

BAM

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Theater director Peter Brook returns to BAM with the US Premiere of *The Suit*

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The Suit

Based on *The Suit* by Can Themba, Mothobi Mutloatse, and Barney Simon
Direction, adaptation, and music by
Peter Brook, Marie-Hélène Estienne, and Franck Krawczyk

Lighting design by Philippe Vialatte
Scenic elements and costume design by Oria Puppo
Assistant director Rikki Henry

BAM Harvey Theater (651 Fulton St)

Jan 17—Feb 2; Tue—Fri at 7:30pm, Sat at 2 pm and 7:30pm, Sun at 3pm
Tickets start at \$25
Press Opening, Saturday, January 19

Peter Brook and his BAM legacy will be celebrated at BAM's Theater Benefit following the January 24 performance at 7pm. Gala tickets: 718-636-4182.

Artist Talk: Peter Brook, Marie-Hélène Estienne, and members of the company

Jan 18, post-show (free for same-day ticket-holders)

“Stunning...unforgettable...theatre as it should be.” —*The Telegraph* (UK)

“Peter Brook is a magician... this new adaptation is directed beautifully.”
—*Le Figaro* (France)

“Jared McNeill's heartstopping, half-hummed performance of *Strange Fruit* has all the politics it needs...” —*The Guardian* (UK)

December 12, 2012/Brooklyn, NY—With *The Suit*, theater director Peter Brook—whose 1987 production of *The Mahabharata* inaugurated the BAM Majestic Theater (now the BAM Harvey Theater)—returns to BAM with Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord to showcase his signature approach of innovative stage design and the integration of live music. Written by Can Themba, *The Suit* was adapted for the stage by Mothobi Mutloatse, and Barney Simon.

BAM

Winter Spring 2013

To tell this tale of simmering resentment and tragedy in the context of apartheid-era South Africa, Brook, Marie-Hélène Estienne, and Franck Krawczyk blend a minimalist aesthetic with a soundscape that includes a version of *Strange Fruit*, traditional African melodies, and an unconventional evocation of Schubert lieder to thicken the tension between a collectively wounded husband and wife.

Living in the Johannesburg settlement Sophiatown, middle-class law clerk Philemon worships his wife, Matilda. Despite the daily oppression of apartheid life in 1950s, he considers himself a happy man. All of this changes when Philemon is tipped off and returns home to discover Matilda with another lover who narrowly escapes, leaving his suit behind on a hanger.

Caught in a vortex of emotions ranging from jealousy to rage, Philemon—a non-violent man—sets forth a unique punishment for his wife: to go on with life as usual but to treat the suit as an honored house guest. An extra place has to be set for it at the table every night and the suit is taken everywhere including the bedside as a constant reminder to the wife of her betrayal. Despite this humiliating commandment, Matilda attempts to redeem her reputation by joining a ladies' cultural club. But, Philemon still thinks she has a lesson to learn, which plays out during a tea party at their home. Philemon regrets his actions only after it's too late. His wife is dead.

This lauded production, seen at the Young Vic, the Naples Theater Festival, and Festival de Otoño, among others, is scheduled to play in Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai throughout December 2012. It features actors and musicians from Paris' Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord including **Rikki Henry, Nonhlanhla Kheswa, Jared McNeill, William Nadylam, Arthur Astier, Raphaeël Chambouvet,** and **David Dupuis.**

About the artists:

Canodoise Daniel “Can” Themba was born in 1924 in Marabastad, Pretoria, South Africa. After graduating with a degree in English and acquiring a teaching diploma from the University of Fort Hare, he moved to Sophiatown, Johannesburg—a vibrant multi-racial community. Themba then worked as a reporter and an editor at *Drum* magazine, after winning a short story competition. He worked alongside other aspiring black journalists who came to be known as the “Drum Boys.” These included Lewis Nkosi, Nat Nakasa, Bloke Modisane, and Es'kia Mphahlele. Themba also worked for *The Golden City Post* in Johannesburg.

His writing, including *The Suit*, won several prizes, including the 1953 *Drum* award. His stories were celebrated for the way they depicted “... the harsh and depressing conditions of African life in the Johannesburg townships.” Themba left Johannesburg in the early 1960s to teach in Swaziland. While there, Themba's work was banned and he was declared a statutory communist. He later passed away at the age of 43, reportedly due to alcohol abuse. His work was published posthumously in a collection entitled *The Will to Die* (1972) and later in *The World of Can Themba* (1985). Can Themba was awarded the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver for “Excellent achievement in literature, contributing to the field of journalism and striving for a just and democratic society in South Africa.”

