



Press Release

Monday 20 December 2021

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***Running with Lions* to star *Bridgerton*'s Ruby Barker as full casting announced at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre**

- Ruby Barker best known as Marina Thompson in *Bridgerton*, Suzette Llewellyn as seen in *EastEnders*, prolific stage and screen star Wil Johnson, Velile Tshabalala and Nickcolia King-N'da to star in world premiere
- Co-production between the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and Talawa Theatre Company runs at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre from 10 February to 12 March. www.lyric.co.uk

The Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and Talawa Theatre Company today announce full casting for the world premiere of *Running with Lions* starring Ruby Barker (*Bridgerton*), Wil Johnson (*Waking the Dead*), Suzette Llewellyn (*EastEnders*), Nickcolia King-N'da (*The Death Of A Black Man*) and Velile Tshabalala (*Call The Midwife*). The debut stage play from new writing talent Sian Carter will be directed by Talawa's Artistic Director Michael Buffong (*A Kind of People, Guys & Dolls*) in the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre's Main House from **10 February to 12 March** with opening night for press on 15 February.

The production brings together **Ruby Barker**, best known for playing Marina Thompson in Netflix's hit series *Bridgerton*; **Wil Johnson** who has performed extensively on stage and the screen for 30+ years including all nine series of *Waking the Dead* as DS Spencer Jordan; **Nickcolia King-N'da** most recently on stage in *The Death Of A Black Man* at Hampstead Theatre; **Suzette Llewellyn** who most recently played Sheree Truman in *EastEnders* and will mark her first appearance in Hammersmith where she was born; and **Velile Tshabalala** recently seen as Viv in *Hollyoaks* and who has previously starred as Kareesha Lopez in *Kerching*, Monique Hyde in *Call The Midwife* and Rosita in *Dr Who*.

Michael Buffong, Artistic Director of Talawa Theatre Company, said: "*Sian Carter is a brilliant new writer; her story of an intergenerational family learning to overcome the challenges we all face today is, I think, life-affirming. To be able to co-produce this play with the Lyric is a welcomed dream. We have an amazing cast and I believe this is going to be an absolute treat for audiences.*"

Rachel O’Riordan, Artistic Director of Lyric Hammersmith Theatre said: “I’ve long admired the work of Talawa Theatre Company and Michael Buffong and it’s a joy to be working with them on *Running with Lions*, our very first co-production together, and championing an exceptional new writer, Sian Carter. We can’t wait to welcome an incredible cast and team to the Lyric and share this bold, exciting work with audiences in the New Year.”

Set and costume Design is by **Soutra Gilmour** (*Macbeth* - Almeida, *Out West* – Lyric Hammersmith Theatre), Lighting Design by **Aideen Malone** (*Death of a Salesman* – Young Vic and West End), Sound Design by **Tony Gayle** (*Get Up, Stand Up! The Bob Marley Musical* – West End) and Casting by **Chandra Ruegg** (*Lava* – Bush Theatre).

Running with Lions is an intergenerational family drama about love, loss and hope: following three generations of women, it explores what it means to allow those we love to be themselves. It marks the first co-production between the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and Talawa Theatre Company, the UK’s outstanding Black British Theatre Company. The production is based on the audio play of the same name originally commissioned by BBC Radio 4.

Following the death of a loved one, a British-Caribbean family struggles to come to terms with their grief. Isolated by their generational beliefs and challenges to their faith and mental health, they live between the things they do and do not say. Running with Lions explores the journey of one family’s reconciliation after loss and the rediscovery of love and joy.

As part of the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre’s Free First Night scheme, all tickets for the first preview of *Running with Lions* on Thursday 10 February will be free to people who live or work in Hammersmith and Fulham. Registration for the ballot will open in January 2022 via <https://lyric.co.uk/our-home/about-us/free-first-night/>

Ruby Barker (Imani) is best known for playing Marina Thompson in Netflix’s hit series *Bridgerton*. Her other screen credits include the lead role of Yakira in the multi-award winning independent feature film *How To Stop A Recurring Dream* and Georgia Nixon in Sky’s political drama *Cobra*.

