



John Newton

1721 - 1807

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 nineteen, he was forced into service on HMS Harwich, but finding conditions intolerable, deserted. He 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.

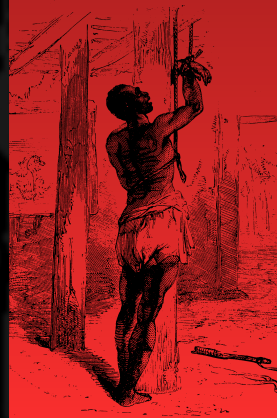
Newton experienced a famous and dramatic conversion at sea, but captained his first slave ship after this, and continued in the slave trade for several years. He attempted to be a suitably christian master by reducing the punishments of slaves and holding services on Sundays. Newton's sense of shame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

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

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.



JOHN NEWTON

“I saw who you were...
and I felt like tearing out your
throat because you were
such a kind, old, holy man.”



Olaudah Equiano
c.1745 - c.1797

Olaudah Equiano is famous for his autobiography, an account of his childhood as the son of the chief in an area called Essaka, an Igbo village in modern-day Nigeria, and of his experiences as a 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

THE CREATIVE TEAM

**MURRAY WATTS****Writer**

Murray began writing for the theatre at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and went on to become one of the founding members of Riding Lights Theatre Company in 1977. He lived in York for ten years, writing and directing for the company, before moving to Cardiff to work as an associate producer at BBC Wales. 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 Bush Theatre at Riverside Studios in 1989. Screenplays include *The Dream*, starring Jeremy Irons, first shown on BBC2 in 1991, and *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 award for the most inspirational film of the year on US TV. In 2005, he directed the touring stage musical, *Luv Esther*, for producer Ray Goudie. Last year, he wrote and directed his first short film, *The Walk*, starring Andrew Harrison, and has recently completed screenplays for two feature films, *Pure Gold*, a proposed sequel to the film *Chariots of Fire* with Tricord in Canada, and *Doodles*, a CGI animation project with Cartwn Cymru and The Welsh Film Agency. Murray now lives in Caithness, where he is director of Wayfarer Productions and the arts charity, the Wayfarer Trust.

**PAUL BURBRIDGE****Director**

Paul is a founder member of Riding Lights Theatre Company and its Artistic Director. He directed his first play by Murray Watts while at Oxford University and since then has directed several other of his plays - *Catwalk*, *Walkout!*, *St John's Gospel* and an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* which toured to St Petersburg. Paul has been involved as an actor, writer or director in all the major Riding Lights' productions, from early award-winning satirical revues at the Edinburgh Festival to the recent productions of *The Alchemist* and

The Complete Works with which Friargate Theatre, the Company's first permanent home, was opened in York in May 2000. He has also been part of the creative team which has produced recent successful national tours of new plays: *a different drum*, *Balancing Act*, *Friendly Fire*, *Love Fifteen*, *Science Friction*, *Saving Grace*, *Hope Opera*, *Remember Remember* and *Pipe Dreams*. Other major shows for Riding Lights have included directing his own adaptation of *Three Men in a Boat* (The Northcott Exeter, Theatr Clywd and York Theatre Royal), *The Fire Raisers* (The Northcott and The Bridewell), *Wrestling with Angels*, *The Winter's Tale* (The Bridewell and two national tours), *Dick Turpin*, Bridget Foreman's world premiere adaptation of *Augustus Carp Esq.* and *Mistero Buffo*. *African Snow* is the first co-production between Riding Lights and York Theatre Royal.

