

**Theatre-Rites**

**The Global Playground**

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**The Global Playground**

**Thursday 1 – Sunday 18 July (Press performance 3 July)**

**Unit 5, Great Northern Warehouse**

**Available to watch on demand at mif.co.uk from 10 July**

**£12 adults/£6 children**

**A group of dancers meet to make a film – but things get wonderfully weird when the camera takes on a life of its own…**

Following the sell-out success of [The Welcoming Party](https://mif.co.uk/previous-festivals/mif17/the-welcoming-party/) at MIF17, Theatre-Rites returns to the Festival with a team of international collaborators – and an uplifting new show mixing dance, music, theatre and puppetry for children and family audiences.

We can now connect with anyone, in person and on screen – but is the camera our friend, our playmate or something else entirely?  Partly inspired by our year under lockdown, *The Global Playground* explores the magic of our first encounters, how we play together, how we connect and sometimes disconnect – and ultimately how we make the most of the time we spend together, however we spend it. This joyful show invites us to celebrate both the people we are and the people we cherish, and reminds us all to treat one another with kindness and care.

Sue Buckmaster, Artistic Director of Theatre-Rites said: “*This has been an unexpected journey of collaboration with an extraordinary talented group of artists and a unique set of challenges. As we embarked on our creative discoveries last year, I questioned whether the artistic process would be robust enough to survive a digital playground. But, of course, the joy is that artists, just like children, can collaborate, adapt and play under exceptional circumstances. Children are at the heart of everything Theatre-Rites does and now more than ever we have a responsibility to inspire and care for them. I am delighted that The Global Playground marks our return to Manchester International Festival and allows us to celebrate our 25th Birthday with our young audience wherever they are and however they are connecting.*”

*The Global Playground* will be directed by Theatre-Rites’ Artistic Director, **Sue Buckmaster** (*The Welcoming Party* MIF 17; *Chotto Desh,* Akram Khan Company). Designing the production is **Ingrid Hu** (*A Slightly Annoying Elephant,* Little Angel Theatre; *Curiouser,* made by Flexer & Sandiland with dybwikdanssUK tour) who will be joined by acclaimed South African choreographer **Gregory Maqoma** (Tree MIF 19, Vuyani Dance Theatre), composer **Ayanna Witter-Johnson** (London Symphony Orchestra; The Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company), sound designer **Nick Sagar** (*Palace of Light,* Noor Festival; *Horrible Histories ‘Tudors & Egyptians’,* UK tour), lighting designer **Guy Hoare** (*Sea Wall/A Life,* Broadway) and **Martin Riley** (*The Great Staycation – Dot’s Farm*, BBC One; *Emmeline Pankhurst: The Making of a Militant,* BBC One) who will manage the digital film and production.

Manchester International Festival Artistic Director & Chief Executive, **John McGrath** says*: “MIF has always been a Festival like no other – with almost all the work being created especially for us in the months and years leading up to each Festival edition. But who would have guessed two years ago what a changed world the artists making work for our 2021 Festival would be working in?*

*From legendary Argentinian artist Marta Minujin’s decision to give the world’s most famous clock, Big Ben, a temporary new home in Manchester to Cephas Williams’ celebratory activist artwork Portrait of Black Britain, the ways in which artists have used the opportunity of the Festival to reflect on life now has been inspiring. Our programme is very different to the one we had almost-fully planned at the start of last year, but I hope it feels urgent and right.”*

*“We hope MIF21 will provide a time and place to reflect on our world now, to celebrate the differing ways we can be together, and to emphasise, despite all that has happened, the importance of our creative connections – locally and globally.”*

*The Global Playground* is co-produced by Manchester International Festival and Theatre-Rites.

