

In 1807 there were 4,000,000 people in slavery worldwide...

... by 2007 there will be over 20,000,000

March 25th 2007 marks 200 years since the bill abolishing the trade in African slaves was passed in the House of Commons.

But 'abolition' has a hollow ring today. 1807 was merely the first victory in a war that has intensified. Across the world, the numbers of slaves and evil causes by which freedom is denied have continued to spiral.

At a time when the overwhelming response to recent disasters has revealed a universal desire for compassion and action, Riding Lights Theatre Company will tour an epic and passionate piece of contemporary theatre that will arouse both national and international interest.

African Snow will be a clarion call to all of us - to let the stories of the past live again in the theatre and to inspire new acts of abolition in the present.

AFRICAN SNOW

a story everyone will want to hear

AFRICAN SNOW



RIDING LIGHTS THEATRE COMPANY will mark the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act with a nationwide tour of a new play by Murray Watts, with the working title African Snow.

Murray Watts' new play, African Snow, is the meeting of two men - cast from opposite sides into the hell of the slave trade. An African stolen from his home in West Africa and an English sailor. Both survived to write remarkable accounts of their experiences and both were urged by William Wilberforce to testify before parliament in the eighteenth century campaign for abolition.



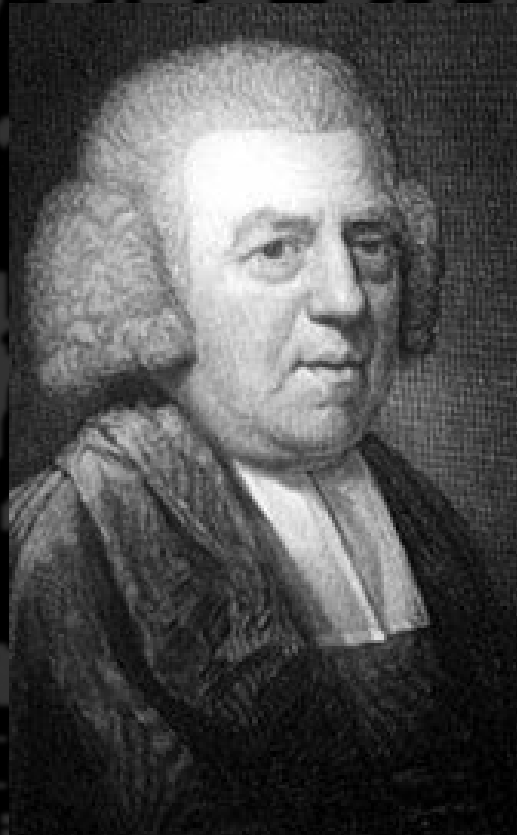
The English sailor, John Newton, is well-known as the converted slave-trader who gave the world its most famous hymn Amazing Grace. But, as one might expect from the quiet racism of the history books, little prominence is given to Olaudah Equiano the African, whose remarkable story has been confined to a footnote or totally ignored. Equiano's ascent from the hell of a

slave ship to become the leading black voice in the political campaign is one of the most extraordinary and moving stories of any era.

Together, Equiano and Newton seem to Wilberforce to provide the most cogent argument in winning the political battle. Bringing them face to face, however, is perhaps beyond the scope of human reason. Can victim and abuser ever be reconciled?

Writing hymns about forgiveness can never be a substitute for the experience of forgiveness. And forgiveness, as everyone knows, is the heart of the issue. African Snow takes us to the heart of the human condition to the place where two men are compelled to confront each another.

THE PLAY



John Newton

1721 - 1807

“I know about hiding...
I know about long days and
years of deliberate and
desperate hiding.”

John Newton was born in London, the son of the commander of a merchant sea ship which sailed the Mediterranean. At the age of eleven he went to sea with his father, and made six voyages with him. At the age of 19, Newton was forced into service on H.M.S Harwich, but finding conditions intolerable, deserted, but was soon recaptured publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman. Finally he was moved to service on a slave ship. At the age of 23 he was rescued by another Captain who had known his father. He would ultimately become captain of his own ship plying the slave routes off the coast of Sierra Leone.

Newton experienced a famous and dramatic conversion at sea, but captained his first slave ship after this, and continued in the slave trade for several years. He attempted to be a suitably christian master by reducing the punishments of slaves and holding services on Sundays. Newton's sense of shame and ultimate support for the abolition cause only came late in his life.