**SEAN CAVANAGH****Designer**

Trained under Ralph Koltai at the Central School of Art and Design, Sean has worked for many theatres throughout the UK and abroad. He is an Artistic Associate and Director of Riding Lights and has designed much of the company's work, including Friargate Theatre's opening production of *The Alchemist*, the musical *Dick Turpin*, touring productions of *Mistero Buffo*, *Remember Remember*, *Science Friction*, *The Fun of the Fair*, *Saving Grace*, *Hope's Kitchen* and *The Winter's Tale*. Other productions include the world premiere in Singapore of *Judah Ben Hur - the Musical*, *Pickwick* in Budapest, *Edward III* in Taormina, David Oyelowo's production of *The White Devil*, *Who Do You Say I Am?* for the BBC and multimedia events, including *The Rock* in San Francisco and *Rock Me Amadeus* in Vienna. Touring productions include *M. Butterfly*, *Outside Edge*, *The Sound of Fury*, *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Dancing in the Streets* and Riding Lights' *The Winter's Tale* and currently the UK tours of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Sweet Soul Music* and the US tour of *Rat Pack*, live from Las Vegas. West End credits include *The Tempest*, *The Aspern Papers*, *Sherlock Holmes - The Musical*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Treasure Island*, *Never the Sinner*, *The Miracle Worker*, *In Praise of Love*, *The Roy Orbison Story*,

Stepping Out - The Musical, The Fire Raisers, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Rat Pack - Live from Las Vegas and currently *Dancing in the Streets* at the Playhouse Theatre.



BEN OKAFOR
Composer

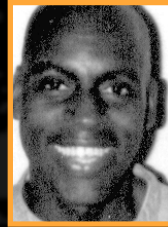
Ben is a political activist whose songs frequently address issues of human rights. As well as composing and performing original music for theatre Ben has released ten albums, four of which, *Nkiru, Generation, Coffee With Lazarus* and *Acoustic Close-Up*, are available through his website. Ben is currently working towards the completion of his new album, *Diverted Traffic*, and preparing to embark on his next tour of universities and colleges titled *The Spirit Of The Act Tour*, which scrutinises the intent and the achievement of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. In July this year the play *Child of Biafra*, written in collaboration with Justin Butcher and based on Ben's own experience as a thirteen-year-old during the Nigeria Biafra war, opens in Manchester's Contact Theatre before touring nationwide to venues including Hackney Empire. www.benokafor.com



BEN CRACKNELL
Lighting Designer

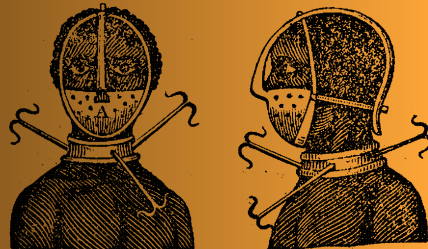
Ben gained a BA (Hons) Lighting Design from Rose Bruford College in 2001. Since then he has worked as a Lighting Designer in the UK and internationally. Recent Lighting Design credits include *Hot Flush* (Bromley and UK Tour), *Stormforce* (Riverside Studios), *The Play What I Wrote* (UK Tour), *Red - The Indian Dance Spectacular* (Johannesburg Civic Theatre), *The War of the Worlds* (UK Arena Tour), Elton John (Munich), *The Winter's Tale* (Riding Lights, York & UK Tour), *This is Elvis* (Windsor & UK Tour), *Dancing in the Streets* (West End & UK Tour), *Luv Esther* (UK Tour) *The Who's Tommy* (UK Tour), *A Christmas Carol* (UK Tour), *Errol Brown* (UK Tour), *Boogie Nights* (UK & World Tour), *Time's Up* Workshop Production (West End), *The Best Of Cuba Spectacular* (Casino Figueira, Portugal). He

has designed the World / Royal Film Premiere of *James Bond - Casino Royale*, and London film premieres of *Hot Fuzz, Flushed Away, Dreamgirls, Bridget Jones 2* and *Alexander*. Architecturally, he has designed the Exterior and Reception lighting for the 2005, 2006 and 2007 Brit Awards and an installation at the prestigious Courtts Bank. As a Lighting Director, recent work includes DVDs for *The Kaiser Chiefs, Steven Seagal, Hoobastank, Joe Pasquale, Goldfrapp* and *Errol Brown*. Also on television, *The Diesel U Music Awards* (Remedy / Channel 4), *The 2007 Brits Launch Show, Amy Winehouse* at the Brit School and *The 2006 Brits Launch Show* (all Brits TV / ITV), *Mindfield* (October Films / BBC3) and *One Priceless Night* (Channel 4). Ben@benracknell.co.uk



