

Eclipse Theatre announces cast and tour for first Revolution Mix production as part of game-changing movement to enrich repertoire with Black British stories

Eclipse Theatre has announced the cast and UK-wide tour dates for the world premiere of 'Black Men Walking', the first work to be staged as part of the company's ground-breaking 'Revolution Mix' movement which will deliver the largest ever national programme of Black British stories produced and performed in UK theatres.

An Eclipse Theatre and Royal Exchange Theatre co-production, 'Black Men Walking', will premiere on January 18th, 2018 at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester.

Inspired by a real-life Black men's walking group based in Sheffield, the piece has been conceived by Eclipse in collaboration with Leeds-based rapper, singer, producer and performer **Testament**. A rising star in the theatre landscape, Testament was most recently acclaimed for his one-man show about feminism, **WOKE**, which fused powerful first-person narrative with his signature beat-boxing and rapping.

Directed by Eclipse Theatre's artistic director **Dawn Walton**, this new work mixes dramatic story-telling with original music written by Testament and performed by a four-person cast.

It tells the compelling story of three middle-aged Black men, Thomas, Matthew and Richard, who meet every month as part of a walking group to explore the dramatic landscape of the Peak District in Yorkshire. On this particular trip, the rest of group cancels and it soon feels like maybe they should have done too. The men find themselves forced to walk backwards through two thousand years of Black history, embarking on a dangerous journey that invokes an element of the supernatural, an encounter with the spirits of their ancestors and an exploration of what it means to be both Black and British today.

The walking group which inspired the production was founded in 2004 by a group of men of African and African-Caribbean heritage who started walking for health, wellbeing and camaraderie.

The cast includes **Tyrone Huggins** [*Prospero in 'The Tempest' for Improbable/Northern Stage/Oxford Playhouse; Gloucester in the Young People's Shakespeare's 'King Lear' for the Royal Shakespeare Company*] as Thomas; **Trevor Laird** [*Lloyd Boateng in 'One Man, Two Guvvornors' for the National Theatre; BBC One's 'Death in Paradise'*] as Matthew and **Tonderai Munyevu** [*Narrator in Bizet's Carmen at the Grange Festival; Sizwe Banzi Is Dead, an Eclipse Theatre Company / Young Vic co-production;*] as Richard. Completing the cast is **Dorcas Sebuyange** [*Hayleigh in 'The Elasticated Sound System' for 20 Storeys High*].

Comments Dawn Walton: "This powerful story perfectly encompasses everything the Rev Mix movement stands for; turning the spotlight onto Britain's missing Black history with a piece inspired by real people and real events. It is so important that these stories are told, especially when you look at the recent online backlash faced by Mary Beard who was accused of 're-writing history' by pointing out the ethnic diversity of Roman Britain. This reaction is evidence of a real lack of understanding about our true British heritage. Open a history book and you'll see that the Roman empire, Britain included, featured people from Ethiopia, Algeria and beyond.

"One of the earliest influences for Revolution Mix was Peter Fryer's seminal book, 'Staying Power', which unearths a compelling history of Black people in Britain over the last 2,000 years. The opening line of the book is '*There were Africans in Britain before the English came here.*' That one statement is so wonderfully provocative and for me, it set the wheels in motion for us to produce a body of work that will bring to stage and screen an erased history. This is just the first of several new works from Revolution Mix set to tour in 2018, which is also the 70th anniversary of the arrival of Windrush, a milestone which is often celebrated as the start of modern multicultural Britain. Acting as the antithesis to this, Revolution Mix will delve deeper to explore Black British history long before, and since, Windrush, offering a new perspective and insight into the full Black British experience."

Black Men Walking will run until 3rd February 2018 at the Royal Exchange Theatre, before embarking on a UK-wide tour Belgrade Theatre, Coventry; Northern Stage, Newcastle; West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds; Hull Truck Theatre; Theatre Clwyd, Wales; Royal Court Theatre, London; Sheffield Crucible Theatre; Salisbury Playhouse and Unity Theatre, Liverpool.

There are currently 14 Revolution Mix writers working with 11 partner organisations across the UK delving into 500 years of Black British history to produce an ambitious body of work including theatre plays, short films and radio plays, with more work set to tour in 2018 and beyond.

The full tour dates for Black Men Walking include:

Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester – Thursday 18 January - Saturday 3 February

Belgrade Theatre, Coventry – Wednesday 7 - Saturday 10 February

Northern Stage, Newcastle – Thursday 15 - Saturday 17 February

West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds – Wednesday 21 - Saturday 24 February

Hull Truck Theatre, Hull – Tuesday 27 February - Saturday 3 March

Theatr Clywd, Mold – Friday 16 - Saturday 17 March

Royal Court Theatre, London – Wednesday 21 March - Saturday 7 April

Crucible Theatre, Sheffield – Monday 9 - Thursday 12 April

Salisbury Playhouse – Wednesday 18 - Saturday 21 April

Unity Theatre, Liverpool – Thursday 26 - Saturday 28 April

More dates to be announced. <https://eclipsetheatre.org.uk>

‘Revolution Mix’ is supported The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; Arts Council England; Heritage Lottery Fund; Fenton Arts Trust and Unity Theatre Trust.

