

March - July 2023 season at the Finborough Theatre

The world premiere

THE RETURN OF BENJAMIN LAY

by Naomi Wallace and Marcus Rediker.

Directed by Ron Daniels.

Set Design by Riccardo Hernandez. Costume Design and Associate Set Design by Isobel Nicolson.

Lighting by Anthony Doran. Sound by John Leonard. Movement Consultant - Bill Irwin.

Presented by Arsalan Sattari Productions in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

With Mark Povinelli as Benjamin Lay.

Supported by the University of Pittsburgh and the Irish Repertory Theatre.

"It is true I've done...extravagant things, every one of them a brutal trial in my soul, but all in service of Truth."

The world premiere of ***The Return of Benjamin Lay*** by **Naomi Wallace** and **Marcus Rediker**, directed by Royal Shakespeare Company Honorary Associate Director, **Ron Daniels**, opens at the Finborough Theatre for a four week limited season on Tuesday, 13 June 2023 (**Press Nights Thursday, 15 June 2023 and Friday, 16 June at 7:30pm**).

2023. A Quaker meeting house on the Finborough Road - or is it a theatre?

Benjamin Lay - shepherd, sailor, prophet, and the British Empire's first revolutionary abolitionist - returns from the grave almost 300 years after his death, as feisty and unpredictable as ever.

"Little David", a dwarf four feet tall, confronts the "Goliath of slavery" once again as he pleads to be readmitted into the Quaker community that has disowned him and who still believe him to be dangerous.

Now, "trembling at the edge of playing God himself", how far will Benjamin go as he stares down his accusers?

Continuing a unique decade-long collaboration between multi-award-winning playwright **Naomi Wallace** and multi-award-winning historian **Marcus Rediker**, and featuring acclaimed American actor **Mark Povinelli**, *The Return of Benjamin Lay* sweeps across the centuries in a bold exploration of an utterly impossible man.

Playwright **Naomi Wallace** returns to the Finborough Theatre which saw the production of her first play, *The War Plays*, and more recently an acclaimed adaptation of *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani, co-written with Ismail Khalidi. Her plays have been produced in the UK, the United States, Europe and the Middle East and include *One Flea Spare*, *The Breach*, *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *In the Heart of America*, *Slaughter City*, *Things of Dry Hours*, *The Fever Chart*: *Three Vision of the Middle East*, *And I and Silence*, *The Liquid Plain*, *Night is a Room* and two adaptations co-written with Ismail Khalidi, *Returning to Haifa* by Ghassan Kanafani and *The Corpse Washer* by Sinan Antoon. Awards include the MacArthur Award, Obie Award, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Fellowship of Southern Writers Drama Award, Horton Foote Award, Arts and Letters Award in Literature, and the inaugural Windham Campbell prize for drama. Wallace is currently writing the book for the new John Mellencamp musical *Small Town*. The second part of her Kentucky trilogy will be produced in France in 2024, and her play, *Night is a Room*, has been adapted for film and will star Ann Dowd.

PRESS INFORMATION

Director **Ron Daniels** was named Honorary Associate Director after fifteen years directing many productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company including *Hamlet* (with Mark Rylance and another with Roger Rees), *The Tempest* (with Derek Jacobi and Mark Rylance) as well as new plays by Stephen Poliakoff, David Rudkin and David Edgar, including Naomi Wallace's *Slaughter City* and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*.

Ron is a former Associate Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theatre where he directed productions including *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *The Tempest*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Hamlet*, and *The Seagull* with Mark Rylance. Other theatres include *Othello* (Shakespeare Theatre, Washington DC), *Richard II*, *Richard III* and *Macbeth* (Theatre for a New Audience), Naomi Wallace's *One Flew Over a Cuckoo's Nest* (Public Theater, New York City), *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (Old Globe, San Diego).

Opera includes *Madama Butterfly*, *La Bohème*, *Carmen*, and *Don Giovanni*, the world premiere productions of Daniel Catan's *Il Postino* with Plácido Domingo, Ricky Ian Gordon's *Morning Star* and Daniel Schnyder's *Charlie Parker's Yardbird*.

Film includes Naomi Wallace and Bruce McLeod's *Lawn Dogs* (Executive Producer) and *The War Boys*.

He is a former head of the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University, where he taught acting and directing.

Writer and historian **Marcus Rediker** is Distinguished Professor of Atlantic History at the University of Pittsburgh. His "histories from below," including *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, have won numerous awards, including the George Washington Book Prize, and have been translated into eighteen languages worldwide. He is the author of *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist*, co-author (with David Lester and Paul Buhle) of *Prophet Against Slavery: Benjamin Lay, A Graphic Novel*, and producer of a prize-winning documentary film, *Ghosts of Amistad*, directed by Tony Buba. He worked with Naomi Wallace on her play *The Liquid Plain*. He is currently writing a book about escaping slavery by sea in antebellum America.

