**For immediate release: Tuesday 21 March**

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**Casting confirmed for Giles Terera’s award-winning play confronting the legacy of Britain's human rights and slave trading past**

***The Meaning of Zong* London premiere at Barbican Theatre, 20-23 April 2023**

[**Bristol Old Vic – The Meaning of Zong, a play by Giles Terera**](https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2023/event/the-meaning-of-zong-giles-terera)Dates: Thursday 20–Sunday 23 April 2023, Barbican Theatre

Press performance: Thursday 20 April 2023, 7.45pm  
Audio described performance: Saturday 22 April, 7.45pm

Captioned performance: Saturday 22 April, 2.30pm

A person and person sitting on the floor

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The Meaning of Zong at Bristol Old Vic 2022. Photo by Curtis Richard

**Giles Terera**’s boldly inventive debut play ***The Meaning of Zong***will make its London premiere at **Barbican Theatre** in April 2023, following its world premiere at **Bristol Old Vic** and visits to Liverpool and Edinburgh last year. Taking place at the height of the transatlantic slave trade, ***The Meaning of Zong*** celebrates the power of the human spirit against adversity and explores how individual and collective action can drive unimaginable change.

The play explores a heinous insurance claim made in 1783 over lost ‘cargo’, masking the murder of over 130 enslaved African people. Calling for a reckoning on the legacy of the UK’s slave trading past and the role played by financial and judicial institutions, the play will be performed a stone’s throw from London’s Guildhall - the location of the court hearing that determined the claim.

**Giles Terera** said: “*240 years ago this extraordinary true story began in the City of London. That we are able to bring it back to the heart of Britain’s financial capital presents a valuable opportunity for us to acknowledge our past and understand our present, so that we can, if we choose to, build a positive future. With shocking stories in papers about the plight of Black and Brown people fighting for their lives at sea in boats, then as now Britain must ask itself - what should be done? This is a story about human rights, our responsibility to one another and the power of the individual to effect positive change.*”

*The Meaning of Zong* is co-directed by **Giles Terera** and **Tom Morris** (*Touching the Void*, *War Horse*). It is performed by an ensemble cast including Giles Terera**,** whose performance in the original run at **Bristol Old Vic** won him the 2022 UK Theatre Award for Best Performance in a Play.

The cast for the London production will include **Tristan Sturrock**, **Ényì Okoronkwo, Rona Morison** and **Kezrena James,** who join original company members **Simon Holland-Roberts, Remi King, Kiera Lester** and **Bethan Mary-James,** with music live on-stage performed by Composer and Musical Director **Sidiki Dembele.**

In 1783, Olaudah Equiano read the harrowing reports of a massacre aboard the slave ship Zong, from which 133 Africans had been thrown overboard. Joining forces with anti-slavery campaigner Granville Sharp to publicly condemn these actions, he helped set in motion events which led to the abolition movement in the UK.

Based on real life historical events, Olivier Award-winning performer, writer and co-director **Giles Terera** (*Hamilton, Othello*) digs deeper into Olaudah’s mission beyond the courtroom. Having bought his own freedom, he now faces a personal battle to rediscover his past and accept his true self.

**Toni Racklin**, **Barbican Head of Theatre & Dance**, said*: “We are honoured to present this compelling new play, which urges us to reflect on our place in the world and our fundamental duty to each other.* The Meaning of Zong *reminds us of theatre’s unique ability to create a place where conversations can come alive. We bear witness to extraordinary stories of resilience and resistance that resonate more powerfully than ever.*”

**ENDS**

“While the legacies of this trade continue to reverberate, so do the victories of those who campaigned against it…urgent, history unfurls and keeps on moving”  
★★★★★ The Guardian  
  
**Press information**  
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 **Images**

For images and crediting information, please visit:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0hpmwmb3bb1iklm/AACFmOlcMLisl7Gn-kZpfu7Ia?dl=0>

**Listings**

The Meaning of Zong

by Giles Terera

Bristol Old Vic

UK

Directed by Giles Terera and Tom Morris

Thu 20–Sun 23 Apr 2023 (6 performances)

