



PRESS RELEASE

**FULL CAST ANNOUNCED FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF
LIBERATION AT ROYAL EXCHANGE THEATRE**

- Leonie Elliot, Eric Kofi Abrefa, Pamela Nomvete and Eamonn Walker star in the World Premiere of *Liberation*.
- Completing the cast are Rudolphe Mdlongwa, Tonderai Munyevu, Tachia Newall, Joshua Roberts-Mensah, Bex Smith and Nicola Stephenson.
- Inspired by true events in Black British history, people, politics and power collide in a powerful new play by writer Ntombizodwa Nyoni, directed by Monique Touko with original compositions from Mercury Prize-winning Ezra Collective's Ife Ogunjobi
- 80 years after the Fifth Pan African Congress, which took place in Manchester in 1945, *Liberation* traces the private lives of activists who fought to liberate Africa.
- Part of Manchester International Festival 2025, *Liberation* will run at the Royal Exchange Theatre from 27 June - 26 July 2025, with opening night on 2 July.
- Commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre, *Liberation* is produced by Royal Exchange Theatre and Factory International in Manchester.

Liberation, a new play by poet and playwright **Ntombizodwa Nyoni** (*The Darkest Part of the Night*), directed by **Monique Touko** (G) will receive its World Premiere as part of **Manchester International Festival 2025 (3 - 20 July 2025)**. Commissioned by the **Royal Exchange Theatre** and inspired by true events in Black British history, this powerful new play delves into the lives of the people who fought to liberate Africa, exploring why their story remains relevant in 2025. The production runs at the Royal Exchange Theatre from **27 June to 26 July 2025** with opening night on **Wednesday 2 July 2025**.

How does a revolution begin and who are the people that keep it going?

It's 15 October 1945, Manchester. Africa's freedom and future is in the hands of her descendants at the fifth Pan African Congress at Chorlton-on-Medlock Town Hall.

With decades of championing change under their belts, emerging African & Caribbean activists and scholars offer new radical ideas of liberation. However, the organiser, Trinidadian



activist George Padmore is unsure who to pass the baton to. Kwame Nkrumah is fuelled by an idealistic desire to become the first Black president of the Gold Coast. Young, resourceful Jamaican social worker Alma La Badie is grappling with the truth behind who must be sacrificed for the cause. And what of the revered Amy Ashwood-Garvey how does she ensure the voices of Black women are heard?

A story of hope, friendship and the consequences of a long-denied awakening unravels in the conference halls and bars of Chorlton, but at what cost?

Leonie Elliott (*Call The Midwife*, BBC; *Danny And The Human Zoo*, BBC) stars as Jamaican activist **Alma la Badie**, alongside **Eric Kofi Abrefa** (*Julie*, National Theatre; *Supacell*, Netflix) as **Kwame Nkrumah**, the man who would go on to be the first President of Ghana. Activist **Amy Ashwood-Garvey** is played by **Pamela Nomvete** (*To Kill A Mockingbird*, West End; *Andor*, Lucasfilm/Disney+), and journalist and author **George Padmore** is played by **Eamonn Walker** (*Chicago Fire*, NBC; *Between Riverside and Crazy*, Steppenwolf Theatre Company).

Completing the cast are **Rudolphe Mdlongwa** (*Is God Is*, Royal Court; *Barbershop Chronicles*, UK Tour) as **Makumalo Hlubi**, **Tonderai Munyevu** (*As You Like It*, Shakespeare's Globe; *Black Men Walking*, Royal Court) as **Jomo Kenyatta**, **Tachia Newall** (*Brassic*, Sky One; *Light Falls*, Royal Exchange Theatre) as **Len Johnson**, **Joshua Roberts-Mensah** (*Drum*, Omnibus Theatre) as **Joe Appiah**, **Bex Smith** (*Coronation Street*, ITV; *The Social*, Not Too Tame) as **Betty Dorman** and **Nicola Stephenson** (*Our Country's Good*, Lyric Hammersmith; *War Horse*, National Theatre/West End) as **Dorothy Pizer**.

This groundbreaking new play developed 80 years after the congress, introduces the people behind the movement. *Liberation* gets to the heart of how our future is built, how our leaders are made, and how dreams are realised. With generational shifts and gender politics added to a swirling mix of power dynamics, *Liberation* asks timeless questions about revolution, freedom, and what it means to be an activist.

The production features set design by **Paul Wills**, costume design by **Sunny Dolat**, composition by Ezra Collective's **Ife Ogunjobi**, lighting design by **Matt Haskins**, sound design by **Alexandra Faye Braithwaite**, movement design by **Kloé Dean** and casting by **Sophie Parrott CDG**.

Manchester International Festival 2025 takes place from **Thursday 3 July to Sunday 20 July 2025**. The first edition under new Creative Director **Low Kee Hong**, MIF 25 features new work from **Blackhaine**, **Eric Cantona**, **Mary Anne Hobbs & Anna Phoebe**, **Richard Russell's Everything is Recorded**, **Ruhaniyat (روحانیت) - An Orchestral Sufi Experience**, **Edgar Davids**, **Juliet Ellis**, **FAFSWAG**, **Andy Field** and **Becky Darlington**, **John Grant**, **Shilpa Gupta**, **Germaine Kruip**, **Juan Mata**, **Ntombizodwa Nyoni**, **The Royal Ballet**, **Hans Ulrich Obrist**, **Rosabel Tan**, **Santiago Yahuarcani** and more

factory international



Working with partners across the city and the world to build on the MIF legacy, the wide-ranging, multi-artform programme of groundbreaking world premieres will inspire fresh perspectives, challenge conventional thought and invite audiences to 'dream differently' - envision new possibilities, brighter futures and utopian spaces. Presenting some of the most exciting creative minds of our generation, the programme champions indigenous artists and creators from the Global South, expanding the Festival's renowned international impact as well as fostering deep connections with local artists and communities in the North West of England.