Wil Johnson (Maxwell) has performed extensively on stage and screen, and in 2016 he received the British Urban Film Festival honorary award for 30+ years’ outstanding contribution to film and television. Television credits include DS Spencer Jordan in all nine series of *Waking the Dead*, *Carnival Row*, *The Larkins*, *Outlander*, *Death in Paradise*, *Vera*, *Lewis*. Film includes *Adulthood*, *Anuvahood* and *Macbeth*. Theatre includes *The Lion*, *The Witch And The Wardrobe* (Bridge Theatre), *Women Beware Women*, *A Mad World My Masters* (Shakespeare’s Globe), *Sweat* (Donmar Warehouse / Gielgud Theatre), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (UK tour), *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (Old Vic), *King Lear* (Royal Exchange), *A Wolf in Snakeskin Shoes* (Tricycle Theatre), *Fuente Ovejuna* (Royal National Theatre), *Redundant* (Royal Court), *Leave Taking* (Bush Theatre) and the lead in *Othello* (Royal Lyceum).

Nickcolia King-N’da (Joshua) most recently starred on stage in *The Death of a Black Man* at Hampstead Theatre. Other theatre credits include: *Boys* (The Pappy Show), *Venice Preserved*, *The Provoked Wife* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *King Lear* (Orange Tree Theatre), *Peter Pan* (Park Theatre), *See For Myself* (Tabard Theatre), *Astley’s Astounding Adventures* (New Vic Theatre). Television includes *McDonald & Dodds*, *Silent Witness*.

Suzette Llewellyn (Shirley) most recently played Sheree Truman in *EastEnders*. *Running with Lions* will mark her first appearance in her hometown of Hammersmith where she was born. Previous theatre includes: *Urban Afro Saxons* (Talawa), *Chigger Foot Boys* (Tara Arts), *Hell Screen* (Vault Festival), *Marisol* (Traverse Theatre). Other television credits include Estelle Vere in *Doctors*, Nanette Duvall in *Holby City*, Wendy Sparks in *Rocket's Island*, *Top Boy*, *The Dumping Ground*, *The Windsors*, *Catastrophe*. Film includes *Real*, *Faces*, *Molly Moon*, *Babymother*, *Playing Away*.

Velile Tshabalala (Gloria) most recently played Viv in Channel 4's *Hollyoaks*. Previously for television she has starred as Kareesha Lopez in *Kerching*, Monique Hyde in *Call The Midwife* and Rosita in *Dr Who* and further roles in *Birds of a Feather Christmas Special*, *The Mayoress*, *Utopia*, *Silent Witness* and *Class Dismissed*. Theatre includes: *Yap! Yap! Yap!* (Gaggle Productions), *Twelfth Night* (Nottingham Playhouse), *Case of Emergency* (Stratford East). Film includes *Euphoria*.

Sian Carter (Writer) trained as a playwright with Soho Theatre Writers' Lab and the Royal Court Playwriting Group and is an Alumna of the Almasi League of Writers. Her work was shortlisted for the 2020 BBC Studios Writers' Academy. As an Assistant Director her credits include *Human Animals* (Royal Court), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Chichester Festival Theatre), *King Lear* (Chichester Festival Theatre), *Quiz* (Noel Coward Theatre, West End). In 2021 her audio drama *Running with Lions*, co-produced by Talawa Theatre Company and Feral Inc. aired on BBC Radio 4.