In 1750 John Newton set sail for West Africa from Liverpool. He was on the first leg of the 'Triangular trade'. His cargo of cheap cloth, brandy, muskets, kettles, mirrors, and glass beads would be used to buy two hundred human beings.

Shackled together, in a hold forty feet by fifteen and five feet high, many of these men, women and children would die. The terrible journey known as the Middle Passage lasted about sixty days, and during it, or during the 'seasoning' period on the plantations, fifty per cent of the original cargo was expected to perish. But there were still enormous profits to be made - the slaves were replaced by West Indian produce, above all by sugar, and the final leg back to Liverpool was run.

John Newton later became a minister of the church and an abolitionist. It was reports of men like him which stimulated opposition to a barbarous and immoral trade - but initially it was only a small band who fought to end the system. They were led by William Wilberforce and supported in parliament by Pitt the Younger and Charles James Fox. At a time when the means of mass communication were in their infancy, and with much of the power and wealth of the country lined up against them, they conducted a campaign of mass protest. After a long struggle it led to the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. The slave trade had made Britain vast profits, and Africa had lost forty million men, women and children.

“I saw you, Mr John Newton,
I saw who you were...
and I felt like tearing out
your throat.”

Olaudah Equiano is famous for his autobiography, an account of his childhood in an area called Essaka, an Igbo village in modern-day Nigeria, as the son of the chief and experiences as a former slave. The book, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, became immensely popular at the height of the anti-slavery campaign when Equiano was in his early forties.

Around the age of eleven, Equiano and his sister were kidnapped and shipped through the notorious middle passage of the Atlantic Ocean. A British naval officer, Michael Pascal, later bought Equiano and introduced him to the naval way of life. Pascal also renamed Equiano 'Gustavus Vassa' after a 16th-century Swedish nobleman who led the Swedes in a war of independence against the Danes to become the first Swedish king - an ironic, almost cruel renaming on behalf of Pascal.

Equiano was brought to England, where he learnt to read and write at a school in London in between naval actions. Equiano saw action in major naval battles during the Seven Years War in the 1750s, travelling to Canada and the Mediterranean. He was now baptised and had fought for the British and felt entitled to freedom and some of the prize money handed out to

sailors on the naval vessels. But he was cheated of this income and sold to another sea-captain who took him to Monserrat in the Caribbean where he was sold to Robert King, a Quaker merchant. During this time he was exposed to the horrors of slavery, seeing fellow slaves treated abominably.

Equiano was more fortunate than some of his peers, holding the position of 'gauger' on the plantations, similar to being a quality controller. After three years saving his income he was able to buy his freedom in 1766 for £40.

He returned to England, becoming a hairdresser but soon returned to sea. In 1773, he joined a voyage of exploration under the command of John Phipps to find a northwest passage to India across the North Pole.

His book appeared in the spring of 1789 and was, in general, favourably reviewed. It was unique in that Equiano not only wrote it himself, but also published it by subscription which demanded finding sponsors in advance. He then sold the book throughout Britain, undertaking lecture tours and actively campaigning to abolish the slave trade. Equiano became the effective leader of the Black community in London, a group calling themselves 'The Sons of Africa'.

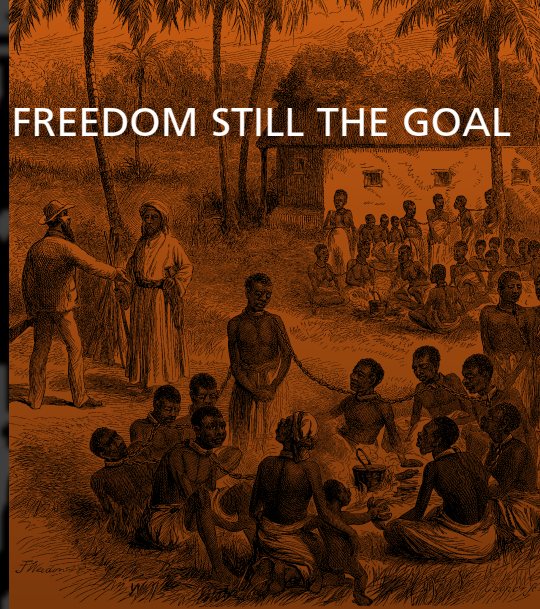


Olaudah Equiano

c.1745 - c.1797

OLAUDAH EQUIANO

FREEDOM STILL THE GOAL



Acayo Concy was abducted, aged 15, by the Lord's Resistance Army, raped and made a sex slave, forced to steal and kill. She had three children in the northern Ugandan bush.

