

factory
international
presents

7-10 MAY

THEATRE-RITES and GREGORY MAQOMA

RETURN TO THE FOREST

A new, immersive puppetry
and dance show for
families and children

Ages 8+

AVIVA studios

St. John's, Manchester avivastudios.co.uk

RETURN ^{TO} THE FOREST

7-10 MAY 2026
NORTH WAREHOUSE,
AVIVA STUDIOS

WELCOME TO THE MUSEUM

We have several precious treasures on display. But remember – strictly no touching! The museum is closing soon. You are the only visitors left. Can you hear the objects calling to be freed? Will you follow them?

Created by Theatre-Rites, Director Sue Buckmaster and Choreographer Gregory Maqoma, *Return to the Forest* invites you on a journey from the museum into the heart of a wild and magical forest. The show marks 30 years of Theatre-Rites productions as well as the third collaboration between Theatre-Rites and Factory International after *The Global Playground* (MIF21) and *The Welcoming Party* (MIF17). Gregory Maqoma also returns after choreographing *Tree* (MIF19) by Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah.

Now it's time to step inside the gallery.

ABOUT FACTORY INTERNATIONAL

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival (MIF) and the landmark cultural space Aviva Studios. Helping to put Manchester on the map as a global destination for arts, music and culture, Factory International invites the world's most exciting artists to invent tomorrow together.

A Theatre-Rites and Factory International co-production, co-commissioned by Sadler's Wells.

Masquerade masks created with students from Manchester Metropolitan University.

Image: Design by Émilie Chen, Photograph by Chris Nash

CREDITS

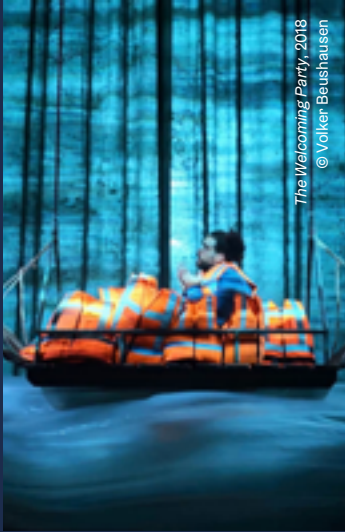
Sue Buckmaster Director
Gregory Maqoma Choreographer
Jean Chan Set Designer
Frank Moon & Domenico Angarano
Co-Composers & Sound Designers
Kinnetia Isidore Costume Designer
Guy Hoare Lighting Designer
Alison Duddle, Naomi Oppenheim & Sue Buckmaster Puppetry Designers & Makers
Miguel Altunaga Assistant Choreographer
Sasha Hsu Assistant Director
Vincent Xie Assistant Puppetry Director
Gareth Howells Production Manager
Beatrice Galloway & Laura Hammond
Company Stage Managers
Ting Yi-Ting Huang Technical Stage Manager
Daiva Aleksiunaite Assistant Stage Manager
Diana Castaldi Costume Supervisor
Stewart Bartlett Production Electrician

Did you know?

Return to the Forest started with a single object: an Ishoba made by Gregory Maqoma's brother. An Ishoba is a ceremonial stick, carried and used in rituals by Sangomas (traditional healers) in South Africa. It represents ancestral spirits, wisdom, guidance and power!



CREATIVE TEAM



Theatre Rites

Theatre-Rites is an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation and field leader in the creation of beautiful and thought-provoking theatre for children, which often explores complex issues such as migration, the climate crisis and neuroscience.

Celebrated for their use of puppetry under the leadership of puppetry expert Dr. Sue Buckmaster, Theatre-Rites are acclaimed nationally and internationally. They create touring productions and immersive, site-responsive productions that stir the imagination and stimulate thought, and have attracted high-profile commissioners including Schauspielhaus Bochum, Salzburg Festival, Manchester International Festival, Barbican, Sadler's Wells and the Ruhrtriennale Festival.

For Manchester International Festival, Theatre-Rites have created *The Welcoming Party* and *The Global Playground*.