Michael Buffong (Director) is the Artistic Director of Talawa Theatre Company. He has previously directed *Private Lives*, *All the Ordinary Angels*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, *On My Birthday* and the multi-award winning *A Raisin in the Sun* for the Royal Exchange Theatre. Most recently he has directed *A Kind of People* (Royal Court), *Guys & Dolls*, *King Lear*, and *All My Sons* (Talawa Theatre Company and Royal Exchange Theatre). Film and television credits include: *Tales From The Front Line* (Talawa), *Holby City*, *EastEnders*, *Admin*, *Placebo*, *Calais Rules*, *Doctors*, *Casualty*, *Comedy Shuffle*, *Hollyoaks*, *Feeling It*, *Blazed* and *Simple!*.

Soutra Gilmour (Set and Costume Designer). Theatre includes: *Out West* (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre), *Macbeth* (Almeida), *Romeo and Juliet* (Lyttelton Films for the NT); & *Juliet* (Shaftesbury Theatre); *Pinter at the Pinter* (Harold Pinter Theatre); *Evita* (Regent's Park); *Timon of Athens* (RSC/ TFANA Brooklyn); *Guys and Dolls* (Royal Exchange, Manchester); *Knives in Hens*, *Inadmissible Evidence*, *Piaf* (Donmar); *Apologia*, *Richard III*, *The Maids*, *The Homecoming* (Trafalgar Studios); *The Guards at the Taj* (Bush Theatre); *My Brilliant Friend* (Rose Kingston); *Pitchfork Disney*, *Killer* (Shoreditch Town Hall); *Twelfth Night*, *Les Blancs*, *Antigone* (National Theatre); *I See You*, *The Pride* (Royal Court); *Assassins*, *Merrily We Roll Along* (Menier); *Bull* (Young Vic); *Reasons to be Happy* (Hampstead); *Urinetown* (St James, West End); *The Crucible*, *The Duchess of Malfi* (Old Vic); *Reasons to be Pretty* (Almeida); *The Caretaker* (Sheffield Crucible/Tricycle); *The Commitments*, *From Here to Eternity*, *The Lover* and *The Collection* (West End).

Aideen Malone (Lighting Designer) has designed lighting for theatre, dance, opera and circus. She received the 2019 Knights Of Illumination Award for Best Lighting Design for *Death Of A Salesman* (Young Vic / Piccadilly). Other theatre includes: *A Kind Of People* (Royal Court); *A Monster Calls* (London Old Vic/Bristol Old Vic); *Brighton Rock* (York Theatre Royal/UK Tour); *Strange Tale Of Charlie Chaplin And Stan Laurel*, *Napoleon Disrobed* (Told By An Idiot); Darbar Festival (Sadlers Wells); *La Strada* (The Other Palace/UK tour); *Peter Pan* (NT); *Jane*

Eyre (BOV/NT/NTP tour); *Frankenstein* (Living Spit); *Raisin in the Sun* (Eclipse Theatre); *Blood* (Tamasha); *Romeo and Juliet* (The Rose Theatre); *Hetty Feather* (Vaudeville Theatre); *Alice in Wonderland* (Octagon Theatre); *Wind in the Willows, The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* (Rose Theatre); *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*, (Mercury Theatre); *Of Mice and Men* (Nottingham Playhouse); *Wizard of Oz* (Royal and Derngate); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Salisbury Playhouse).

Tony Gayle (Sound Designer) received the British Black Theatre Recognition Award 2019. Theatre includes: *And Breathe...* (Almeida) *Get Up, Stand Up! The Bob Marley Musical* (Lyric), *Shoe Lady* (Royal Court), *Poet In da Corner* (Royal Court & UK Tour) *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical* (UK Tour), *Jersey Boys* (UK Tour), *American Idiot* (UK Tour), *Songs For Nobodies* (Wilton's Music Hall & West End), *Floyd Collins* (Wilton's Music Hall), *The Wild Party* (The Other Palace), *Lazarus* (King's Cross), *West Side Story* (Bishopsgate Institute). Associate Sound Designer credits include: *Dear Evan Hansen* (Noel Coward), *Tina - The Tina Turner Musical* (Aldwych, Broadway, Hamburg, Utrecht), *Here Lies Love* (National Theatre, Seattle Rep), *The Book of Mormon* (Prince of Wales, European Tour), *Disney's Aladdin* (Prince Edward, Germany), *Beautiful - The Carole King Musical* (Aldwych) *The Girl from the North Country* (Old Vic, Noël Coward), *Groundhog Day* (Old Vic), *Matilda* (International tour), *Spring Awakening* (Lyric Hammersmith Theatre, Novello).