CLYDE BAIN
Movement Direction

Clyde graduated from the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in 1986. He has worked and toured in Europe, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and the USA with a variety of contemporary / physical theatre companies and choreographers including Nexus Dance Company, Springs Dance Company, Pneumata, Bi Ma, Imlata, Green Candle Dance Company, Nigel Charnock, Aletta Collins, Mark Bruce, Emlyn Claid, Annette Aubrey and Janet Smith. More recently he has acted in productions of *Dance and The Railroad* for Northern Stage under the direction of Alan Lyddiard and *Riding Lights Theatre Company's Wrestling with Angels* by Nigel Forde, directed by Paul Burbridge. He leads workshops on a regular basis for the National Youth Theatre and the Christian Dance Fellowship of Britain. He is currently touring with Springs Dance Company in Paul Field's show, *Cargo*.



THE CAST

**ROGER ALBOROUGH**

Roger trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Theatre credits include *Loot* and *Dry Rot* at York Theatre Royal; national tours of *The Night They Raided Minsky's* and *Polly*; *Last Summer in Chulimsk* for Birmingham Repertory Theatre; *Up 'n' Under*, *Curse of the Werewolf* and *Are You Lonesome Tonight?* at the Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch; *Way Upstream* and *Up in the Gallery* at St Andrews, Jonnie Rice in a tour of *Spivs*, Eddie Carbone in *A View from the Bridge* at Sheffield Crucible, *Widow Twankey* in *Aladdin* at Liverpool Everyman and Dr Prospero in *Return to the Forbidden Planet*. West End credits include Brian Heritage in *Enjoy* at the Vaudeville Theatre, Albert Prosser in *Hobson's Choice* at the Lyric Theatre, *Annie Get Your Gun* at Chichester Festival Theatre and the Aldwych, Hipockets Duncan in *Buddy* at the Victoria Palace Theatre and Hawk Houghton in *Jailhouse Rock* at the Piccadilly Theatre. Television credits include *Rosemary and Thyme*, *Doctors*, *My Hero*, *The Debt*, *Judge John Deed*, *Casualty*, *Bomber Harris*, *Strife*, *More Lives Than One*, *Escape Banned*, *The Night They Raided Minsky's*, *Eastenders*, *Pie in the Sky*, *Chernobyl*, *Green*, *Green Grass and Uther Pendragon* in the series of *Merlin*, all for the BBC, *Closing Ranks* and *Mr. Pye* (Channel 4), *The Bill* (Thames), *Unnatural Causes* (Anglia), *Frank Stubbs Promotes* (Carlton), *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (Ecosse Films) and *Thieftakers* (Carlton). Film credits include *It's Not You It's Me*, *Velvet Goldmine*, *Julie and the Cadillacs* and *Shaka Zulu - The Citadel*.

**MENSAH BEDIKO**

Mensah has lived in London all his life. After a number of years working in IT he decided on a career change in 2004 and went to study acting at the Poor School. Mensah's theatre work whilst training included Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Sweeney Todd in Sweeney Todd* and *Big Daddy* in *Sweet Charity*. *Showboat* at the Royal Albert Hall was Mensah's first professional engagement, closely followed by *Prostate* and then *Tobias & The Angel* at the Young Vic.

**ANTONIA KEMI COKER**

Antonia has worked in theatre nationally and internationally for twenty years. Most recently, she has been working on *Wire in the Blood* (ITV), at The Theatre Royal Stratford East on *The Snow Queen* and with Polka Theatre on *Stamping, Shouting, Singing Home* and *Visible* (Soho Theatre). Antonia also performed in the successful Stratford East production of *The Big Life*, which transferred to the West End and was adapted for BBC Radio 4. Other theatre includes *It's Just a Name* by Don Kinch (Birmingham Rep), *In the Parlour with the Ladies* by Nona Shepphard (The Drill Hall), *Lear's Daughters* by Women's Theatre Group (Yellow Earth Theatre; national tour, Soho Theatre), *Ragamuffin* by Amani Naphtali (Birmingham Rep, Theatre Royal Brighton), *Yerma* (Chipping Norton, on tour), *Sense of Belonging* (Arcola Theatre), *Other People's Shoes* (Spare Tyre Theatre Co), *Things Fall Apart* (WTP / Royal Court), *LIFT* (The Tower Project), *Zumbi* (Black Theatre Co), *Arawak Gold*, *Resurrections* and *Maskerade* (Talawa Theatre). As well as doing a number of voice overs for BBC programmes and trailers, Antonia appeared in *Things Fall Apart* for BBC Radio.

