

# Young Vic

Press Release – Thursday 16 May 2024

Images available [here](#)

## FIRST LOOK AT THE TONY AWARD-WINNING ROCK MUSICAL PASSING STRANGE AT YOUNG VIC THEATRE



Production photos are released today for the **Tony Award-winning rock musical *Passing Strange*** ahead of its **European premiere** at the **Young Vic Theatre**. The hit Broadway show follows a young musician as he sets out on a musical odyssey, through 80s L.A, Amsterdam and Berlin. International film, TV and theatre director **Liesl Tommy** (Aretha Franklin biopic *Respect*, Tony nominated *Eclipsed*) directs this new production with book and lyrics by **Stew**, created in collaboration with and originally directed by **Annie Dorsen**, with music by **Stew Stewart** and **Heidi Rodewald**. The production is currently in previews with official opening night on **Tuesday 21 May** and it will run until **Saturday 6 July**.

*You know, it's weird when you wake up in the morning and realize that your entire adult life was based on a decision made by a teenager. A stoned teenager.*

A young musician sets out on an electrifying musical odyssey to find himself and his place in the world, swapping his middle-class L.A. upbringing for punk rock and protest in 1980s Amsterdam and Berlin.

*"A thrilling score in which rock, punk, funk and gospel conduct a revival meeting that blows the roof off."*

(Rolling Stone – Broadway, 2008)

*"Its big heart throbs to the sound of electric guitars... Richer in wit, feeling and sheer personality than most of what is classified as musical theater."*

(New York Times – Broadway, 2008)

Olivier Award-winner **Giles Terera** (*Hamilton*, *Othello*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*) plays Narrator; **Keenan Munn-Francis** (*Black Dog*, *The Lion King*, *Thriller Live!*) plays Youth; **Rachel Adedeji** (*Dreaming Whilst Black*, *Hollyoaks*, *X-Factor*) plays Mother; **Renée Lamb** (*Six the Musical*, *Cake*) plays Desi/Sherry/Renata; **David Albury** (*Get Up Stand Up! The Bob Marley Musical*, *Motown the Musical*) plays Rev Jones/Terry/Christophe/Hugo; **Caleb Roberts** (*Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, *I Think We Are Alone*) plays Mr Franklin/Joop/Mr Venus; and **Nadia Violet Johnson** (*School of Rock*, *The Outlaws*) plays Edwina/Marianna/Sudabey.

The band is **Ikechukwu Onwuagbu** (Bass), **JT Taylor** (Drums) and **Pete Billington** (Keyboards/Guitar).

The creative team brings together Set and Costume Designer **Ben Stones**, Lighting Designer **Richard Howell**, Sound Designer **Tom Gibbons**, Video Designer **Will Duke**, Musical Supervisor and Additional Arrangements and Orchestrations **Brandon Michael Nase**, Choreographer **Dickson Mbi**, Wigs, Hair and Make Up Designer **Suzanne Scotcher**, Musical Director **Jerome van den Berghe**, Voice and Dialect Coach **Hazel Holder**, Casting Director **Heather Basten CDG**, Jerwood Assistant Director **Tian Brown-Sampson**, Jerwood Trainee Assistant Director **Nathanael Campbell** and Jerwood Assistant Choreographer **Robia Brown**.

This marks the European premiere of *Passing Strange* which took Broadway by storm in 2008, receiving seven Tony Award nominations, winning for Best Book of a Musical; seven Drama Desk Award nominations, winning for Outstanding Musical, Outstanding Lyrics and Outstanding Music; and it was named winner of the Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Musical.

**Giles Terera** (Narrator) won the Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Musical as Aaron Burr in the original London cast of *Hamilton* and was most recently nominated for the 2024 Olivier Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role for *Clyde's* (Donmar Warehouse). Other recent performances include *Blues for an Alabama Sky* for which he received Olivier and Evening Standard Best Actor Award nominations, in the title role of *Othello* (National Theatre), and *The Meaning of Zong*, also his playwriting debut (Barbican & Bristol Old Vic). Previous West End credits include: *Rosmersholm*, *The Book Of Mormon*, *Avenue Q*, *The Rat Pack*, *Jailhouse Rock*, *125<sup>th</sup> Street* and *Rent*. Film and TV includes: *Scrooge*, *Death of England: Delroy, Maxx, Flack*, *The Current War*.

**Rachel Adedeji** (Mother) played Funmi in the BAFTA winning series *Dreaming Whilst Black*. She can currently be seen in PBS/Channel 4's *Alice & Jack* and BBC/Netflix's *Champion*. She recently completed filming for the Paramount+ feature film *Hard Home* and will soon be seen in *The Almond and the Seahorse*. Other screen credits include *RIPD 2: Rise of the Damned* and *Whitstable Pearl*. Rachel was an *X Factor* finalist in 2009 before starring in *Thriller Live!* (West End & UK tour) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (UK Tour). She went on to play series regular Lisa Loveday in *Hollyoaks* until 2020.

**Keenan Munn-Francis** (Youth) was longlisted for Breakthrough Performance in the 2023 British Independent Film Awards (BIFA) for his leading role as Sam in *Black Dog*. He recently completed filming for the BBC One adaptation of Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Mr Loverman* in the role of Young Barry. Previous television credits include BBC's *Call the Midwife* and Disney's *Penny on MARS*. Theatre includes: *The Lion King*, *Thriller Live* (West End), *Our Lady of Kibeho* (Royal & Derngate), *Five Guys Named Moe* (Underbelly), *Filthy Business* (Hampstead), *Soul* (Royal and Derngate / Hackney Empire), *Lord of the Flies* (Regent's Park), *The Scottsboro Boys* (Garrick Theatre).