Peter Ochan, forced to become a child soldier, was abducted from his home one night when he was 14. He and other children were compelled to walk all night and all day before taking a rest. Their training also included being forced to carry around the decomposing body of a boy who had been killed for trying to escape.

"We carried the body everywhere we went," he said after escaping a 10-month captivity. "It smelt very bad. We were told it was part of our training. The commander then told us to scoop out the brains from what was left of the body and show them around to others."

Stories like these are distressingly similar to those told by slaves over 200 years ago, as in Olaudah Equiano's Narrative, published in 1789, the year William Wilberforce first spoke against slavery in parliament. And it is stories like these that drive CMS to continue Jesus Christ's mission "to bind up the broken-hearted and set the captive free."

CMS owes its own beginning in 1799 to the remarkable group of people who fought the slave trade. Among them were Wilberforce, who championed the cause of abolition for 44 years, and John Newton, slave dealer turned abolitionist, who penned the evergreen 'Amazing Grace',

*I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

Sharing that amazing grace remains the

chief goal of CMS and although that historic template of slavery is ended, we see its modern form in situations that destroy people, rob them of choice and entrap them for the benefit of users.

To bring international attention to the 19-year war in northern Uganda, where Acayo Concy and Peter Ochan became modern slaves, CMS initiated its 'Break the Silence' campaign.

CMS supports another champion of the fight against modern slavery in Dr Lalita Edwards, who works with women sold into prostitution in India. These women face constant violence, poverty and malicious pimps. Their children suffer too.

"Six-year-old Bharat wanted to know if I had as many husbands as his mother has," says Lalita. "Seven-year-old



Rajkumar's mother is too embarrassed to answer his questions about her work."

Rajkumar's mother could well be one of the thousands trafficked to the red-light areas of Pune and Mumbai from Nepal and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, mission worker James Pender is helping the church to set up a social programme to provide poor women with alternative means of employment, in order to reduce the risk of them being trafficked into the sex trade.

"Every year 20,000 women and children are trafficked from Bangladesh," James reports. "Typically, traffickers first fix their target and go to the woman's family to convince them to send her abroad for marriage or employment. They target poor, powerless, illiterate and already vulnerable women, who are less able to seek redress on their return."

The problem reaches Britain too. Even government figures state that up to 1,400 women are trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation each year.

This slavery of war, poverty and human trafficking brings death, bondage and premeditated destruction of the humanity of its victims.

CMS believes that African Snow will shine a light onto the world's conscience and galvanise people into action on behalf of today's slaves.

Greg Obong-Oshotse

Left: Dr Lalita Edwards comforts a woman during counselling at Inter-mission Care and Rehabilitation Society Clinic in Charkop slum

Right: Acayo Concy and her three children after escape from the LRA and rehabilitation in northern Uganda



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SLAVERY



Murray Watts
Writer

Murray Watts began writing for the theatre at Cambridge University. His experiences in Soweto, South Africa, where he was a visiting lecturer in drama at the University of Natal led to his award winning play *The Fatherland*, staged by the Bush Theatre at Riverside Studios in 1989.

Screen plays include *The Dream*, starring Jeremy Irons, first shown on BBC2 in 1991 and nominated as Best Drama Shown on Cable in the USA in 1993, *The End Time* for by BBC Scotland and *Complete Surrender*, a proposed sequel to the Oscar winning *Chariots of Fire*.

As well as original plays and screen plays he has written a number of successful adaptations: Dostoyevsky's *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* for stage and TV, Victor Hugo's *Last Day of a Condemned Man*, *The Pilgrim's Progress* for BBC Radio 4, and the animated *Beowulf* for S4C / BBC TV. He was an associate producer for BBC Wales' documentary department from 1987 - 1989, where he wrote and presented a TV documentary on the poet and painter David Jones, *The Quest*, and his TV play *Revival*.

Murray was one of the pioneers of the *Testament* series for BBC / S4C, for which he was script consultant and a contributing writer. *Testament* was nominated for two BAFTA awards and one



Paul Burbridge
Director

EMMY. He wrote the screenplay for the feature film *The Miracle Maker*, which was released in 2000 to international acclaim. *The Miracle Maker* was networked on ABC TV in America for Easter 2000 and 2001, and was the winner of the Movie Guide Epiphany Award for the most inspirational movie on US TV. He was one of the writers of the BBC TV series, *Tales from the Mad House*, 2000. His forthcoming work includes an animated film *Doodles*.