**EMMANUELLA COLE**

Emmanuella recently trained at Central School of Speech and Drama for a BA (Hons) in Acting. She is looking forward to *African Snow*, her first theatre tour since graduating.

**CHRIS JACK**

Chris graduated from Salford University with a BA (Hons) in Media and Performance. His theatre credits include; *Crocodile Seeking Refuge* (Ice & Fire), *A Taste of Honey* (Oldham Coliseum/One For The Road), *The Earl of Mo'bay* (Nottingham Playhouse), *A Midsummer Nights Dream* and *Les Blancs* (Royal Exchange Theatre,

Manchester), *Angels In America: Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* (Unity Theatre, Liverpool), *Titus Andronicus* (KAOS Theatre), *Blindsight* (Contact Theatre/Tramway), *A Christmas Carol* and *Aladdin* (Lawrence Batley Theatre), *Magic Earth, Magic Sky* ((MAC), *Peter Pan* (Brewery Arts Centre), *Ali Baba & the 40 Thieves* (London Bubble), *King Lear* (50 Dolla Players), *The Three Musketeers* (Feelgood Theatre) and *The Selfish Giant* (Leicester Haymarket). He has also worked on numerous development workshops for new writers with Flip The Script, at the Contact Theatre, Manchester and North West Playwrights. Chris's television appearances include *Emmerdale* (Yorkshire), *That Peter Kay Thing* (Open Mike), *The Good Samaritan*, *Vincent*, *Northern Lights* and *Coronation Street* (all Granada) and numerous commercials. Chris has also recorded several plays for BBC Radio 4, most recently *Small Island* by Andrea Levy.



JADE LAURIE-HART

Jade trained at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and graduated with a BA (Hons) in acting. Since leaving her theatre credits include: Birmingham Repertory Theatre's Transmissions Festival; *Jenny on the Block* (Birmingham Repertory Theatre); *The Slam* (Soho Theatre). Jade has also appeared in *Doctors* on BBC.



REX OBANO

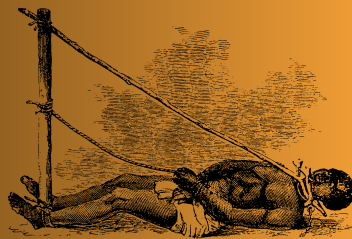
Rex trained at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art where he was awarded the 1995 Laurence Olivier Bursary. Theatre work has included Prospero in *The Tempest* (New Wolsey, Ipswich), Oz in *The Wizard of Oz*, Sam in *Master Harold and the Boys*, Reverend Sykes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Aslan in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (Leicester Haymarket); Jack in *The Beggar's Opera*, Will Parrish in *Flyin' West* (Orange Tree Theatre); Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Theatre Clwyd / Tour, Winner of the Manchester Evening News Theatre Award for Best Visiting Production 2002); Claudius in

Hamlet, Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (Merlin International Theatre, Budapest); First Witch in *Macbeth* (Ludlow Festival); Ajiing Japour in *The Settling Dust*, Geoffrey in *No Place Left For Heroes* (Union Theatre); Selwyn in *This Island's Mine* (Bedlam Theatre, Edinburgh); Maye Okunade in *Trojan Women - The Women Of Owu* (Chipping Norton / Tour) and *Hamlet, Cymbeline, The Spanish Tragedy, More Words and Henry VIII* (Royal Shakespeare Company). Television and film has included *Jack Brown and the Curse of the Crown*, *On the 8-Ball*, *Tales of The Underground*, *The Bill*, *Whacked!* and *Angell's Hell*. Opera work has included *Down by the Greenwoodside* (Three Mills Island).