**ENDS**

**The Global Playground
Friday 2nd July – Sunday 18th July 2021
Performance times Thursday – Friday, 7pm
Saturday – Sunday, 11am and 3pm
There will be an additional performance on Wednesday 14th July at 7pm**

**Location Unit 5, Great Northern Warehouse, 235 Deansgate, Manchester M3 4EN**

**This production will also be presented digitally full details to be announced**

**Tickets will be on sale on from Thursday 13 May 2021 and can be purchased from mif.co.uk
£12 adults/ £6 children**

**Running Time 75 minutes**

**Sue Buckmaster**

Sue Buckmaster is the Artistic Director of Theatre-Rites, a puppetry expert and the fifth generation of theatre practitioners in her family. Since 1996 she has directed 12 site-specific productions and 15 theatre productions for Theatre-Rites including Houseworks (1996), a seminal site-specific show for children commissioned by LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre), the award winning Mischief (2007), a co-production with Sadler’s Wells and Dance Touring Partnerships, 3 productions for the Ruhrtriennale Festival (Salt 2008, Paradise 2010 and The Welcoming Party 2018 which was Theatre-Rites first collaboration with the Manchester International Festival in 2017) and The Incredible Tale of Robot Boy, a co-production with Schauspielhaus Bochum in 2019.

Outside of Theatre-Rites she has worked with many companies including the National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company and Complicité. Sue directed *Chotto Desh*  and *Chotto Xenos* for Akram Khan Dance Companies, adaptations for family audiences of his award winning solo shows.

Sue Buckmaster has an MA in Contemporary Theatre Practice from Essex University, which included a thesis on the Psychoanalytical Study of the Power of the Puppet. In 2018 the University of Essex awarded her an honorary doctorate in recognition of her inspiring leadership in theatre direction and puppetry.

**Gregory Maqoma**

Gregory Vuyani Maqoma became interested in dance in the late 1980s as a means to escape the growing political tensions growing in Soweto, South Africa, where he was born. He started his formal dance training in 1990 at Moving into Dance, where he, later, became the Associate Artistic Director in 2002. He founded Vuyani Dance Theatre (VDT) in 1999 while undertaking a scholarship at the Performing Arts Research and Training School (PARTS) in Belgium, under the direction of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. Maqoma has established himself as an internationally renowned dancer, choreographer, teacher, and director.

In 2002, Maqoma received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for dance and was a finalist in the Daimler Chrysler Choreography Award. He was a finalist in the Rolex Mentorship Programme in 2003. Several works in his repertoire have won him accolades and international acclaim, including the Tunkie Award for Leadership in Dance (2012), and a “Bessie”, New York City’s premier dance award for *Exit/Exist* for original music composition (2014). He served as a nominator in the 2016-2017 Rolex Arts Initiative as well as curating the 2017 Main Dance Programme for the National Arts Festival.

The French government honoured Maqoma with the Chevalier de L’Ordre des Artes et des Lettres (Knight of the Arts & Literature) Award in 2017. The following year, 2018, Maqoma collaborated with William Kentridge as a choreographer and performer in “The Head and the Load,” an opera which premiered at the Tate Modern Gallery in London, and is still touring Europe, and the United States.

Recently, he collaborated with Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah in the production, “Tree,” produced by Manchester International Festival and the Young Vic (2018). Last year, 2020, Maqoma was honoured to deliver the prestigious International Dance Day message under the auspices of the International Theatre Institute and UNESCO.

**Ingrid Hu**

Ingrid Hu is a scenographer, designer and artist working in theatre and multidisciplinary design in the UK and internationally. With a focus on materiality, contextual and conceptual thinking, she creates spaces and environments that are alive and empowered to co-author, investigate, and respond to varied perspectives.

She joined the award-winning Heatherwick Studio in 2002 and has worked on a wide range of projects including the UK Pavilion for the 2010 World Expo, for which she received a D&AD award in Spatial Design.