Paul Burbridge is Artistic Director of Riding Lights Theatre Company and has been a major influence on the Company's strong reputation for pioneering new work, for comedy and powerful ensemble productions of classics and devised plays. He has been involved as actor, director or writer in all the Company's major productions, from award-winning revues at the Edinburgh Festival to his recent world premiere of the hilarious comic masterpiece *Augustus Carp Esq.* and Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo*.

Paul also oversaw the opening of the company's new home, Friargate Theatre in York. His inaugural production of *The Alchemist* was described by the Daily Mirror as "simply unmissable", and "a highly accessible and glittering production" (The Stage). Paul's other notable productions for RLTC include his own adaptation of *Three Men in a Boat* ("a

riverful of good jokes" - The Guardian), a sell-out at The Northcott Exeter & Theatr Clywd; *The Fire Raisers* ("a crackling production" - Time Out Critics' Choice) and *The Winter's Tale* ("Pure pleasure" - Financial Times) were both presented at London's Bridewell Theatre and on tour.

In 2002, a new musical *Dick Turpin* was one of a string of highly original ensemble productions for RLTC ("Dark, captivating... tremendous boisterous comedy" - The Stage). Other ensemble shows created with Riding Lights, addressing issues such as international debt relief, playground violence, science and faith, social responsibility and forgiveness, have included *Walkout!*, *Wrestling with Angels*, *A Different Drum*, *Balancing Act*, *Love Fifteen*, *Science Friction* and *Hope Opera*.

Paul has directed several plays by Murray Watts, including an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* which toured to St Petersburg, *Catwalk*, an adaptation of *St John's Gospel* and the musical *Daniel*, which toured nationally to major theatres. Paul was Assistant Director at the Cambridge Theatre for Leslie Bricusse's *Sherlock Holmes - the Musical*. Recently, Paul has directed *The Passion* for York Minster and a new play by Les Ellison about John Wesley, *Saving Grace*.



Ben Okafor
Composer

Ben Okafor is a prolific performer and advocate for social justice, a passion that grew from his own experience of involvement as a child soldier in the Nigeria/Biafra war.

His albums include *Nkiru*, *Generation*, *Blood Brothers*, *Coffee with Lazarus* and *Shadows*. Now based in the UK Okafor has worked with such key figures as Desmond Tutu and attracted praise from U2's Bono.

An experienced musician and actor, Ben has used his art to communicate creatively on social issues for many years. These performances have taken him to Europe, Africa, India and America and placed him before diverse audiences including students, educationalists, health care specialists, politicians, activists, church and community leaders and charitable organisations. He has worked with NGOs worldwide, using his art to address issues of equality.

He is a regular contributor to the national "Racial Justice Sunday" initiative delivering awareness raising events in prisons around issues of prejudice, equality and diversity as well as being a spokesman to the media and contributor for the annual "Celebrating Sanctuary" series of events to raise issue around refugees and asylum seekers.

Ben runs his own music recording label, Roadsweeper Records Limited, specialising in world music. The



Sean Cavanagh
Designer

company has its own recording studio and production house situated in his home town of Malvern. Ben's business plan and vision for the company reflects his own experience working as a black artist and his links with black and Asian musicians worldwide.

Sean Cavanagh is a long-standing Artistic Associate and Director of the Riding Lights Theatre Company. He is a Graduate of RADA and the Central School of Art and Design and has worked for many theatres throughout the UK and abroad. He was Head of Design for the Plymouth Theatre Royal for two years prior to the theatre's opening in 1982 and then for the first two years of its operation.

Productions designed include *Pickwick* for the Hungarian National Theatre in Budapest and Toby Robertson's acclaimed revival (for the first time in 400 years) of Shakespeare's *Edward III*, seen at the Cambridge and Taormina Festivals. Premiers include Christopher Neame's adaptation of Graham Greene's *Monsignor Quixote*, Robin Hawdon's adaptation of *The Old Devils* by Kingsley Amis, Jeremy Brook's translations of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People* and Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Paul Burbridge's stage adaptation of *Three Men in a Boat* for Riding Lights, and the World Premiere in Singapore of *Judah Ben Hur - the Musical*. Touring productions include *M. Butterfly*, *Outside Edge*, the musical *The Sound of Fury*, *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a*