ISRAEL OYELUMADE

Israel is a graduate of RADA. His theatre credits include *Royal Hunt of The Sun* for The Royal National Theatre, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Antony and Cleopatra* (both at the Haymarket Theatre), *Volpone*, *Oroonoko* (winner of the EMMA award) and *School for Scandal* all for the RSC, *Sacrificed*, *Who Killed Mr Drum* and *The White Devil*. Radio work includes *Olushambles*, *The Estate* and *Grace Unshackled: The Story of Olaudah Equiano*. TV work includes *The Window*, *Ghost Squad*, *Sensitive Skin*, *New Tricks*, *Doctors*, *EastEnders*, *Judge John Deed*, *The Long Firm*, *Casualty*, *Prime Suspect*, *The Bill*, *Man and Boy* and *Destination 2000*. Film work includes *The Tiger and The Snow*, *Exorcist: The Beginning*, *About A Boy*, *Dirty Pretty Things*, *Roof Jumping*, *Tag - Back In The Day* and *Pirates of The Caribbean 2*.





ROBERT SHERLOCK

Robert's theatre work includes *The Wasp in the Wig*, *Red Riding Hood's Wolf* and *Rumpelstiltskin* in *The Grimms' Tales* (both for Sixth Sense Theatre Company), *Horatio* in *Hamlet* and *Julius Sagamore* in *The Millionairess*. Credits for *Riding Lights* include *The Winter's Tale*, *Signs and Blunders*, *Hope's Kitchen*, *Hope Opera*, *Angel at Large* and for *Riding Lights Roughshod Tempting Fete* and *Saving Grace*.



KENNY THOMPSON

Kenny's theatre credits include *Showboat* (Royal Albert Hall), *Cleopatra* (Unity, Liverpool), *The History Boys* (Royal National Theatre), *The Big Bamboo* (Liverpool Everyman), *The Lion King* (Lyceum Theatre), *Idle Pop* (Quicksilver Theatre Company), *Such Sweet Thunder* (NYMT / Newcastle Theatre Royal), *Best of Broadway* (Palace Theatre), *Tight* (Brief Candle Theatre Company) and *Poor Ted* (OnO Theatre Company). His television and film credits include *Mobile* and *My Beautiful Son* (Granada), *Sorted*, *Eastenders* and *Doctors* (BBC), *Playing the Field* (Tiger Aspect), *Brannigan's March* (One Day Films) and *Suspicion* (Yorkshire TV).



THE CAST

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AFRICAN SNOW

THE PLAY

John Newton and Olaudah Equiano were part of a small circle of Abolitionists in London which included William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and Granville Sharp. Sharp was a close friend of Equiano, others knew him very well and eminent preachers like John Wesley, who had long spoken out against slavery, were avid readers of Equiano's autobiography.

There is no direct evidence that Newton and Equiano ever met in person, but it is impossible to believe that they did not...

The action of the play takes place in the mind of John Newton, in 18th century London, in Africa... on the deck of a slave ship... the world.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Roger Alborough

Rev John Newton

Mensah Bediako

Olaudah's father
Daniel Queen, a sailor
Robert King, a Quaker merchant

Antonia Kemi Coker

Olaudah's mother
Cook
Miss Guerin, Pascal's other aunt

Emmanuella Cole

Chuma Ifem, Olaudah's sister
Polly, Newton's wife
Miss Guerin, Captain Pascal's aunt

Chris Jack

William Wilberforce
Richard Baker, a sailor
Job Lewis, a sailor

Rex Obano

Captain Michael Pascal, Naval Officer
Angel

Israel Oyelumade

Olaudah Equiano

Kenny Thompson

Slave
Sailor
British Naval Captain

All other parts, British and African, played by members of the ensemble

GLOSSARY

Embrenche

Men with ritual scars denoting, as Equiano writes, "the highest distinction, and signifying in our language a mark of grandeur."

Ibo (pron. ee'-bo)

The people indigenous to Iboland, which covered most of what is now Southeast Nigeria.

Ikenga

An Ibo word meaning the strength of the masses.

Mmonwu

A Ibo mask play. Mmonwu means a visible soul, or spirit. The Mmonwu mask play is performed in coming-of-age celebrations, funerals and so on, in which the masks are regarded as the revived souls of deceased persons.

Oye-Ibo

"Red men living at a distance"; a people from the Southwest of the region.

Snow

A class of two-masted ship, commonly used for the transportation of slaves. 'The African' was the first slave ship on which John Newton was captain.