Recent credits include: *Chotto Xenos* (Akram Khan Company, world tour), *A Slightly Annoying Elephant* (Little Angel Theatre, London, UK), *Light/Dark* (Uppsala, Sweden), *Curiouser* (UK/Norway tour), *A Kettle Of Fish* (The Yard Theatre, London, UK), *Zeraffa Giraffa* (Little Angel Theatre and Clapham Omnibus Theatre, London, UK), *We Raise Our Hands In The Sanctuary* (The Albany, London, UK), *Music Impossible* (LSO St Luke’s & St Paul’s Church, London, UK); *Hong Kong Impressions* (Yuen Long Theatre, Hong Kong); *1908 Body And Soul* (Jacksons Lane Theatre, London, UK); *You May!* (The Place, Arnolfini, UK; Onassis Culture Centre, Greece); *The Van Man* (UK national tour); *The Girl Who*… (Spitalfields Market & The Rag Factory, London, UK); *Theatre Of The Viscera* (La Nef Manufacture d’utopies, France); *The Bell Ringer* (Dilston Grove, London, UK); *Medea*, *The Foreigner* (Bridewell Theatre, London, UK); *On The Cusp* (Camden Roundhouse studio, UK).

**Ayanna Witter-Johnson**

Singer, songwriter, cellist Ayanna Witter-Johnson is a rare exception to the rule that classical and alternative r&b music cannot successfully coexist.

Graduating with a first from both the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and the Manhattan School of Music, Ayanna was a participant in the London Symphony Orchestra’s Panufnik Composers Scheme and became an Emerging Artist in Residence at London’s Southbank Centre. She was a featured artist with Courtney Pine’s Afropeans: Jazz Warriors and became the only non-American to win Amateur Night Live at the legendary Apollo Theater in Harlem, NYC.

As a composer she has written original music for the London Symphony Orchestra and the Gürzenich Orchester (Cologne), scored music for various productions and as an arranger and orchestrator, worked with the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Urban Classic).

Since releasing her EP’s ('Truthfully', 'Black Panther' and 'Ella, Reuben and Ay') and her debut album ‘Road Runner’, Ayanna has extensively toured the UK and Europe, whilst gaining a MOBO award nomination and receiving airplay on BBC Radio 1 & BBC 1Xtra.  A performer of extraordinary versatility, her live shows are intimate journeys that chronicle her experience as a female artist in the 21st century.  Ayanna has collaborated with artists as diverse as Akala, Riz MC, Nitin Sawhney and Anoushka Shankar. Currently working on her sophomore album, Ayanna has recently appeared on Channel 4 (Sing It Loud) and Later...with Jools Holland (BBC1) and is preparing to return to the live arena whilst working on a number of commissions for ensembles and orchestras in the UK and Europe.

Because of her musical prowess, enchanting vocals, non-compromising lyrics and ability to deftly reinterpret songs on the cello Ayanna is able to straddle both the classical and black music worlds effortlessly.

**Guy Hoare**

Guy has been designing lighting for dance, theatre and opera for over 20 years; he has been based in London since 1998 as a freelance designer but creates work throughout the UK and internationally.

Guy designed the lighting for Theatre Rites & Arthur Pita’s production of *Mischief* in 2007. Other designs for dance include Arthur Pita’s *The Metamorphosis* and Mark Bruce’s *Dracula* which won the South Bank Award for Dance in 2012 and 2014 respectively. He has created work with companies throughout Europe and in Cuba, Lebanon and Australia; In the UK he has designed work many choreographers including Christopher Bruce, Shobana Jeyasingh, Akram Khan and Alexander Whitley. Since 2015 he has been collaborating with Gandini Juggling on several cross-artform pieces.

In London, his theatre designs include work for the National Theatre, Donmar Warehouse, Royal Court, Young Vic, Old Vic, Almeida, and Kiln as well as several pieces in the West End. In 2019 he designed *Sea Wall / A Life* at the Hudson Theatre on Broadway.

Opera credits include the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Scottish Opera, Bregenz Festival and National Theatre, Brno; he has also designed multiple productions for English Touring Opera, including the 2014 Olivier award-winning season of *King Priam* and *Paul Bunyan*.