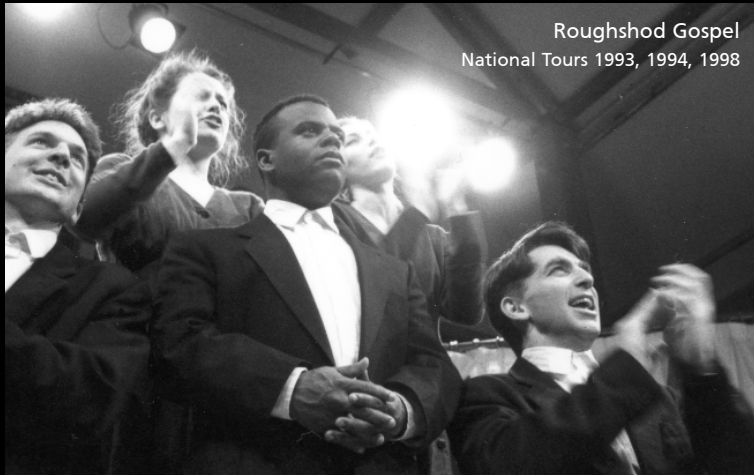
Mockingbird, *Dancing in the Streets* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. He has also recently designed a number of multimedia events. These include *The Rock* in San Francisco and *Rock Me Amadeus* in Vienna.

Sean has designed many productions for Riding Lights, including Friargate Theatre's opening production of *The Alchemist*, the musical *Dick Turpin* and the recent touring productions of *Science Friction*, *Fun of the Fair*, *Saving Grace* and most recently, *Hope Opera*.

West End credits include the settings for *The Tempest* (Wyndham's Theatre), *Sherlock Holmes - The Musical* (Cambridge Theatre), *Of Mice and Men* (Mermaid Theatre), *Stepping Out - The Musical* (Albery Theatre), *Never the Sinner* (Playhouse Theatre), *The Roy Orbison Story* (Whitehall Theatre), *Treasure Island* (Mermaid Theatre), *The Miracle Worker* (Comedy Theatre), *In Praise of Love* (Apollo Theatre), *The Aspern Papers* (Wyndham's Theatre), and *The Fire Raisers* (Bridewell).

In 2005, Sean had two shows in the West End, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (New London) and *The Rat Pack* (Strand Theatre).

RIDING LIGHTS PRODUCTIONS



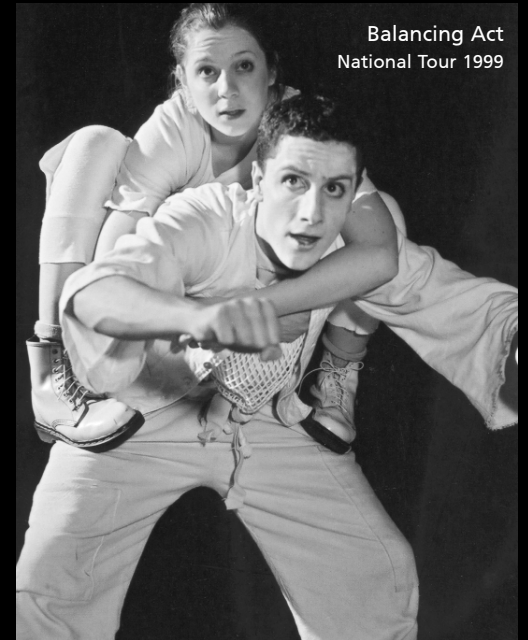
Roughshod Gospel
National Tours 1993, 1994, 1998



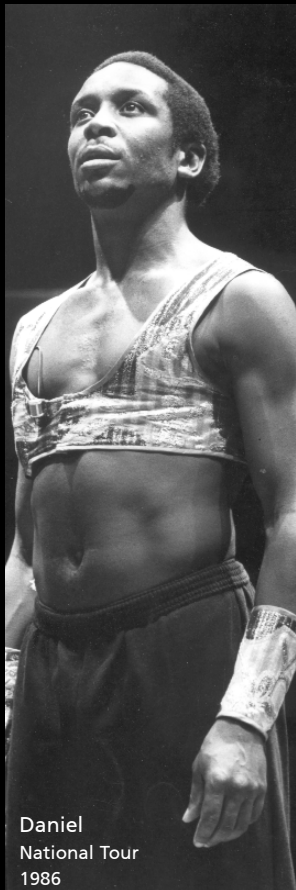
If It Makes You
Happy
National Tour
2002



