



## *Wedding Band* audio described performance introduction

Welcome to this introduction to *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White*, written by Alice Childress and directed by Monique Touko. It's a Lyric Hammersmith Theatre production.

The audio described performance will be on Monday 17 June at 7.30pm. There will be a touch tour at 6pm. The performance lasts for 2 hours and 40 minutes with an interval of 20 minutes and has been written by Ruth James and Willie Elliott.

This performance uses haze. The script contains references to themes of racism, classism, sexism and violence. It includes several instances of strong language, including racist slurs and anti-Semitic language and descriptions of sexual violence.

The theatre's website sets the scene like this:

*Wedding Band* is set in the deep south of the USA in 1918 when interracial marriage was illegal, Julia, a black seamstress, and Herman, a white baker, are defying all odds with their secret love.

They face vicious judgement not just by society but also their closest friends and family. As they finally begin to believe their dreams for a future together are possible, Herman becomes a victim of the Spanish flu. Determined to save him, Julia is faced with decisions that will change her life.

Award-winning American playwright **Alice Childress'** *Wedding Band* is a searing and powerful masterpiece which offers a stark reflection of the reality she was writing in during the Civil Rights era. It explores themes of race and class, questioning the devastating impact of unjust laws on ordinary human lives.

There are 11 characters in the play – six Black and five white of varying ages. Most costumes are based on a colour palette of autumnal shades of ochre, russet and dark oranges, while the characters with opposing world views are clothed in varying tones of light green. The clothes are of the era of 1918, with long, calf-length skirts for the women, worn with neat leather, low-heeled shoes. The men wear suits, with loose trousers held up by braces, and one wears army uniform.

The play is set in a run down back street boarding house. The only elegant element of the set design is a two metre high by four metre long letterbox window, with a patchwork of dark and light panes of glass. It hangs in the middle of the white back wall, and lowers down to floor level, as the play begins.

As you take your seat, the back wall pulses with subtle changes of light. The boarding house rooms are partially obscured by a patchy, two metre high picket fence with slats of wood missing. More fence runs off the the far right and left of the space at the very back. Here a walkway, two steps up from the floor of the stage, runs the full width.

Running left to right, three, two metre square cage-like dwellings sit side by side. Their walls are made of chicken wire affording us a view into the sparsely furnished rooms.

On the left, there is a table and a chair, and a small window frame in the back wall. This is the home of **Mattie** and her daughter **Teeta**.

**Mattie** is a friendly young woman, wearing a modest blue and black check dress, with a long flounce at the bottom, covered with a white apron. Her black hair is styled into long braids, caught up with a matching blue ribbon.

Her daughter **Teeta** is dressed in a loose, faded pink dress, tied at the waist with a scrap of blue fabric and worn with chunky brown boots. Teeta is about eight years old, and often accompanied by **Princess**, a white girl of a similar age, who

is looked after by Mattie. Princess wears a pink and white dress, with her long blonde hair tied back with a pink ribbon, then left to flow down her back.

The middle room appears to be the most comfortable, with a single iron framed bed by the left hand wall. A little bedside table with a paraffin lamp, sits to the right, and against the right wall is a wooden sideboard, with several suitcases on the floor by the right wall.

This is the home of the central character, **Miss Julia Augustine**, an elegant young woman of 29. Julia first appears in a long, narrow terracotta coloured skirt, and pristine white blouse, frilled at the neck. She is dark-skinned, with high cheekbones, her long, black hair neatly bound back into a long plait. Her brown leather shoes are tied with a matching ribbon, and small earrings sparkle in the light. Julia later appears in a golden coloured silk wrap, edged with amber satin, over a white slip.

The last room, on the far right, has just a square kitchen table, with a single chair by it. This apartment is occupied by **Lula** and her adopted son, **Nelson**.

**Lula** is about 45, a serious, self-contained woman, her hair smoothed down, with a chignon at the nape of her neck. Her dress is a simple tube of dark orange, with long sleeves, adorned only with three small pleats at the front, and her brown button-up boots are well-polished.