Set Designer **Riccardo Hernandez**'s numerous productions include *Jagged Little Pill* (Tony Nomination for Best Scenic Design of a Musical), *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* (Tony Nomination for Best Revival of a Play) starring Audra McDonald and Michael Shannon, *Indecent* (2017 Tony Award Best Play Nomination - Broadway and Menier Chocolate Factory, London), *The Gin Game* with James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson, *Porgy and Bess* (2012 Tony Award Best Musical Revival), *The People in the Picture* (Studio 54), *Caroline, or Change* (2007 Olivier Award for Best New Musical and London Evening Standard Award for Best Musical 2006), *TopDog/UnderDog* (2002 Pulitzer Award Best Play - Broadway and Royal Court Theatre, London) and *Parade* (Tony Award and Drama Desk Nominations).

Riccardo has designed over 250 productions at most leading Regional Theatres and Operas across the US and internationally, over twenty productions at the American Rep Theatre, and over thirty productions at New York Shakespeare Festival and Public Theater.

Awards and Nominations include Obie Award Sustained Excellence of Scenic Design, Henry Hewes Design Award Outstanding Scenic Design, Princess Grace Statue Award, Princess Grace Grant, Drama Desk Awards, Connecticut Critics Circle, Helen Hayes Award, Audelco, American Theater Wing and the Boston Elliot Norton Award.

He is the Associate Professor of Theater Design at Yale School of Drama.

Costume Designer and Set Designer **Isobel Nicolson** is a Creative Associate at the Watermill Theatre, Newbury. She was a Resident Assistant Designer with the Royal Shakespeare Company 2019-2020.

Theatre includes *Rapunzel*, *Camp Albion*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Moonfleet*, *Digging for Victory*, *The Miller's Child* (Watermill Theatre, Newbury), *Lone Flyer* (Hull Truck Theatre, Jermyn Street Theatre and the Watermill Theatre, Newbury), *Jessie's Tattoo Club* (Bristol Old Vic Ferment), *Queen Mab* (Iris Theatre), *Jabberwocky* (The Other Palace and Theatre Royal Margate), *Tis Pity She's A Whore* (Sherman Studio, Cardiff), *Dream* (The Other Place and The New Vic Theatre, Staffordshire), *Errol's Garden* (UK tour), *Old Friends* (Cambridge Junction and the Cockpit Theatre), *D-Day75* (101 Outdoor Arts), *The Witches* (Watford Palace Theatre), *Die Fledermaus* (DEPOT and Spit & Sawdust Skatepark) and *Bright Young Things* and *Stay Brave Brian Gravy* (Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds).

Associate Designs include *My Neighbour Totoro* (Royal Shakespeare Company at the Barbican Theatre), *The Winter's Tale*, *The Magician's Elephant* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *Island Nation* (Arcola Theatre), *The Velveteen Rabbit* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (UK tour) and *Jason and The Argonauts* (Unicorn Theatre).

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439

e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk Artistic Director Neil McPherson

Registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 03448268.

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Lighting Designer **Anthony Doran** is an acclaimed designer for numerous productions in the UK, New York and Europe. He returns to the Finborough Theatre following the critically claimed *Scrounger* for which he was nominated for an OffWestEnd Award.

Theatre includes *The Cherry Orchard*, *Bluets* (Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg), *In Real Life*, *Schatten* and *Orlando* (Schaubühne), *Killing It* (Network theatre, Vaults Festival), *Norma Jean Baker of Troy* (Kenneth C. Griffin Theatre, The Shed New York), *La Maladie de la Mort* (Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris), *A Colder Water* (Vaults Festival) and *Asymptote* (Laban).

Associate Lighting Designs include *Greatest Play* (Trafalgar Theatre) and *Kuala Khan* (Oily Cart).

Sound Designer **John Leonard** started work as a sound designer before the term was even coined in the UK. He was Head of Sound at the Royal Shakespeare Company and an Associate Artist, and has worked for most of the major theatre companies in the UK, including the National Theatre, the English National Opera, Hampstead Theatre, Almeida Theatre, Donmar Warehouse and extensively in London's West End, Broadway and on national and international tours. Recent theatre includes *As You Like It* (Soho Place Theatre), *The Sex Party* (Menier Chocolate Factory), *The Snail House*, *Night Mother*, *Wolf Cub*, *Cell Mates*, *The Meeting*, *Stevie* (Hampstead Theatre), *The Dresser* (Theatre Royal Bath and UK tour), *The Stepmother*, *8 Hotels* (Minerva Theatre, Chichester), *Prism* (Hampstead Theatre and UK tour), *Blithe Spirit* (Theatre Royal Bath, UK Tour and West End), *Consent*, *Cocktail Sticks* (National Theatre and West End), *My Name Is Lucy Barton* (Bridge Theatre and Friedman Theatre, New York City), *Uncle Vanya* (Theatre Royal Bath), *Charlotte & Theodore*, *In Praise Of Love* (Ustinov Theatre, Bath), *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (Bristol Old Vic, West End, New York and Los Angeles), *Hand To God* (Vaudeville Theatre), *McQueen* (St. James Theatre and West End), *Firebird*, *Mr. Foote's Other Leg* (Hampstead Theatre and West End), *Ghosts* (Almeida Theatre, West End and Harvey Theatre, Brooklyn).