Barbican Theatre

2.30pm & 7.45pm on Thu 20 and Sat 22; 7.45pm on Fri 21; 2.30pm on Sun 23 Apr 2023

2 hours 25 minutes including an interval

Age guidance: 12+ (contains distressing scenes, historical racial language, themes of slavery and violence and some strong language)

From £16 plus booking fee; £15 Young Barbican tickets available

Press performance: Thu 20 Apr 2023, 7.45pm

Post-show talk: Fri 21 Apr 2023 (free to same-day ticket holders)

Captioned performance: Sat 22 Apr 2023, 2.30pm

Audio-described performance: Sat 22 Apr 2023, 7.45pm

Presented by the Barbican.

A Bristol Old Vic production. Supported by the Ronald Duncan Literary Foundation, The Mackintosh Foundation and donations toward The Peter O'Toole Prize.

Original production support from the Bristol Old Vic Law Circle: Christopher Sharp, Osborne Clarke, Reynolds Porter Chamberlain, Bevan Brittan, Burges Salmon, Clarke Willmott, St John’s Chambers, Kannan Siva.

**Notes to Editors**

**Biographies**

**Sidiki Dembele (Composer/ Onstage Music Director)** hails from an ancient line of Malian Griot musicians, diplomats and oral historians, raised in the cultural traditions of his ancestors. He is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, beginning his professional career at the age fourteen. He teaches at masterclass level internationally. Since appearing and composing for Justin Macgregor's *Mugabeland!* (2012, Lowry Theatre), and as MD for Ballet Nimba (2010-2015) he joined the RSC as player musician (*Hamlet,* 2016 and 2018) and was named 21st century drummers ambassador in 2020. Numerous appearances with BBC Concert Orchestra, Welsh National Orchestra and Manchester Collective, culminated in a 2021 BBC Proms appearance, bringing together the music and traditions of two worlds and spaces in time. Associate Lecturer at RWCMD, with arrangement and contribution credits for several albums.

**Simon Holland-Roberts** is a co-founder of ShakesVR with Giles Terera in 2019, and Pigtown Theatre CIC in 2009, both based in Conwy, North Wales. As an actor, his theatre credits include *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice,* *Cyrano, All My Sons, Arms and the Man*, *Aristocrats, Glengarry Glen Ross* (Theatr Clwyd); *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Saint Joan* (Donmar Warehouse); *Strife* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Of Mice and Men* (Leeds Playhouse); *Assembly13* (NTW); *Love’s Labour’s Lost, Lisa’s Sex Strike, The Tempest, Richard III, Edward IV, Henry VI, The Man with Two Gaffers* (Northern Broadsides). TV and Film work includes *All at Sea, Da Vinci’s Demons, Stepping Up, The Borrowers, Coronation Street, Shameless, Eric & Ernie, Accused, The Street.*

**Kezrena James**’theatre credits include *Under Milk Wood*, *From Morning To Midnight* and *My Brilliant Friend* (National Theatre), *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (Harold Pinter Theatre/Tour), *The Cherry Orchard* (Theatre Royal, Windsor), *othellomacbeth* (Lyric Hammersmith/Home, Manchester), *The Little Matchgirl* (Shakespeare’s Globe/Bristol Old Vic), *Medea* and *Sleeping Beauty* (Bristol Old Vic), *The Borrowers* and *Clytemnestra* (Sherman Theatre), *Primetime* and *The Faith Machine* (The Royal Court), *Macbeth, The Comedy Of Errors* and *The Secret Garden* (Chester Performs), *The Winter’s Tale* (Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre), *Arabian Nights* (The Lowry) and *Five Children And It* (The Egg, Theatre Royal Bath). For television, she has appeared in *The A List, 15 Days, Ordinary Lies, Being Human, Doctors* and *Crash*.

**Remi King** recently made his professional stage debut in *The Meaning of Zong* (Bristol Old Vic, Edinburgh Lyceum, Liverpool Playhouse). Further credits include the role of Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet* (Oxford Castle).