In 2010, he was nominated for Best Lighting Designer at the TMA Awards (for *A Christmas Carol*); He has been nominated three times at the Knight of Illumination Awards - in 2009, 2012 and 2013 (in Opera for *The Magic Flute*; in Dance for *The Metamorphosis*; and in TV for the filming of *The Metamorphosis*).

Guy is currently an Associate Artist at Wilton’s Music Hall in London.

**Nick Sagar**

Recent works include: Palace of Light / NOOR Festival Riyadh (Composer), Robert Wilson’s Jungle Book (Théatre de la Ville - Paris/Lyon/Luxembourg), Mary Said What She Said (Théatre de la Ville - Paris/Lisbon), Robert Wilson’s Das Dschungelbuch (Schauspielhaus - Dusseldorf), Billionaire Boy (Birmingham Stage Company - UK Tour 2019/20), Tom Gates (Birmingham Stage Company - UK Tour 2019/20), Tree of Codes (Manchester International Festival - Paris/Hong Kong/Sydney), Horrible Histories ‘Barmy Britain 4’ (Birmingham Stage Company - Apollo Theatre, London), Horrible Histories ‘Tudors & Egyptians’ (Birmingham Stage Company - UK Tour 2019/20), First Snow/Premiére Niege (National Theatre of Scotland - Montréal/Edinburgh)

Other notable work includes: Awful Auntie (Birmingham Stage Company - UK Tour 2018/19), Autobiography (Company Wayne McGregor - International Dates), Gangsta Granny (Birmingham Stage Company - UK Tour 2017/18), Tree of Codes (Manchester International Festival - Manchester/New York/Aarhus/London/Melbourne), The James Plays (National Theatre of Scotland/National Theatre London - International Tour), Robert Wilson’s Letter To A Man (Change Performing Arts - New York, San Francisco, LA, Madrid & 2017 International Tour) and Life & Death of Marina Abramovic (MIF - New York, Toronto, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Madrid, Manchester),  A Doll’s House (NTS - Edinburgh Lyceum) & Men Should Weep (NTS - Glasgow Citizens), Young@Heart Chorus - End of the Road (No Theatre - Oslo, Singapore, New York, Manchester), Running Wild (Children’s Theatre Workshop - UK Tour), Tom’s Midnight Garden (Birmingham Stage Company - UK Tour), Appointment With The Wicker Man (NTS - Edinburgh Fringe Festival)

Notable Composer credits include: First Snow/Premiére Niege (National Theatre of Scotland - Montréal/Edinburgh), A Doll’s House (NTS - Edinburgh Lyceum), Men Should Weep (NTS - Glasgow Citizens)

Gangsta Granny (Best Family Show) and Tree of Codes (Best Dance) were both nominated for Olivier Awards.

**Martin Riley**

Martin has been helping the worlds of theatre and film speak to and through each other for over 20 years both as a freelancer and as owner of boutique production company Lion Eyes, facilitating live captures on over 200 productions. Martin has two RTS awards and 1 BAFTA nomination for his television work.

He has produced digital content and stage to screen productions for Peter Kay, Bridget Caldwell and provided technical consultation to production teams at BBC, Channel 4, Channel 5, Universal, The Welsh National Opera & English National Ballet.

As Theatre Video Producer for The Lowry, Martin helped create *Fireflies* (2008) a ground-breaking, multimedia theatre and film show. Previous work for Manchester International Festival includes: *Tree* (Idris Elba & Kwame Kwei-Armah) 2019, *Tao of Glass* (Improbable & Philip Glass) 2019*, So It Goes* (New Order & Liam Gillick) 2017. Previous credits for Dance (multi-camera capture) include: *The Red Shoes*, *Swan Lake*, *Romeo & Juliet* (Matthew Bourne’s New Adventures), *Giselle* (Akram Khan)