Liberation is commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre and produced by Royal Exchange Theatre and Factory International in Manchester.

ENDS

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LISTINGS

The Royal Exchange and Factory International present

LIBERATION

By Ntombizodwa Nyoni

Directed by Monique Touko

Commissioned by the Royal Exchange Theatre

Produced by Royal Exchange Theatre and Factory International in Manchester

Tickets from £10

27 June – 26 July 2025

Access Performances

Sensory Adapted (SA) Performance: Tuesday 22 July, 6pm

Audio Described (AD) Performance: Saturday 26 July, 2.30pm



BSL-Interpreted (BSL) Performance: Wednesday 16 July, 2.30pm & Thursday 17 July, 7.30pm
Captioned (C) Performances: Saturday 19 July, 2.30pm & 7.30pm

Biographies

Ntombizodwa Nyoni

Ntombizodwa is writer, director and script editor working in opera, theatre, film & television.

For television she has contributed two episodes to Series 1 & 2 of the hit Netflix show *Castlevania: Nocturne*. She was an international fellow on Oxbelly's inaugural Episodic Program in Greece; and was on the BIFA mentoring programme.

She is currently under commission at London's Kiln Theatre and the Bristol Old Vic.

Theatre includes: *The Darkest Part of the Night* (shortlisted for the Alfred Fagon Award & George Devine Award 2021 - Kiln Theatre); *Weathered Estates* (City of Culture 2017/Hull University); *Borderline* (Young Vic '5 Plays' season); *Nine Lives* (Leeds Studio - Bridge Theatre, UK Tour); *Boi Boi Is Dead* (a finalist for the 2015 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize - Leeds Playhouse, Tiata Fahodzi & Watford Palace Theatre); *Phone Home* (Upstart Theatre; European tour)

Radio includes : *Love Again - Sonnets in the City* (read by Maxine Peake - BBC / BBC Philharmonic); *A Khoisan Woman* (Drama on 3).

Film includes: *Mahogany* (National Trust & 24 Design Ltd) ; *Notes on Being a Lady* (BBC Arts); and the award winning, *The Ancestors* (BBC Films & BFI Network).

Monique Touko

Monique Touko is a London/Manchester based multidisciplinary artist- director, dramaturg and producer.

Upcoming Shows: UK Premiere of *Marie and Rosetta* (Rose Theatre, Wolverhampton Grand, Chichester Festival Theatre, English Touring Theatre).

Directing Credits: *G* (Royal Court, Jerwood Theatre Upstairs)

UK Premiere of *Wedding Band: A Love Hate Story in Black and White* (Lyric Hammersmith); *The Boy At The Back of The Class*, Based on the Novel by Onjali Q. Raúf (National Tour); UK Premiere of *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Lyric Hammersmith); *We Need New Names*, Based on the Novel by NoViolet Bulawayo (National Tour); *Gone Too Far!* (Theatre Royal Stratford East); *The Clinic* (Almeida Theatre); *Fair Play* (Bush Theatre); *Malindadzimu* (Hampstead Theatre Downstairs).

She is the recipient of the 2022 Stage Debut Award for Best Director.

Her directing training includes Regional Theatre Young Directors Scheme at Royal Exchange Manchester. At the Young Vic, her training has involved the Intro to Directing course led by Sacha Weres, Boris Karloff Trainee Assistant Directors Programme and the Jerwood Assistant Director



Scheme. In 2022, Monique was selected to take part in the National Theatre's annual Directing Course.

Her assisting credits include *Wishlist* (Royal Exchange Manchester and Royal Court); *Yellowman* (Young Vic); China Plate's *On the Exhale* (Traverse Theatre); *Cock* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Richard II* (Shakespeare's Globe Theatre); *Rosmersholm* (Duke of York Theatre); and *Blood Wedding* (Young Vic).

She is also part of The Ubunifu Space- A definitive guide to music and culture from the youth of Africa and the diaspora - the Ubunifu way. Monique is project manager for the Space and regular member of the UK reaction team on the youtube channel which has a global following of 320K+ subscribers and over 50 million views.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Factory International

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios.

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year.

MIF is one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, the festival invites world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds to create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester. Previous artists include, Björk, Jeremy Deller, Akram Khan, Yayoi Kusama, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Yoko Ono, Maxine Peake, Skepta, and The xx

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

Aviva Studios was designed by the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), with Ellen van Loon as lead architect – their first major public building in the UK. Its development was led by Manchester City Council, with backing from HM Government and National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

factoryinternational.org

About the Royal Exchange Theatre

factory international



Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre Company transforms the way people see theatre, each other and the world around them. Our historic building was taken over by artists in 1976 and today it is an award-winning cultural charity that produces new theatre in-the-round, in communities, on the road and online.

Exchange remains at the heart of everything we make and do. Our currency is brand new drama and reinvigorated classics, the boldest artists and a company of highly skilled makers - all brought together in an imaginative endeavour to share ideas and experiences with the people of Greater Manchester (and beyond).

The Exchange's unique auditorium is powerfully democratic, a space where audiences and performers meet as equals, entering and exiting through the same doors. It is the inspiration for all we do; inviting everyone to understand the past, engage in today's big questions, collectively imagine a better future and lose themselves in the moment of a great night out.