**Kiera Lester** made her professional stage debut in *The Meaning of Zong* (Bristol Old Vic, Edinburgh Lyceum, Liverpool Playhouse). Her screen credits include the upcoming *Ruby Speaking* and *Grace* for ITV, as well as *Chloe* and *Death in Paradise* for the BBC.

**Bethan Mary-James**’s theatre credits include *Trouble in Butetown* (The Donmar),*The Meaning of Zong* (Bristol Old Vic), *The Merthyr Stigmatist* (Sherman Theatre/Theatre Uncut) *Antigone* (NTW), *This Beautiful Village* (Abbey Theatre), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Tobacco Factory), *Pride & Prejudice* (Nottingham Playhouse), *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (Talawa/National Theatre), *All My Sons* (Talawa/Manchester Royal Exchange). Her work for television includes *Sisters* (Peer Pressure), *Friday Night Dinner* (Big Talk), *Doctors, Casualty* (BBC), *The Collection* (Amazon), *Cuffs* (Tiger Aspect), *Stella* (Sky1) and *Public Enemies* (BBC One). Further credits include feature film Belle, radio play *H Is For Hair (BBC Radio 3) and* voiceover for *Jukebox Juniors* (CBBC).

**Rona Morison** is best known for playing the role of Chell in feature film *Our Ladies*. She can be seen in *Solo: A Star War’s Story* and Stephen Spielberg’s *Ready Player One* and in BBC Scotland’s *The Control Room.* Rona most recently played the titular role in *Mary* directed by Roxana Silbert at the Hampstead Theatre and played the role of Sandy in T*he Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* directed by Polly Findlay at the Donmar Warehouse.

**Ényì Okoronkwo**’s theatre work includes *Dr. Semmelweis* and *The Cherry Orchard* (Bristol Old Vic); *Tartuffe* and *Wonder.Land (*National Theatre); *The Haystack* (Hampstead Theatre); *Noises Off* (Lyric Hammersmith); *The Model Apartment* (Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal Bath); *Junkyard* (Bristol Old Vic/Theatre Clwyd/Rose, Kingston); *Boy with Beer* (King’s Head) and *Arthur’s World* (Bush Theatre). For the screen, his film work includes *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Up On The Roof* while television credits include *Renegade Nell* (Disney+) *Giri/Haji* (Netflix); *I Hate You* (Channel 4); *Funny Woman* and *The Lazarus Project* (Sky).

**Tristan Sturrock**’s theatre credits include *The Nutcracker, Cyrano, Messiah, Peter Pan, Coram Boy, Juliet and her Romeo* and *The Beaux Stratagem* (Bristol Old Vic), *Edward II* and *Blue Remembered* *Hills* (Sheffield Crucible), *As You Like It* (Manchester Royal Exchange) and *Spanish Tragedy* (RSC). He was a founding member of Kneehigh Theatre, appearing with the company in *Rebecca, Brief Encounter, A Matter of Life & Death, Tristan & Yseult* and *The Riot*. His work for television includes *The Tower, Malpractice, Miss Scarlet & The Duke, The Outlaws, Midsomer Murders, Poldark* (5 series), *The Crown, Three Girls, Endeavour, Doc Martin, Jamaica Inn, The Borgias, The Queen, Bad Girls* and *The Project*. Film credits include *My Policeman, Christopher Robin, Bait* and *Saving Grace*.

**Giles Terera (Writer, Co-Director, Performer)** is an award-winning actor, musician and writer. He has worked consistently at venues such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, Shakespeare’s Globe and most recently returning to the National Theatre for leading roles in *Othello* and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (for which he has received an Olivier Award nomination for Best Actor). He is best known for originating the role of Aaron Burr in the London production of the award-winning musical *Hamilton*, for which he won the 2018 Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Musical.