**Nelson** is a tall, well-made man, at least 6'4" and in his late twenties, who first appears in pale green trousers, his braces loose over a white vest. This reveals his muscular dark brown arms, gleaming in the light. His hair is short at the back and sides, but with full, tight curls on top and he sports a small chin beard. Nelson later puts on a smart, ochre coloured shirt, with very white collar and cuffs, and later still, appears in full army uniform, with brown Sam Browne belt tight over the khaki jacket and jodhpur trousers, wrapped tightly at the calves with gaiters. A forage cap and high brown boots complete the uniform.

The landlady of the boarding house is **Miss Fanny Johnson**, an older, slightly lighter skinned woman, who claims to be 35. She has fine features and sharp, dark eyes, her black hair smoothed up into a high bun. She is an elegant woman in a long, purple dress of layered seersucker cotton, with long sleeves. A wide satin sash emphasises her narrow waist, with a long necklace ending in a large pearl tucked into it for safety. Fanny also wears a shorter necklace holding a silver cross, pearl earrings, black boots, and brandishes a fan.

Into this backyard, inhabited only by black people, arrives the **Bell Man**. He's a seedy white man, of about 30 years old, with an unhealthy pale pallor and greasy, thinning, short brown hair, covered with a battered straw hat. His stained dark brown trousers don't match his lighter brown jacket, which is rumpled, over a pale yellow shirt and dark tie. An itinerant salesman, he carries a large suitcase painted with the Stars and Stripes flag, that has bells tied to the handle, that announce his approach.

The second white man we meet is very different – respectful and neat. This is Julia's beau, **Herman**. In his thirties, he's a broad shouldered man, who wears a terracotta suede jacket that matches Julia's skirt, over a khaki green shirt and grey trousers, with worn black work boots. His dark brown hair is short and neatly parted on one side, and he sports a neat moustache.

We later meet Herman's mother, **Miss Thelma** and his sister **Annabelle**. Annabelle is a tall, slender woman in her thirties, with long ginger hair, rolled up on either side of her pale face, and drawn back into a ponytail. She wears a pale green skirt, with horizontal pleats at the hem, a pale yellow blouse and tan shoes and first appears wearing a white cloth facemask. She has a silver cross at her neck but is otherwise unadorned. Thelma is a petite, tight-faced older woman, who carries herself proudly, but is plainly dressed in a green and white checked shirtdress, with a broad white collar, that is held in at the waist with a too-long man's brown belt. Her faded blonde hair is scraped back into a bun at the nape of her neck, and she wears clumpy white boots. Thelma also wears a small golden cross and her face is shiny and without make-up.

## Cast

|           |                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Thelma    | Geraldine Alexander               |
| Julia     | Deborah Ayorinde                  |
| Fanny     | Lachele Carl                      |
| Annabelle | Poppy Gilbert                     |
| Lula      | Diveen Henry                      |
| Nelson    | Patrick Martins                   |
| Mattie    | Bethan Mary-James                 |
| Herman    | David Walmsley                    |
| Bell Man  | Owen Whitelaw                     |
| Princess  | Poppy Graham or Wren Stenbridge   |
| Teeta     | Lylianna Eugene or Saskia Holness |

## Creatives

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Written by                              | Alice Childress    |
| Directed by                             | Monique Touko      |
| Set and Costume Design by               | Paul Wills         |
| Wigs, Hair and Make-up Design by        | Cynthia De La Rosa |
| Lighting Design by                      | Matt Haskins       |
| Sound Design by                         | Elena Peña         |
| Music by                                | Shiloh Coke        |
| Choreography and Movement Direction by  | Aline David        |
| Wigs, Hair & Make-Up Associate Designer | Keisha Paris-Banya |
| Casting by                              | Sophie Parrott CDG |
| Dialect & Voice Coach                   | Joel Trill         |
| Fight & Intimacy Director               | Bethan Clark       |
| Assistant Director                      | Mo Korede          |