Chandra Ruegg (Casting Director) started working in the industry as a child actress. After more than 20 years, she moved into the world of casting. For Theatre: Casting Director for *Lava* (Bush Theatre). As an assistant; two seasons at Chichester Festival Theatre, *Dance Nation* (Almeida Theatre). For Screen she has cast short films *The Cunning* (Hazel Lane Productions) and *Tortoise* (BFI Network/Persona Pictures). Her associate work includes: *The Peripheral* (Amazon Studios/Kilter Films) Tim Burton's *Wednesday* (MGM/Netflix) *The Witcher 3* (Netflix). Her assistant work includes: *Outside The Wire* (Netflix/42 Film) *Voyagers* (Lionsgate) and *Censor* (BFI/Film 4).

- ENDS -

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Notes to Editors

IMAGES available to download [here](#)

Listings

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre and Talawa Theatre Company present

Running with Lions

Written by **Sian Carter**

Directed by **Michael Buffong**

Set & Costume Design by **Soutra Gilmour**

Lighting Design by **Aideen Malone**
Sound Design by **Tony Gayle**
Casting by **Chandra Ruegg**
Assistant Director **Kwame Owusu**

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre

Lyric Square, King Street, London, W6 0QL

Dates: Thursday 10 February – Saturday 12 March 2022

Press Night: Tuesday 15 February

Free First Night: Thursday 10 February

Open Captioned Performance: Saturday 26 February, 2.30pm

Audio Described Performance: Saturday 26 February, 7.30pm

Box office: 020 8741 6850

www.lyric.co.uk

Tickets from £10

£5 tickets available for Young Lyric Members

Age Guidance: 14+

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#RunningWithLions

Also upcoming at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre in 2022:

For The Culture – Celebrations of Blackness

Curated by **Dr Peggy Brunache, Tinuke Craig and Nicholai La Barrie**

28 – 30 January 2022

Headline events include: Le Gateau Chocolat (28 Jan), 90s Baby Show Podcast (29 Jan), Shingai (29 Jan), Lemn Sissay (30 Jan), Josephine (29 and 30 Jan)

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre

In association with Fictional Company presents

Scandaltown

By **Mike Bartlett**

Directed by **Rachel O’Riordan**

Dates: Thursday 07 April – Saturday 14 May 2022

Press Night: Thursday 14 April

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre presents

Britannicus

By **Jean Racine**

Translated and adapted by **Timberlake Wertenbaker**

Directed by **Atri Banerjee**

Dates: Thursday 26 May – Saturday 25 June 2022

Press Night: Wednesday 01 June

Amici Dance Theatre Company produced by Turtle Key Arts presents

One World: Wealth of the Common People

Choreographed by **Wolfgang Stange**
Directed by **Wolfgang Stange** and **Michael Vale**
Set design by **Michael Vale**
Composition by **Nao Masuda**
Costume Design by **Tina Bicat**
Lighting Design by **Phil Supple**
Dates: Wednesday 29 June – Saturday 02 July 2022
Press Night: Wednesday 29 June

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre presents
Closer
By **Patrick Marber**
Directed by **Clare Lizzimore**
Dates: Thursday 14 July – Saturday 13 August 2022
Press night: Wednesday 20 July

Lyric Hammersmith Theatre presents
Heather
By **Roy Williams**
A new version of ***Hedda Gabler*** by **Henrik Ibsen**
Directed by **Ola Ince**
Dates: Thursday 29 September – Saturday 29 October 2022
Press Night: Wednesday 05 October