French map of the Guinea coast, 1722



FOR AFRICAN SNOW

Murray Watts
Writer

Paul Burbridge
Director

Sean Cavanagh
Designer

Ben Okafor
Composer

Ben Cracknell
Lighting Designer

Clyde Bain
Movement Direction

Catherine Willis
Casting Director

Francesca Finney
Company Stage Manager

Robert Sherlock
Jade Laurie-Hart
Assistant Stage Managers

Matt Somerville
Sound Operator

Veronica Hardwick
Wardrobe

Chris Jack
Jade Laurie-Hart
Robert Sherlock
Kenny Thompson
Understudies

FOR YORK THEATRE ROYAL

Mike Devaney
Production Manager

Anna Belderbos
Stage Manager

Clare Morse
Assistant Stage Manager

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Set built by
Weld-Fab Engineering
J Wedgwood & Sons
& York Theatre Royal

Scenery painted by
Julian Saxton and Vicki Hackett

Costumes by
York Theatre Royal Wardrobe Department

Props by
York Theatre Royal; Beckie May & Clare Kendall
Hilary Forde

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Poster Design
Stone Soup

Programme Design
Antony Dunn, Riding Lights

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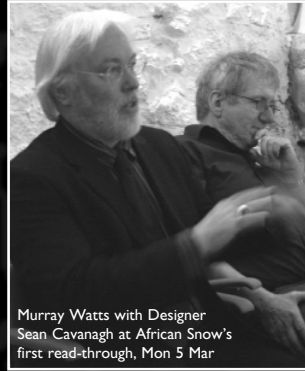
AFRICAN SNOW



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Murray Watts with Designer Sean Cavanagh at African Snow's first read-through, Mon 5 Mar

ANOTHER HIDDEN STORY

by Murray Watts
author of *African Snow*

I have hesitated to write anything here, because

a play must speak for itself. Yet perhaps there is another hidden story, about the birth of a play, which is worth offering in a theatre programme.

As a teenager, I was standing in the centre of Liverpool - my home city - gazing at the beautiful buildings. I said something to a friend about how beautiful and majestic they were, and the only thing on my mind that day was art and architecture. I was studying for an Art A-level. My friend seemed strangely unimpressed. 'Do you know who paid for all this?' He looked at me hard. 'Slaves,' he said. At that moment, it seemed like the whole of Liverpool was running with blood. I had heard of the horrors of slavery. I had not heard that my own city was at the very heart of this trade.

In 1981 I spent a year in South Africa, as a visiting lecturer in drama. I worked on a theatre project in Soweto, which became a tri-lingual street theatre show in English, Sotho and Zulu. The youth leader I was working with was one of the most brilliant and inventive men I have ever worked with, but he did not have the vote. He had a brother imprisoned on Robben Island for his involvement with the ANC. He had experienced terrible personal hardships at the hands of the white authorities, and had collected the bodies of children gunned down by the police in the youth club minibus. The dark cloud of slavery over the world was not something that had been lifted in 1807, or 1833, or at the time of the American Civil War. It was still with us, but the spirit of Africa was stronger than ever. My Sowetan friend somehow managed to remain passionate and angry, without bitterness, and to be full of laughter and love. Although I was a white writer from Merseyside, he made me feel that Africa was my true home.

In 1989, Bush Theatre staged my play, *The Fatherland* at the Riverside Studios. It was only with the constant encouragement of friends from Soweto that I rescued my unfinished play, abandoned for some years, and then was finally given the chance by Bush theatre to bring it to life with the help of eleven remarkable actors and a reconstructed Sowetan street. But I felt, even then, that there was another journey to make some day, a journey far closer to home.

In 2001, I was commissioned to write both a short theatre piece about John Newton, and then a treatment for a possible movie, which was never made. All this finally led to a short film, which I wrote and directed myself, called *The Walk*, but as I explored the lives of Wilberforce and Newton - both men I have admired so much - many questions arose. Why was the real, troubling story of Newton largely unknown? Why had the legend persisted that Newton had given up slavery as the result of a religious conversion, when in fact his main life as a slave trader was after his conversion? Why had Newton only spoken out so late in his life? Why was the Western world still obsessed with the white heroes of abolition? What had happened to the great African voices in this story? I began to read and research. It was then that Olaudah Equiano came walking, quietly and confidently, into my life.

