

DISCUSSION LINKS

Organisations involved in the aftershow discussions include -

Anti-Slavery International www.antislavery.org

Founded in 1839 by the same abolitionists who led the campaign in 1807 and fought for the abolition of slavery in 1833. They continue to work for an end to all forms of slavery throughout the world and are the leading organisation in this field.

Chaste - Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe www.chaste.org.uk

Amnesty International Oxford Branch www.oxford-amnesty.org.uk

Working to protect human rights worldwide

Asylum Welcome www.asylum-welcome.supanet.com

Supporting asylum seekers, refugees and detainees

Helen Bamber Foundation www.helenbamber.org

Working with survivors of human rights violations

oxford theatre guild



The Oxford Theatre Guild, founded in 1955, is Oxford's largest company of non-professional players. While nominally an amateur company, a number of members are former or current professionals. We endeavour to achieve professional production standards and perform regularly in professional venues. This has enabled the Guild to become a valuable training ground for actors with ambitions to enter the profession. The Guild also provides opportunities for members to develop skills and experience in other areas of theatre.

Guild members come from all over Oxfordshire and membership is open to anyone, as are auditions, which are advertised in the local press, on our website and through our newsletter Guild News. Membership details are available from Bill Moulford at bill.moulford@oxfordtheatreguild.com and at www.oxfordtheatreguild.com

forthcoming production

The Dresser by Ronald Harwood

directed by Sue Baxter 4th - 8th December 2007

The Old Fire Station Studio Theatre, Oxford

Described as a 'love letter to the theatre', The Dresser is Ronald Harwood's hilarious portrait of backstage life, an evocative, perceptive and wonderfully affectionate look behind the scenes of a touring stage company.

If you would like to get involved in the backstage or technical crew for the Dresser, please contact joanna.mathews@oxfordtheatreguild.com

Tickets from the OFS Studio on 01865 297170 and www.livenation.com

OXFORD THEATRE GUILD
presents

to testament

a dramatic exploration of the
impact of the slave trade
directed by Verity Peacock

supported by



synopsis

A collaboration of the work of three local writers, the director and cast, the play weaves together several strands connected with past and present slavery.

The play opens with an African village celebration, highlighting two characters in particular - brother and sister Adhobe and Ghnosi. The scene merges with a contemporary scene in Oxford, where we see the characters of Aethiopia Janet and William Ottley searching for the way 'home': characters from the 18th century re-appearing in the 21st century and baffling locals.

We return to 18th century Africa, and witness the kidnapping of Adhobe and Ghnosi by black traders. Ghnosi is then further taken by Makuri, son of a Chief, to be a wife. She escapes, then Makuri is himself kidnapped by slavers.

Then to contemporary Oxford. Marina has arrived in Oxford from Moldova, seeking work and a better life - but begins her life here homeless. The Guide presents beautiful Oxford, while newspaper seller Noel mischievously tries to put her off and reveals a different side to the city.

Returning to the 18th century, we see Mrs Wood and her serving household, made up of housemaids and African servants Aethiopia Janet and William brought over from the West Indies.

Now to contemporary Europe. Olga and Lilliana discuss their plans to travel to Oxford, following cousin Marina. They meet Doru who promises to take them where they want to go.

Meanwhile in Oxford, Marina continues life homeless. The Guide introduces the magnificent Codrington Library and Noel develops a desire to help Marina.

18th century Oxford. Richard Sheridan MP is at a coffee house, where he meets Rev Agutter and Sir William Dolben who convince him of the evils of the slave trade, and introduce Dolben's Bill to reduce the number of slaves allowed to be transported on a slave ship.

Olga and Lilliana fall into the wrong hands and begin working against their will as prostitutes in Kosovo for Ivan.

Returning to Africa, we see Adhobe, Ghnosi and Makuri all chained up on the same slave ship. Adhobe becomes a Captain's favourite and is given special duties. He discovers Makuri is on the same ship, and later on they both see Ghnosi as she is taken off by the mate to be tortured.