Exhibitions include those for The Tussauds Group in London, Warwick Castle, Amsterdam and New York, He is the author of a renowned textbook on theatre sound, winner of Drama Desk and Sound Designer of The Year Awards and is a Fellow of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, an Honorary Fellow of The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts and a Companion of the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts.

Movement Consultant **Bill Irwin** is an American actor, clown and comedian. He began as a vaudeville-style stage performer and has been noted for his contribution to the renaissance of American circus during the 1970s. He has made a number of appearances on film and television, and won a Tony Award for his role in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* on Broadway.

Irwin was awarded the National Endowment for the Arts Choreographer's Fellowship in 1981 and 1983. In 1984, he was named a Guggenheim Fellow and was the first performance artist to be awarded a five-year MacArthur Fellowship. For *Largely New York* (five Tony Award nominations), he won a New York Drama Critics Circle Special Citation in 1988 and an Outer Critics Circle Award and Drama Desk Award in 1989.

The cast is:

Mark Povinelli | Benjamin Lay

Mark is most known for his critically acclaimed performance as Torvald Helmer in the OBIE award winning production of *Mabou Mines Dollhouse* (St. Ann's Warehouse and International Tour) as well as the premiere of Martha Clarke's *Belle Epoque* (Lincoln Center) in the lead role of Henri Toulouse-Lautrec. Other theatre includes performances at the Shakespeare Theater, Children's Theater Company, Radio City Music Hall, Oklahoma Lyric Theater, Will Geer Theatricum and UCLA Live.

Film includes *Nightmare Alley*, *Water For Elephants*, *Mirror Mirror*, *The Hot Flashes* and *My Dinner With Herve*.

Television includes *Modern Family*, *Criminal Minds*, *Happyish*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Charmed* and *Mad Dogs*.

Mark became the first little person cast as a series regular on a network sitcom in *Are You There, Chelsea?*

As a noted social activist, in June 2017, Povinelli was elected President of the Little People of America which promotes awareness, advocacy and medical assistance for individuals with forms of dwarfism.

The Return of Benjamin Lay is proudly sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh.

The press on plays by Naomi Wallace

"Disturbing drama is a plea for peace" ★★★★★ Michael Billington, *The Guardian* on *Returning to Haifa*

"As quietly shattering as it is gently complex." ★★★★★ Matt Trueman, *WhatsOnStage* on *Returning to Haifa*

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"Class and politics are probed with fierce, searing tenderness" ★★★★★ Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian* on *One Flea Spare*.
"Wallace's excellent, riveting play is an absorbing story of love, lust and loyalty." ★★★★★ *Daily Telegraph* on *The Breach*
"Theatre needs more plays like Naomi Wallace's *The Liquid Plain* - by which I mean works that are historical, epic and poetic." *Time Out New York* on *The Liquid Plain*
"One of the more audacious jaw-droppers in recent memory" *The New York Times* on *Night is A Room*
"She speaks to, and for, the body as eloquently as any American writer since Walt Whitman." *American Theatre*
"Absolutely compelling theatre." *Evening Standard* on *The Fever Chart*
"A taut, beautifully written elegy and it reaches out to us now like a prophecy." *The Observer* on *The Fever Chart*

COVID SAFE

As one of the most intimate theatre venues in London, we are taking every possible precaution to ensure the safety of performers, staff, and audience members during the current pandemic.
Audience members may be temperature-checked upon their arrival at the theatre, and masks are strongly recommended at all times, including during the performance.
In order to ensure that the Finborough Theatre is still accessible for those who are CEV (Clinically Extremely Vulnerable) or those who would just prefer it, **mask wearing is mandatory for all Sunday matinee performances**.
We have reduced our audience capacity to 85% and adjusted our ticket prices to reflect this. We have been reviewing these protocols every month and will lift them as soon as it is safe to do so. For full information, please see our website.

PRESS NIGHTS: THURSDAY, 15 JUNE 2023 AND FRIDAY, 16 JUNE 2023 AT 7.30PM

PHOTOCALL: TUESDAY, 13 JUNE 2023 AT 1.00PM-1.30PM

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Box Office 020 7244 7439

No booking fees

Tuesday, 13 June - Saturday, 8 July 2023

Tuesday to Saturday evenings at 7.30pm. Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3.00pm.

Prices until 25 June 2023 - Tickets £20, £18 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £18 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £20 all seats. Previews (13 and 14 June) £15 all seats.

£10 tickets for Under 30s for performances from Tuesday to Sunday of the first week when booked online only.

£15 tickets for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on Saturday, 17 June 2023 at 7.30pm when booked online only.

Prices from 27 June 2023 - Tickets £23, £20 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £20 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £23 all seats.

Group Bookings for all performances - 1 free ticket in every 10 purchased.

Performance Length: Approximately seventy five minute with no interval.

For all Press, marketing and public relations please contact: olivia@chloenelkinconsulting.com

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Matilda Russell on e-mail press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07384 379624**

Download press releases and images at <http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources.php>

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