When I was reading Newton's captain's log, during the writing of *African Snow*, I came across a reference to mooring his slave vessel at Hoyle Lake. That was where I was born, near Liverpool, and it made this story seem very close indeed. It was my friend, Paul Burbridge, also born in Hoylake, who knew of my fascination for Newton and Equiano, and so *African Snow* has become his journey as well as mine. I thank him for his courage and persistence in bringing this play to the stage.

Murray Watts, March 2007

AFRICAN SNOW

IN REHEARSAL, MARCH 2007



FINDING EQUIANO

BY ISRAEL OYELUMADE



As an actor, touching people's hearts with stories of passion and perseverance is something I relish. There are few times in one's career when one is faced with a role and a play of such historical significance. So significant, in fact, that the need for the abolition of slavery can still be seen all over the world today. Being cast as Olaudah Equiano, one of the first black role models in Afro-European society (notably also one of the key campaigners and a key member of the "Sons of Africa") is a benchmark moment in my career.

Accessing this great man has made me look deep within myself - this is a man who changed the course of history. In today's society the 'moral fibre' of man is not of the same constitution as it was amongst these sort of men.

As I read Equiano's autobiography I laughed, cried and even experienced myself moments of great solace during which I pondered on how he must have felt whilst living in such inhumane conditions. Yet, like a phoenix, this warrior rose out of his past into his present day to enable our future. As the actor playing Equiano, this is the challenge I am facing now: to truly transport every member of the audience to these very heights and depths of Equiano's life and journey.



all rehearsal photos © Peter Byrne, www.peterbyrne.co.uk

RIDING LIGHTS THEATRE COMPANY



Riding Lights is one of the UK's most productive independent theatre companies, touring nationally and internationally since 1977. With the support of its Members, Riding Lights established a permanent home at Friargate Theatre in York in 2000, opening its new studio theatre with productions of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and the company's own *The Complete Works*. Since then, Friargate Theatre has hosted several major new productions by Riding Lights, including the award-winning *Dick Turpin* and Bridget Foreman's world premiere adaptation of the comic novel *Augustus Carp Esq*. Riding Lights is principally a national touring company. Its work has recently included Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Paul Burbridge's acclaimed production of *The Alchemist* will tour nationwide for the first time this autumn. Riding Lights also operates a community touring company, Roughshod, for seven months of the year. www.ridinglights.org

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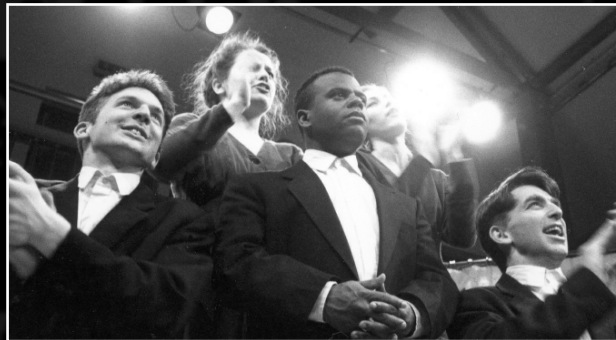
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Rebecca Thomson	Education & Youth Theatre Assistant
Murray Watts	Associate Director

Riding Lights
Theatre Company
Friargate Theatre
Lower Friargate
YORK YO1 9SL

01904 655317
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Reg. Charity no. 1070142



Israel Oyelumade,
with actors David Oyelowo, Jessica Oyelowo, Priyanga Burford and Penelope Uilli-Schmidt, was one of the founder members of Brighton's dynamic, innovative InService Productions in 2004. InService theatre

productions so far have included *The White Devil*, and the company's screenwork has begun with the BBC short film *Graham and Alice*. InService Productions, also artistic directors of Brighton Dome Youth Theatre, are excited and honoured to be working with Riding Lights and York Theatre Royal.