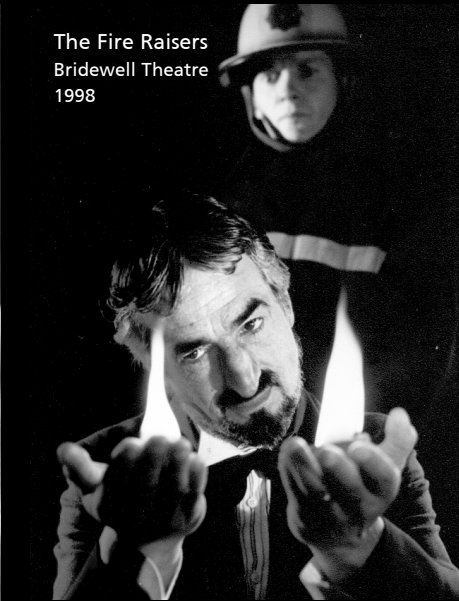
Dick Turpin
Friargate
Theatre
2001



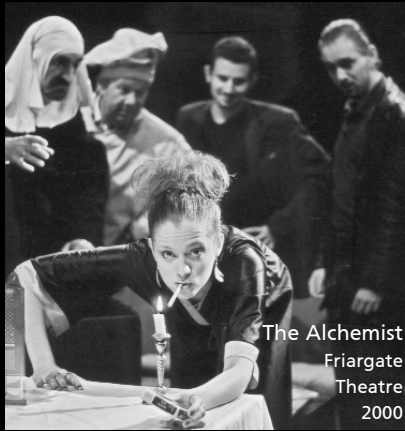
Balancing Act
National Tour 1999



Daniel
National Tour
1986



The Fire Raisers
Bridewell Theatre
1998



The Alchemist
Friargate
Theatre
2000



First Hand
National
Tours
2001, 2002



Hope Opera
National Tour 2004



a different drum
National Tours
1997
1998



York-based Riding Lights is one of the UK's longest-lived independent theatre companies.

Internationally renowned for 27 years' of touring productions, Riding Lights opened its own home, Friargate Theatre, to the public in 2000.

The Company's productions have ranged from its own blockbuster adaptation of Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (a collaboration with The Northcott Exeter, which played to 90% houses at Theatr Clywd), to *Walkout!* (a modern dramatisation of *Pilgrim's Progress*), *The Winter's Tale* (at the Bridewell Theatre, London, and on national tour), Max Frisch's *The Fire Raisers* (a collaboration with The Northcott Exeter, and a sell-out success in a second production at the Bridewell), and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* at Friargate Theatre, York.

"Riding Lights Theatre Company is outstanding"
The Scotsman

"simply unmissable"
The Mirror (The Alchemist)

"this is the one to see... swift, intelligent, charming... directed with tact, pace, fresh jokes and many a sharp insight. Pure pleasure."
Financial Times (The Winter's Tale)

"with a cast this good... keeps you watching to the bitter-sweet end. Get your snow-boots on and go take a look."
The Independent (The Winter's Tale)

"well-conceived... a crackling production"
Time Out Critics' Choice (The Fire Raisers)

"a fine performance... a sparkling new production"
What's On, (The Fire Raisers)

"a riverful of good jokes"
The Guardian (Three Men in a Boat)

"stunning... everyone should see this show"
CAFOD (Balancing Act)

"Riding Lights has established an enviable reputation for theatre which aims its sights high... an excellent track record for success"
The Stage

The commission for the writing of African Snow was funded by the Church Mission Society (CMS) with help from the Christian Arts Trust. CMS recognised the opportunity presented by the cultural and political profile that the bicentenary will offer. It also wished to acknowledge its own debt to John Newton, William Wilberforce and other members of the Eclectic Society who brought CMS into being in 1799.



Riding Lights Theatre Company has worked on the project since its inception and is providing the artistic and production expertise to ensure that African Snow is seen by audiences throughout the UK. African Snow will be a compelling and moving piece of contemporary theatre. It will also offer opportunities for education work associated with the play: reaching into schools, colleges and communities and bringing new insight into contemporary issues such as race relations and modern slavery.

It is hoped that theatres in cities with the strongest historical links to the slave trade will work together with Riding Lights to co-present the play in Autumn 2006. This will be followed by a major tour across the UK and abroad running into 2007.



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