Previous credits for Theatre (multi-camera live capture) include: *The Railway Children* (Kings Cross Station Theatre), *Peter Pan In Kensington Gardens* (New Wimbledon Theatre), *Agatha Christie’s Witness For The Prosecution*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Skepta: Dystopia987*, *Re:Creating Europe*, *King Lear - The FIlm* (Manchester Royal Exchange), *9 to 5*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, *We Will Rock you*, *Ghost The Musical*, *Nativity The Musical*, *Curtains The Musical*, live stream (2020)

During lockdown, Martin helped traditional TV production companies to continue to film using remote cameras and video monitoring and is currently working with colleagues at Lion Eyes / The Den on new virtual production techniques projects using Unreal Engine.

**Theatre Rites**

Theatre-Rites has created over 30 theatre-based and immersive productions for children and families in the UK and internationally.  Committed to intercultural collaborations, working in different disciplines in order to present children with unusual contemporary imagery, they put their audience at the heart of every experience creating a sense of their own agency.

Led by Artistic Director Sue Buckmaster, the work often explores challenging issues from inviting young audiences to walk side by side with refugees considering the kind of ‘welcome’ they might offer new arrivals (*The Welcoming Party*2017 and 2018, Manchester International Festival, Z-arts and Ruhrtriennale Festival), to enabling children to step inside an empty bank vault and reimagine the kinds of valuables that might fill it in the wake of the global financial crisis (*Bank On It* 2013, Barbican, Warwick Arts Centre and Economics Department University of Warwick). Recent productions have included The Incredible Tale of Robot Boy, a co-production with Schauspielhaus Bochum in 2019 which gently explored ethics and neuroscience.  Robot Boy was adapted into a short film in 2020 premiering at Dublin’s Festival of Curiosity.

Theatre-Rites turns 25 in 2021 and alongside The Global Playground they will celebrate with the publication by Routledge Press of *Theatre-Rites Animating Puppets, Objects and Sites*, and a new production in Austria; a time travelling journey to a magical Plastic Island inhabited by animals, scavengers and spirits exploring how our lives can affect the future.

**About Manchester International Festival**

Manchester International Festival (MIF) is an artist-led festival of original, new work and special events reflecting the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture. MIF21 takes place from 1 - 18 July 2021.

Staged every two years in Manchester, MIF has commissioned, produced and presented world premieres by artists including Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Laurie Anderson, Björk, Boris Charmatz, Jeremy Deller, Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah, Elbow, Philip Glass and Phelim McDermott, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Yoko Ono, Thomas Ostermeier, Maxine Peake, Punchdrunk, Skepta, The xx, Robert Wilson and Zaha Hadid Architects.

These and other world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work, staged in venues across Greater Manchester – from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and car parks. MIF works closely with venues, festivals and other cultural organisations globally, whose financial and creative input helps to make many of these projects possible and ensures that work made at MIF goes on to be seen around the world.

MIF supports a year-round Creative Engagement programme, bringing opportunities for people from all backgrounds, ages and from all corners of the city to get involved during the Festival and year-round, as volunteers, as participants in shows, through skills development and a host of creative activities, such as Festival in My House.

MIF will also run The Factory, the new landmark cultural space currently being built in the heart of Manchester and designed by the internationally-renowned architect Ellen van Loon of Rem Koolhaas’ OMA. The Factory will commission, present and produce one of Europe’s most ambitious and adventurous year-round creative programmes, featuring bold new work from the world’s greatest artists and offering a space to create, invent and play.

Attracting up to 850,000 visitors annually, The Factory will add up to £1.1 billion to the economy over a decade and create up to 1,500 direct and indirect jobs. Its pioneering programme of skills, training and engagement will benefit local people and the next generation of creative talent from across the city, whilst apprenticeships and trainee schemes are already underway during the construction phase.

MIF’s Artistic Director and Chief Executive is John McGrath.

[mif.co.uk](https://mif.co.uk)

**ENDS**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, IMAGES, QUOTES AND INTERVIEW REQUESTS PLEASE CONTACT:**

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