Marina goes to Asylum Welcome in Oxford for their help, and is told it may be years before her claim will be decided. In Europe, Lilliana is ill and is to be irafrikked to Macedonia, where she will most likely die.

To end, we see George and Bertie in an Oxford coffee house in the early 19th century discussing the Abolition Act, then returning to our original setting of contemporary Oxford, where Aethiopia Janet and William Ottley are 'going home'.

The writers

Heather Dunmore

Testament to a Trade was a wonderful opportunity as I was already interested in writing a piece about contemporary slavery. To my delight I was encouraged to develop ideas that were already in my head. It's my first devised collaboration and I'm proud to be working with Oxford Theatre Guild on a play which has grown into an amazing piece of theatre. The enthusiasm and dedication of everyone involved is an inspiration.

I'm passionate about theatre. My writing career began in journalism and progressed to plays. BLUE - a play I wrote in 2002 - won the Derek Lomas Memorial Playwriting Competition and was performed in Oxford, Yorkshire, Shropshire and at the Edinburgh Fringe. I work part-time for Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company.

Joel Kaye

I came to Testament to a Trade through the Oxford Playhouse Writers' Group. I was particularly attracted to dealing with the subject in a dramatic way, without trivialising it or reducing the actors to reciting chunks of history books.

It was beneficial to see how Gwilym and Heather approached the subject, and then to be involved in the drafting stages - and exciting to see actors breathing life into our lines.

Previously, I've had a play broadcast of BBC Radio 4, short stories on Radio Oxford, and written and produced education and training videos.

Gwilym Scourfield

The opportunity to research and write a play commemorating the 200th year since the Abolition of Slavery was incredibly exciting for me. Having read the harrowing autobiography of Claudah Equiano published in 1789 and seen the first-hand material from the Oxford archives, I was hooked.

Sheridan's wonderful plays and his connections with Parliament and Oxford made the possibility of a meeting with him, Dolben and Agutter a theatrical coup. Whether they did or not, the spirit of their deliberations within our play certainly seem likely to relate to Oxford's laissez-faire participation and reflect the strident minority voices who shouted 'Not in our name'. I have written other plays and stories, but never cooperated in a talented team like this to be a small part of a memorable production.

cast



Ria Bamisile Aethiopeia Janet, Tenarka

My family is from Nigeria, and it's been really interesting to work on a project using some of my mothers first language. I am a singer by training, and this is my first major theatre project.



Kaylee Corcoran Marina, Natalia

I've recently finished studying performing arts at college. I knew Testament to a Trade would be a challenge and strengthen my skills, but I also think it's important to realise how serious slavery was, and is in some cases. It's really opened my eyes.



Peter Dandy William Ottley, Makuri, Dolben, Bertie

I'm at the early stages of building a career in acting, and feel this project is a poignant subject which I am proud to be part of. I hope as an actor I can give the history a little justice and tribute for the huge suffering inflicted upon many.



Judith Fantozzi The Guide, Mrs Wood, Yana

Sickened by the records of what happened long ago, the horror stories that come to light in the present day and from personal experience of being homeless, I have found this project very telling and worthwhile. My training includes tuition at Union Seminary, New York, and with The Michael Chekhov Studio, London.



Howard McNair Noel, Sheridan, Doru, George

I have been a carer for autistic children and adults for ten years. This is my second theatre production, the first being a Dennis Potter play, and I have also been involved in a series of independent short and feature films.



Keshia Watson Ghnosi, Liliana

I was so impressed when we sat down and read the play. The writers had created something very real. It was remarkable to me how much bravery human beings have had to call on. I will take away a sense of pride of being part of a people that strived for freedom and overcame so much.

Keshia was nominated Best Actress for the short film Trippy at Bet's BFM International Short Film Awards in September.



