.

###