SUE BUCKMASTER

Director

Sue Buckmaster is the Artistic Director of Theatre-Rites, a puppetry expert and the fifth generation of theatre practitioners in her family. She is known for her unique puppet whispering technique and her work exploring animism.

Sue has created over 30 site-specific and theatre productions for Theatre-Rites including MIF17's *The Welcoming Party*. She has worked with a wide variety of companies including the National Theatre and the Akram Khan Company.

Sue holds an honorary doctorate from the University of Essex and is the co-author of *Theatre-Rites: Animating Puppets, Objects and Sites* with Dr Liam Jarvis. She is an Advisor for Sadler's Wells and Polka Theatre.



GREGORY MAQOMA

Choreographer

Gregory Maqoma is an internationally renowned dancer, choreographer, teacher, director and scriptwriter from Soweto, South Africa.

Gregory has directed and served on the committees of major festivals including the Afro-Vibes Festival and the South African National Arts Festival. He has earned several awards including the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. He has worked with artists including Sue Buckmaster on MIF21's *The Global Playground* and Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah on MIF19's *Tree*.

He has published a memoir *My Dance, My Life, My Soul* and children's book *One Step at a Time*. He now presents his own work as Gregory Maqoma Industries.

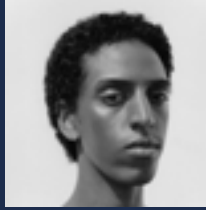
CAST



MAYOWA OGUNNAIKE

Mayowa Ogunnaike is a British-Nigerian contemporary dance artist based in Leeds. She graduated from Trinity Laban with a first-class degree before joining Phoenix Dance Theatre as an apprentice.

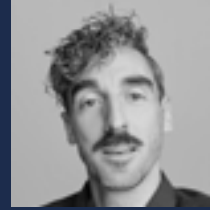
She has since worked for companies including Uchenna Dance, Seke Chimutengwende, Léa Tirabasso and Gary Clarke. Mayowa is currently Associate Artist at Phoenix Dance Theatre.



NATNAEL DAWIT

Natnael Dawit is a professional freelance artist. While training at Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance, Natnael worked with renowned choreographers including Wayne McGregor and IMPERMANENCE.

His work blends innovation with vulnerability to explore the boundaries of the human experience. He performed in *Eshu at the Crossroads* by Theatre-Rites and Miguel Altunaga.



SIMON PALMER

Simon Palmer trained in contemporary dance in Leeds. His passion for theatre and storytelling stretches across movement, voice and puppetry.

He has appeared in works for Punchdrunk, Secret Cinema and Ballo Arthur Pita. For Theatre-Rites, he has performed in *Paradise*, *Mojo*, *Rubbish*, *Bank On It* and *Recycled Rubbish*.



TEELE UUSTANI

Teele Uustani is a London-based performer and puppeteer from Estonia. She has worked with Old Trout Puppet Workshop, The Paper Cinema and Maison Foo.

Her work spans short films, music videos and theatre projects as a deviser, puppet maker and assistant director. For Theatre-Rites, she has performed in *Beasty Baby* and *Zoe's Peculiar Journey Through Time*.



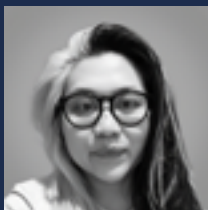
XOLISILE BONGWANA

Eastern Cape-born Xolisile Bongwana is a multidisciplinary artist with over 15 years of experience in the performing arts.

He has collaborated with Robyn Orlin, Luyanda Sidiya and Gregory Maqoma, performed worldwide in major works, and created *MNQUMA*. His compositions featured in *SIVA*, *Makwande* and *Amawethu*.