Marlon Williams Adhobe, Rev Agutter, Ivan

I was intrigued by this play as it was different to most other plays, dealing with the strong issues of the slave trade. My insight into the whole situation is now much more vivid. I hope to obtain a full-time place at drama school, starting in September 2008.



Hannah Wilson Olga, Nancy

I wanted to embrace the challenge of a convincing portrayal of a character within a piece that carried so many traumatising and brutal undertones. I found the experience immensely humbling. I've been inspired to integrate into my gap year work with refugees and support groups connected with prostitution. I plan to study Classics at university.



Steve Scott Musical director/composer/percussion

This is one of the most challenging projects I've ever worked on. Once I tuned in to these characters who went on a journey of torment, I was inspired. Testament to a Trade has opened my eyes to who I am. Steve has performed with a number of well known singers, and now coordinates a performing arts programme in Buckinghamshire.



Ferris Chitsike Singer/composer

I was born in Zimbabwe and lived there until I was 12. I experienced struggles such as poverty and family feuds. Adjusting to life in the UK, I practised songwriting every day. I am part of the group 3rd World and am developing a solo career. This is my first theatre work.

crew



Verity Peacock Director

Verity trained at Manchester University, developing a strong interest in contemporary issues on (and off) stage. She has led projects involving homeless people, asylum seekers and substance mis-users. This production has been challenging on many levels, exploring our collective contribution to ending slavery across the world. This is Verity's first production for OTG.



Joanna Matthews Production and stage manager

Joanna is a member of OTG's committee and has worked on several productions over the last 3 years, including stage management, prop-making and front of house. She trained in stage management so long ago that sound was recorded on reel-to-reel tape and edited with the help of a yellow pencil. Nayo Butler-Puttock is assisting with stage management and front of house.



Felicity Peacock Production and publicity manager

As well as being secretary for OTG, Felicity has been production or stage manager for a number of productions, and has coordinated publicity for many as well (other contributors welcome!) When not busy with Guild business, she loves travelling and looking after her granddaughter Rowan.



Darren Cliff Filmmaker

Darren is a film and video producer. His entry for Channel 4's three-minute wonder documentary series was shortlisted to the final 9, and earlier this year his short film Alan was aired on national TV.



Mike Ward Technical manager

Mike is a theatrical jack of all trades. He directs, acts, designs sets and lighting and is a technician and operator for theatre, concerts and arts events. Julian Johnson is operating sound and lights during each performance and Colin Silvester is providing technical support.



Bill Moulford Production assistant

Bill has been found front or backstage for every Guild production over the past few years, and for other companies such as Cakes and Ale, as well as professional acting and voicework. Currently on a career sabbatical, he is about to take a theatre sabbatical to concentrate on a new career.



Emma-jane Jones Wardrobe

Emma-jane's training was in performing arts, and since then she has worked in community arts, for the most part as an Arts Development Officer. This is her second production for Oxford Theatre Guild. Verity Walker assisted with the making of costumes.



Stu McLellan Publicity designer

Stu is a community artist and one-time horticultural therapist, running workshops with community and school groups, as well as taking illustration, graphics and painting commissions, and trying to find time to bake bread.

Acknowledgments

So many people have contributed to the creation of this production, and our grateful thanks go to all involved. Special thanks to -

Jenny Berry at the Unicorn Theatre, Darren Cliff at Cliff Productions, Alex Graham at Oxfordshire Drama Wardrobe, Oxfordshire Touring Theatre Company, Rupert Rowbotham and team at Oxford Playhouse, Asylum Welcome, All Souls College, Bampton Parish Council, Alfons and Emmanuel at Osagyefo Theatre Company, BBC Radio Oxford, Robert Bristow at the Burton Taylor Studio, Carl Boardman and Talia Sussman at Oxfordshire Records Office, Sheila Robbins, Travis Perkins, Thame Players and Aspect Woodworking Ltd.

Thank you to all OTG members and friends and family of the cast who have lent props and costumes to the production.

Special thanks also to our panel guests and performance venues