**Renée Lamb** (Desi / Sherry / Renata) originated the roles of Catherine of Aragon in *Six the Musical* and, most recently, the leading role of Jeanne in *Cake* (West End). Previous stage

credits include: *Little Shop of Horrors* (Regent's Park), *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed The World* (UK tour), *Be More Chill* (The Other Palace / West End), *Malory Towers* (Wise Children), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Mercury Colchester & Southwark Playhouse). Film includes: *This is the Night Mail*. Renée will also be seen in *This Town*, the upcoming six-part series for BBC One penned by Steven Knight.

**David Albury** (Rev Jones / Terry / Christophe / Hugo) played the title role in *Get Up Stand Up! The Bob Marley Musical* and Smokey Robinson in *Motown the Musical*, both in the West End. Other stage roles include: *Committee... (A New Musical)* (Donmar Warehouse), *The Life* (Southwark Playhouse), *Exposure - Life Through A Lens* (St. James Theatre), *Only the Brave* (Wales Millennium Centre), *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (Birmingham Rep), *Love Story* (Union Theatre), *Porgy and Bess* (Open Air Theatre), *Bare* (Greenwich Theatre), *The Lion King* (National Tour). Television includes: *Doctors*.

**Caleb Roberts** (Mr Franklin / Joop / Mr Venus) played Ike Turner in *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* (West End) and won a Black British Theatre Award as Charming in *Cinderella* (West End). He returns to the Young Vic having previously performed in the Taking Part community show *She Ventures He Wins*. Other theatre credits include: *I Think We Are Alone* (Frantic Assembly), *Richard III* (Headlong), *King Lear* (West End / Chichester Festival Theatre). Television credits include *A Very English Scandal*.

**Nadia Violet Johnson** (Edwina / Marianna / Sudabey) graduated from ArtsEd. She has appeared as Patti in *School of Rock* (UK tour), as Young Myrna in *The Outlaws Season 3* and performed in concert at the BBC Proms in *Bernstein: On The Town*.

**Liesl Tommy** (Director) is an award-winning international theatre and film director. She is the first Black woman ever nominated for a Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play, earned for the Broadway hit *Eclipsed* starring Lupita Nyong'o. She made her feature film directorial debut with the Aretha Franklin biopic *Respect* starring Jennifer Hudson. Her television credits include *The Walking Dead*, *Insecure* and *Jessica Jones*.

**Stew** (Book & Lyrics / Music) is a critically acclaimed singer-songwriter and Tony/Obie Award winning playwright and performer. He leads two bands: The Negro Problem and Baba Bibi. He is also Professor of the Practice of Musical Theater Writing at Harvard University.

**Heidi Rodewald** (Music) is a Tony Award-nominated, Obie Award-winning co-composer, collaborating and performing with Stew for over two decades, releasing 10 critically acclaimed albums and creating new theatre work. Credits include composer with librettist Donna Di Novelli, *The Good Swimmer* (BAM Next Wave Festival), *A Lifesaving Manual* (UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance).

**Passing Strange** was originally produced in Berkeley California, by the Berkely Repertory Theater, and in New York by the Public Theater in creative collaboration with **Annie Dorsen**.

BSL Performance: Thu 30 May, 7.30pm

Captioned Performances: Wed 5 June, 2.30pm & Thu 13 June, 7.30pm

Relaxed Performances: Sat 8 June, 2.30pm & Thu 27 June, 7.30pm

Sensory Adapted Performance: Tue 18 June, 7.30pm

Audio Described Performances: Sat 22 June, 2.30pm & Tue 25 June, 7.30pm

**-ENDS-**

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Images: [available here](#)

### **About the Young Vic Theatre**

Founded in 1970 as a space for world-premiere productions and unexpected takes on classic plays that speak urgently to our present, the Young Vic Theatre has been one of London's leading theatres for more than fifty years.

Welcoming more than 100,000 visitors a year to its London Waterloo location, the Young Vic stands out in the city's cultural landscape for balancing daring commercial drive, success and artistic flair with genuine grassroots social impact change in our neighbourhood. We forge deep connections in our neighbourhood through our Taking Part programme, where we engage with over 15,000 people every year via a wide range of projects, from skills-based workshops to on-stage performances. We give 10% of our tickets free to schools and neighbours, irrespective of box office demand, and we are committed to keeping ticket prices low.

The Young Vic's Creators Program is our space for multi- and anti-disciplinary artists, and is the only scheme of its kind. Launched in 2001, and formerly known as the Directors Program, we offer artists and producers a unique opportunity to develop their craft through opportunities that range from trainee and assistant director roles to a two-year residency through the Genesis Fellow/Associate Director position. The Genesis Network provides an online community to over 2,500 artists and producers. Each year, the recipient of the Genesis Future Directors Award directs a show in the Clare Theatre with full support from the Young Vic team.

Built upon the principles of access, innovation, and community, the Young Vic is deepening its roots nationally and internationally. Recent transfers include a *Death of a Salesman* and *The Collaboration* on Broadway, and *Best of Enemies* and Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* in the West End.

The Young Vic's founding spirit is iconoclastic and pushing at the forefront of possibility, bringing together artists and audiences on a global scale and using the power of stories to change our world.

**Artistic Director: Kwame Kwei-Armah**

**Executive Director: Lucy Davies**

[www.youngvic.org](http://www.youngvic.org)

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**Additional support is provided by The Black Heart Foundation and the Genesis Foundation.**

**We gratefully acknowledge Ian Burford and Alec Cannell for generously supporting the Young Vic's mission.**