His other theatre credits include *Rosmersholm, The Tempest, Avenue Q, The Book of Mormon, 125th Street, Rent* (West End); *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, Hamlet, Death and the King’s Horseman, The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other, Troilus and Cressida, Candide, Honk!* (National Theatre); *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare’s Globe/international tour); *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Donmar Warehouse); *Pure Imagination – The Songs of Lesley Bricusse* (St. James’s); *King John* (Shakespeare’s Globe/UK tour); *Don’t You Leave Me Here* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *The Playboy of the Western World* (Abbey, Dublin); *The Ratpack* (West End/international tour); *Jailhouse Rock* (Theatre Royal Plymouth/West End); *You Don’t Kiss* (Stratford Circus); *Up on the Roof* (Chichester); *The Tempest* (RSC); *Six Degrees of Separation* (Sheffield); *Generations of the Dead* (Young Vic); *Bill Shakespeare’s Italian Job* (Playbox, Warwick/Gilded Balloon, Edinburgh); *The Demon Headmaster/The Animals of Farthing Wood* (Pleasance, Edinburgh).

As a writer, his theatre work includes: *The Meaning of Zong* (Bristol Old Vic); *The Ballad of Soho Jones* (St. James’) and *Black Matter* (Crazy Coqs). As a filmmaker, Giles’s first documentary, *Muse of Fire* – created with Dan Poole – centres on modern perspectives of Shakespeare and premiered on BBC Four in Autumn 2013. Giles was an associate producer on Poole’s feature documentary *The Space: Theatre of Survival* and he wrote and directed the concert film *Hello Harry! A Celebration*.

Giles was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 New Year Honours for services to theatre.

**Tom Morris** **(Co-Director)** was Artistic Director of Bristol Old Vic from 2009 -2022 and has been Associate Director of the National Theatre since 2004. He was the Artistic Director of BAC from 1995 to 2004 and has worked widely as a journalist, broadcaster and freelance writer, producer and director. At Bristol Old Vic he has directed many shows including *Touching the Void* and *The Grinning Man* (both Bristol and West End) and *Swallows & Amazons* (Bristol, West End and UK tour). Other directing credits include: *Breaking the Waves* (Scottish Opera/ Opera Ventures with Edinburgh International Festival); *The* *Death of Klinghoffer* (ENO & Metropolitan Opera); *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (National Theatre); *War Horse* (as co-director for National Theatre; 2011 Tony Award for Best Director); *Disembodied, Newsnight: The Opera, Home, Passions, Unsung, Othello Music, Trio* and *All That Fall,* all for BAC, where he also produced *Jerry Springer: The Opera* (BAC Opera, British Festival of Visual Theatre, Sam Shepard Festival). Tom was founding Chair of the JMK Trust, has served on the boards of Complicite & Punchdrunk, has honorary doctorates from UWE and Bristol University, and an OBE for services to Theatre.

**About Bristol Old Vic**Bristol Old Vic is the longest continuously running theatre in the UK and celebrated its 250th birthday in 2016. The historic playhouse aims to inspire audiences with its own original productions, both at home and on tour, (*Touching the Void*, (West End / International) *The Grinning Man*, Mark Rylance’s *Dr Semmelweis* (both West End) and Ross Willis’ *Wonder Boy*), whilst nurturing the next generation of artists, supporting experiment and innovation, and creating access to their programme for people who would not otherwise encounter it.

Since 2020, Bristol Old Vic has been sharing its shows in new ways: Live Broadcast from the Georgian auditorium to tens of thousands and also On Demand both to TV and cinema. This has led to the launch of Bristol Old Vic On Screen - unforgettable performances filmed in its 257 year-old theatre, broadcast live to you wherever you are in the world.

[www.bristololdvic.org.uk](http://www.bristololdvic.org.uk)

**About the Barbican**

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](http://www.barbican.org.uk/) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 700 [staff](https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/our-people/careers) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2019/event/conservatory), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](http://lso.co.uk/); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](https://www.bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](http://www.aam.co.uk/) and [Britten Sinfonia](http://www.brittensinfonia.com/), Associate Producer [Serious](http://www.serious.org.uk/), and Artistic Partner [Create](http://createlondon.org/). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](http://www.boyblueent.com/site/), [Cheek by Jowl](http://www.cheekbyjowl.com/), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](http://drumworks.co.uk/) and [Michael Clark](http://www.michaelclarkcompany.com/). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](https://www.laphil.com/) are the Barbican’s International Orchestral Partner, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](http://www.jazz.org/JLCO/) are International Associate Ensemble.

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