PARTICIPANT PERFORMERS

Akindele Akinlosotu
Benjamin Astridge
Rahmario Baker
Safiya Duncan
Kai Hannon
Johanna Leung
Nessa Ndong
Solomon Nelson
Oluwafunmilokun Ogunade
Edzor Talez

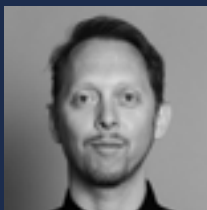


JEAN CHAN

Set Designer

Jean Chan's recent stage designs include *Shanghai Dolls* (Kiln Theatre), *Rise* (Bradford City of Culture 2025), *Beegu* (Unicorn) and *Lost and Found* (Factory International, Manchester).

Jean is also a celebrated Costume Designer with work including *Becoming Nancy* (Birmingham Rep Theatre), *Miss Saigon* (Scenekvelder, Oslo) and *Legally Blonde* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre).

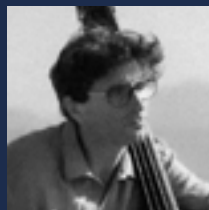


FRANK MOON

Co-Composer & Sound Designer

Frank Moon is an award-winning specialist composer for dance and theatre known for scores including *The Metamorphosis* (Royal Ballet), *The Wind* (Royal Ballet) and *The Great Gatsby* (Royal Danish Ballet).

He is a multi-instrumentalist and has toured widely with artists including The Urban Folk Quartet and Cerys Matthews.

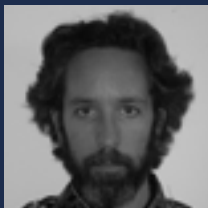


DOMENICO ANGARANO

Co-Composer & Sound Designer

Domenico Angarano graduated in Jazz at the Naples Conservatory of Music before moving to London and entering the world of contemporary dance.

He has worked with Akram Khan, the Hong Kong Academy of Arts and English National Ballet. In 2025, he composed the score for *Eshu at the Crossroads* by Theatre-Rites and Miguel Altunaga.



GUY HOARE

Lighting Designer

Guy Hoare designs lighting for dance, theatre and opera. Based in London, he works with major companies worldwide and has collaborated with the Mark Bruce Company since 1999.

Guy has designed several interdisciplinary works for Theatre-Rites and is an Associate Artist at Wilton's Music Hall.



KINNETIA ISIDORE

Costume Designer

Kinnetia Isidore studied costume design at Wimbledon College of Art.

Design credits include *The BFG* and *Pericles* (RSC), *Nye* and *Our Generation* (National Theatre), *Black Superhero* (Royal Court) and *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* (Young Vic).

SCAN THE QR CODE

Scan for full cast and creative team biographies, credits and thanks, as well as behind-the-scenes content with Theatre-Rites.



WORD SEARCH

HELP! SOME WORDS HAVE GONE MISSING. CAN YOU FIND THEM ALL?

C E S I U R H O A I M V Y N E U M W M M
P Q U J K C Z T K D N H M N O X S A L C
Z R T S X T P H W W T R E A S U R E M X
A K E E V E N B P D O X Z F V P T P A E
T O U C X L K V H X D U S R P N T U G R
M E C Y I J G E F E I C M D A P C P I E
B I U Q B O O O L Z I M X A K B T P C T
N G T T S I U B G D C S O V U I V E J U
P U J V N L O S M A S K T V P Y S T Y R
Z W P L V P E F C E Q E N I E F Z G Y N
Z U I A D A N C E U Y X J H X N I Y Z W
Q O G Z Z N N T P Z Z B L M Z A K C A S
T H E A T R E U D Y W C U A F R E F A J
T W C O M U N N E S C A P E Y X W I G F
M U S E U M W I L D R W R S O S T K U T
B F B V R W V J I U M F O R E S T L W P

FOREST
HEIST
PUPPET
MASK
THEATRE
MUSEUM
WILD

ESCAPE
DANCE
MOVE
TREASURE
MAGIC
PRECIOUS
RETURN

**Have you ever listened
to an object?**

Choose a cherished object
in your home and listen to
it – then create an artwork in
response to what it tells you!
In *Return to the Forest*, this
takes the form of Masquerade
Costumes. At home, you could
create a drawing, painting,
poem or a mask!