York Theatre Royal has been producing great drama for great value in the City of York for over 250 years. The past and present are united, as the historical elegance of the auditorium contrasts with the modern foyer and intimate Studio space, allowing a wide variety of

programming. Today audiences can choose between drama, comedy, dance, opera, debate, youth theatre and one of the most popular pantomimes in the country. York Theatre Royal also has one of the largest and busiest Education departments in the country that work with over 2500 local and regional young people every year. The Theatre is committed to bringing a range of quality productions from around the country to complement their own inspiring productions created in the heart of Yorkshire.
www.yorktheatreroyal.co.uk

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 Propmaker Beckie May

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YORK THEATRE ROYAL

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

ABOLITION AN UNFINISHED BUSINESS

"London is capital of sex slave trade" screams the headline... from 2007.

Tonight's play takes us back more than 200 years, when there were four million slaves in the world. Now there are over twenty million. Forced and bonded labour, child soldiers, human trafficking - these forms of slavery have burgeoned, not declined, in the modern world.

In 1807, when William Wilberforce finally got his Bill to abolish the slave trade through Parliament, it seemed like the beginning of the end of the worst excesses of human exploitation.

Have things really got better? Back then, a slave trader could buy an enslaved African for a third of what a rural British labourer earned in a week. The cockle-pickers who died in Morecambe Bay in 2004 were paid just £1 for a nine-hour shift. Two hundred years after Wilberforce's bill was passed, London is the main market for human traffickers in Europe.

The tentacles of this evil trade reach every corner of the world, and the victims are the poorest and most vulnerable.



Trafficked and disoriented: harsh new reality in a Bombay basement

© Santosh Verma

Take, for example, Halina, from a Bangladeshi village, who was 12 when she was sold into sex slavery in a brothel in India.

Halina (not her real name) was forced to work as a prostitute for six long years. Every night she was helpless to resist as she was violated by 10 to 15 different men. She often contemplated suicide but, eventually, she convinced one of her regular clients to help her to escape and she made her way back to Bangladesh.

"That is where I lost my life really," she says of those brutal Indian nights. "When I am alone in my house I cry for my lost innocence."

Last year her life finally took a turn for the better when she got training in tailoring and embroidery on a programme run by the Church of Bangladesh.



Learning new skills: tailoring training for former victims of trafficking

She is now recovering her dignity by realising her simple dreams of being financially self-reliant. On graduating, she got an interest-free loan and is now in business selling the clothes she makes.

What's more, through attending women's meetings of the Church's social development programme, Halina has found the courage to take her traffickers to court. The Church's gender equality officer is supporting her through the process.

But the Church of Bangladesh is not a rich or powerful institution. It has only 16,000 members in a country of 139 million, most of them extremely poor. Yet the success of their anti-trafficking project, which began in one rural

district in 2005, is an example of what ordinary people can do when they join together.

It's a partnership of local people, church staff, international workers and the agencies that support them, who are in turn supported by people like you.

So far, the Bangladeshi church has trained 57 formerly trafficked women in new skills. Last year the Church reached more than 8,000 local people with a message of awareness about trafficking. Soon, it will be rolling out the programme across the country.

It shows that a small, local start can lead to great things. Mission worker James Pender from Surrey, who helped launch the programme, appeals to us all to help.

"Let's combine our efforts and see modern forms of slavery such as the trafficking of young women like Halina stopped!"

It's easy to think that the days of the great Abolition campaigns are in the past. But what you'll see tonight, if it means anything at all, is a call for you personally to do something - anything - to help end the evil of slavery in our time.

It is still an unfinished business.



Alliance of ordinary people: a development project in Dhaka makes campaign wristbands for CMS

You can help set captives free today. Please visit www.cms-uk.org or call 0845 620 1799 to find out more.

The CMS Free For All Fund supports positive action against slavery today, through education, awareness-raising and rehabilitation - including projects like the anti-trafficking programme in Bangladesh. If you would like to give, please donate online or by phone (details above) or write to



Reaching out: Dr Lalita Edwards, supported by CMS, runs clinics for sex workers in Pune's red light district

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...in 2007 there are
over 20,000,000



find out more www.antislavery.org www.setallfree.net www.stophetraffik.org

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Tue 22 & Wed 23 May
Box Office 0845 330 3565

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Box Office 0870 607 7535

HACKNEY Empire
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Box Office 020 8985 2424

HULL New Theatre
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