**Leave to Remain**

**Introductory Notes**

Welcome to this introduction to **Leave to Remain**, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. It’s a Lyric Hammersmith, Frantic Assembly co-production written by Matt Jones and Kele Okereke and is directed by Robby Graham, who has also choreographed the show.

The audio-described performance will take place on Saturday 9th February. There will be a touch tour at 6 pm, the introductory notes will start at 7.15 and the performance itself at 7.30. The play lasts for 1 hour and 50 minutes, with no interval. The live audio description will be given by Ruth James and Alison Clarke.

Please be aware, there will be haze used during the show.

Told through a mix of music, movement and drama, **Leave to Remain** is a tender portrait of love in the face of an uncertain future. Obi and Alex are a young gay couple leading busy London lives. When Alex’s visa comes into question, their relationship takes a turn. Marriage is an option, but the timing isn’t perfect, and it means confronting their families and their pasts. The show features original new songs by Bloc Party’s Kele Okereke, who writes in the programme “I’m hearing the music of my childhood. West African High Life music, mixed with electronic music, the music I hear in clubs today.”

When we enter the auditorium the open stage faces us: an empty space closed off by a huge opaque, white screen that stands halfway back on the stage. This screen fills the whole space and is sectioned by thin metal strips into panels, large at the bottom and then sub-divided into smaller rectangles at the top. The screen’s panels are on wheels and separate to slide easily away to the sides.

Once the screen slides away, tall darkened steel struts are revealed, stretching up the sides and back of the black-painted stage walls. These also support a balcony high above the main stage which spans the whole width. This is reached either by a staircase, which runs parallel to the back wall, or from the left side. On the right side of the balcony is a chair. Here in the shadows, a guitarist sits to play live over the already recorded tracks throughout the performance.

The paneled sections are moved separately and swiftly into place as locations change and allow the scenes to segue one into another. They help to represent the different locations, which are also sometimes indicated by the addition of an item of furniture. In this way, a table for two represents a restaurant, a sofa furnishes the apartment and so on. When the action moves to a nightclub, the club takes over the entire stage and is lit by a series of vertical neon tubes that flash in a variety of colours.

Obi’s smart converted warehouse apartment, where much of the action takes place, is suggested by a section of tall wall with a large window that descends in the centre, near the back. The wall below the window is black-painted brick, the area above it, a stylish neutral cream. A sleek plum-coloured sofabed stands in front of the wall. A plain black table with four black chairs and a long counter laden with an impressive array of implements suggests a designer kitchen.

There are 12 actors in the diverse, mixed heritage cast, all of whom play one main character, but also return as anonymous groups, for example, as passers-by, waiters or dancers in a club. At the centre of *Leave to Remain,* are **Obi**, **Alex** and their families.

**Obi** is in his late 20s. He is a short, stocky first generation British man of Nigerian descent. He’s well groomed and neatly dressed. His hair is shaved at the back and sides into a close-cut fade and straightened on top into a well cut flat top. At first, he wears tight-fitting blue jeans, a white t-shirt under a maroon shirt and brown leather jacket. He changes into a bright orange jacket and later still into a dark purple shirt and grey trousers.

We meet Obi’s family in the kitchen of their home – represented by a solid wooden table and chairs. The table is covered with a brightly patterned red and white patterned oilcloth. Their kitchen counter is more functional, with just a kettle and a few sugar and coffee containers on top.

**Kenneth** and **Grace** areObi’s parents. Kenneth is a very tall, dignified man, with great presence, who towers over Obi. He has rugged features and his expression is serious. Kenneth is immaculately dressed in a brown roll neck sweater, well pressed trousers and a smart tweed jacket. His shoes are highly polished.

His wife **Grace**, is a petite figure, who first appears wearing her nurse’s uniform, with a chunky amber cardigan over the top and sensible shoes. Grace has delicate features and bright dark eyes. She ties a brightly coloured scarf neatly in a band around her head.

Obi’s sister is **Chichi**. We first meet her as a feisty, energetic girl with a tousled mop of black curls, in her neat school uniform: maroon blazer, white shirt and short black, pleated skirt and sneakers. Once she’s left school she is a stylish young woman, wearing vibrant wide legged silk trousers in orange, white and black stripes, with a tie neck blouse and later a white-spotted black jacket. A bag is slung carelessly over her shoulder as well as, sometimes, a large colourful cotton bag, full of the baby necessities for her son, Kevin.

**Alex** is an American, living in London, where he meets Obi. He is white, slim and taller than Obi. He is more casual, his style veers towards scruffy and he wears a series of grey or washed-out blue patterned shirts, worn open over grey t-shirts and black jeans. His light brown hair is similarly cut to Obi’s, shaved at the back, but on top he has an uncombed curly mop.

**Brian** and **Diane** are Alex’s parents. When we first meet them they are newly arrived from the airport and are comfortably and casually dressed. Diane is blonde, her tousled hair hangs to her shoulders, and she arrives wearing black trousers with a long grey cardigan. A pink patterned scarf hangs around her neck and her sunglasses are tucked into her hair. Diane moves with a restless energy. Her husband Brian is tall with short greying hair and beard and a chilled relaxed demeanour. He wears casual, slightly crumpled beige trousers and a baseball cap, with a combat jacket and navy jumper.

**Damien** is slender and tall, a graceful figure with a closely shaved head and olive complexion. He dresses stylishly, but carelessly with designer t-shirts, black jeans and ankle boots, often wearing a grey pork-pie hat. His room, at first on the stage with a low coffee table and a couple of chairs, is later on the balcony high above the stage with the coffee table in front of a black leather sofa. The same actor also plays **Pastor Fabian**, a tall slim man dressed in black, with a white dog collar.

Damien’s friend **Raymond** is almost as tall, and white, with sticking up spiky brown hair and a sensitive face.

Other characters appear from time to time in hoodies and dark jeans to swiftly change location and also in carefully choreographed movement sequences where the whole company move together as one.

**Cast**

Obi is played by Tyrone Huntley

Kenneth by Cornell S. John

Grace by Rakie Ayola

Chichi is played by Aretha Ayeh

Alex is played by Billy Cullum

Brian by Martin Fisher

Diane by Johanne Murdock

Damian by Arun Blair-Mangat

Raymond is played by Sandy Batchelor

Young Obi and Obi’s Friend by Marvell Fayose

Company - Ndabane Emmanuel Makukula and Tudor Davies

Guitarist – Chrio Blake

**Creative Team**

The Sound is by Mike Thacker for Orbital

The Lighting is by Anna Watson

The Design is by Rebecca Brower

The Director is Robby Graham

The Writers are Matt Jones and Kele Okereke