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You can download high-res images of the cast and creative team here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tbybi8xg6s7xbfd/AAA8yAT34-qUAZROATFmXtXya?dl=0>

For further information, images or interviews please contact Anys Williams or Debbie Bradley at Anita Morris Associates on 01943 603311.

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Notes for editors

- Sheffield based **Eclipse Theatre Company** is Britain's principal Black-led national touring company, and the only Black-led NPO delivering an annual middle scale tour to regional theatres. Through its high-quality productions, ground-breaking audience development programme and unique digital platform – eclipseTV, Eclipse Theatre Company instigates and influences change that will lead to a more diverse and equitable theatrical landscape.

Eclipse Theatre Company Ltd began in 2010, led by Dawn Walton as Artistic Director. Previously, in 2003, Arts Council England created the Eclipse initiative in agreement with a consortium of regional theatres, with the aim of addressing the complete absence of Black Theatre on the regional middle-scale touring network. Five years on, Eclipse Theatre Company are consistently redressing this imbalance by continuing to produce exceptional quality new productions for the middle scale. These have included:

Michael X (2009); The Hounding of David Oluwale (2009) by Kester Aspden (adapted by Oladipo Agboluaje); SUS (2010) by Barrie Keeffe, co-produced with the Young Vic; One Monkey Don't Stop No Show (2011, 2013) by Don Evans, originally co-produced with Sheffield Theatres; Sizwe Banzi is Dead (2014) by Athol Fugard, co-produced with the Young Vic; Journeys Beyond (2014) by Steve Medlin and company, co-produced with Wac Arts and A Raisin in the Sun (2016) by Lorraine Hansberry.

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- **Dawn Walton**

2017 marks 20 years in the industry beginning her directing career at the Royal Court Theatre, and was previously acting Head of Studio-National Theatre. Recent productions include Salt (Selina Thompson Productions).

For Eclipse Theatre: A Raisin in the Sun, (UK Theatre Best Touring Production nomination) One Monkey Don't Stop No Show; The Hounding Of David Oluwale (TMA: Best Director nomination). For Royal Court Theatre: Oxford Street (Olivier Awards Nomination); 93.2fm;

For Young Vic Theatre: Winners; The Blacks For Sheffield Theatres: There's Only One Wayne Matthews. Also Lyrikal Fearta (Sadlers Wells) and Urban Legend (Liverpool Everyman).

Film: Produced and Directed 10by10 a series of 10 short film dramas now a featured collection on Digital Theatre Plus.

- **'Revolution Mix'** will challenge inequality in theatre, television, radio and digital media. It will be the largest ever national delivery of Black British stories, produced and performed in regional theatres.

From the body of 'Revolution Mix' stories created by the 14 writers, Eclipse Theatre Company will commission 9 theatre plays; 2 short films and a series of radio plays. The first theatre tours are set to open in 2018 with the remaining pieces being delivered over the next two years.

'Revolution Mix' is supported by a £100,000 award from The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation; an Exceptional Award of £249,141 from Arts Council England; £97,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2015 and smaller donations from the Fenton Arts Trust and Unity Theatre Trust.

The Revolution Mix writers are:

- Perrie Balthazar
- Maurice Bessman
- Leah Chillery
- Lorna French
- Tyrone Huggins
- Afshan Lodhi
- Archie Maddocks
- Courttia Newland
- Chino Odimba
- Janice Okoh
- Juliet Gilkes Romero
- Shamsar Sinha
- Paula B Stanic
- Testament

The Revolution Mix partner venues are:

- Belgrade Coventry
- Birmingham Repertory Theatre
- Bristol Old Vic
- Hull Truck
- National Theatre
- Northern Stage
- Royal Court Theatre
- Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester
- Salisbury Playhouse
- Sheffield Theatres
- West Yorkshire Playhouse

www.eclipsetheatre.org.uk/revolution-mix

- **Testament** (aka Andy Brooks) is a rapper, singer, and producer. His credits include performances on BBC, MTV, BBC Radio 1 and BBC 1txra. He also holds the Guinness

World Record for leading the world's largest Human Beatbox ensemble. Beatboxing since he was 11 and rapping since he was 14, Testament went on to win the BBC Urban Music Talent Award in 2007. Since then he has gone onto work with a diverse range of artists from Grammy winner Corinne Bailey Rae and MOBO winner Soweto Kinch to the progenitor of Hip-Hop himself, US legend DJ KoolHerc.

Theatre includes: Blake Remixed (Little Mighty/West Yorkshire Playhouse/National Tour), The Ten Past (Leeds Library Service/LittleMighty), WOKE (Little Mighty/Royal Exchange, Manchester/West Yorkshire Playhouse/The Roundhouse/Camden People's Theatre)

Podcasts includes: White Open Spaces: Jerusalem (Pentabus/Eclipse Theatre)

Work as a performer includes: Shlomo & The Vocal Orchestra (Southbank Centre)

Awards include: 2007 BBC Performing Arts Fund Bursary

Testament is a rapper, human beatboxer and theatre maker currently based in West Yorkshire. Testament is a supported artist of The Royal Exchange, Manchester.