Peter Brook was born in London in 1925 and has achieved distinction throughout his career in the disciplines of theater, opera, and literature. Following his studies at Magdalen College at the University of Oxford, he dedicated himself to the performing arts, soon directing some of the great actors of his time—John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, and Paul Scofield—as well as in iconic venues across the UK and beyond. He directed and performed with the Royal Shakespeare Company in such productions as *Titus Andronicus*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Marat/Sade* (also seen on Broadway), and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Brook became identified with a pared-down, minimalist style in which the audience was returned to a raw and unmediated encounter with the power of the performing art. In 1971, he founded the

International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris and in 1974, he established its permanent base at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord. Among his landmark works are the stage adaptation of the epic Indian poem *Mahabharata*, which tells the story of mankind; the film version of *The Lord of the Flies*; and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, an apartheid-era classic.

Brook, who has written and directed works in French and English, recently announced his retirement from the Bouffes du Nord. Brook's history with BAM began with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1971 Spring Season) and continued with the historic *The Mahabharata* (1987 Next Wave), *The Cherry Orchard* (1988 Spring Season), *The Man Who* (1995 Spring Season), *The Tragedy of Hamlet* (2001 Spring Season), and helped restage *The Island* (2003 Spring Season).

Marie-Hélène Estienne worked with Peter Brook in 1974 on the casting for *Timon of Athens*, and consequently joined the Centre International de Créations Théâtrales (CICT) for the creation of *Ubu aux Bouffes* in 1977.

She was Peter Brook's assistant on *La tragédie de Carmen*, *The Mahabharata*, and collaborated to the staging of *The Tempest*, *Impressions de Pelléas*, *Woza Albert!*, and *La tragédie d'Hamlet* (2000). With Brook, she co-authored *The Man Who* and *Je suis un phénomène* shown at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord. She wrote the French adaptation of Can Themba's play *The Suit*, and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*, by authors Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. In 2003 she wrote the French and English adaptations of *The Grand Inquisitor* based on Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. She was the author of *Tierno Bokar* in 2005, and of the English adaptation of *Eleven and Twelve* by Amadou Hampaté Ba in 2009. She co-directed with Brook *Fragments*, five short pieces by Beckett, and with Brook and composer Franck Krawczyk she freely adapted Mozart and Schikaneder's *The Magic Flute*.

Franck Krawczyk was born in 1968 and started his musical training in piano in Paris, then studied composition in Lyon where he currently teaches chamber music at the Conservatory (CNSMD). Early on, Krawczyk was discovered by the Festival d'Automne in Paris, and started writing pieces for piano, cello, string quartet, ensembles, and chamber choir. In 2000, he received the Prix Hervé Dugardin and the Prix de la SACEM for his orchestral piece *Ruines*.

His subsequent collaboration with artist Christian Boltanski gave him new perspectives on his music. With lighting designer Jean Kalman, he created a dozen pieces in France and abroad in locations ranging from opera houses to spaces dedicated to contemporary art. In the meantime, he developed new forms of musical creations for various media: theater (*Je ris de me voir si belle* with J. Brochen), readings (*Les Limbes*, *Absence*, with E. Ostrovski), video (*Private Joke* with F. Salès), and dance (*Purgatorio-In vision*, with E. Greco and P.C. Scholten).

Always maintaining strong links to the classical repertoire, Krawczyk collaborated with Accentus Choir conductor Laurence Equilbey and with cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton. In 2009, upon Peter Brook's request, he conceived and interpreted a musical accompaniment for Shakespeare's sonnets (*Love is my Sin*). They continued their collaboration with Marie-Hélène Estienne on *A Magic Flute*, a 2010 free adaptation of Mozart's opera at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord.

His last major work, *Polvere*, for solo cello, instrumental ensemble, and choir was created in 2010 at the Grand Palais (Monumenta-Christian Boltanski) and subsequently performed in New York, Milan, and Bologna. He is currently working on his third string quartet.

For press information contact Sarah Garvey, sgarvey@BAM.org, 718.636.4129 x7.

Credits

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General Information

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, BAM Rose Cinemas, and BAMcafé are located in the Peter Jay Sharp building at 30 Lafayette Avenue (between St Felix Street and Ashland Place) in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn. BAM Harvey Theater is located two blocks from the main building at 651 Fulton Street (between Ashland and Rockwell Places). Both locations house Greenlight Bookstore at BAM kiosks. BAM Fisher, located at 321 Ashland Place, is the newest addition to the BAM campus and houses the Judith and Alan Fishman Space and Rita K. Hillman Studio. BAM Rose Cinemas is Brooklyn's only movie house dedicated to first-run independent and foreign film and repertory programming. BAMcafé, operated by Great Performances, is open for dining prior to BAM Howard Gilman Opera House evening performances. BAMcafé also features an eclectic mix of spoken word and live music for BAMcafé Live on Friday and Saturday nights with a special BAMcafé Live menu available starting at 6pm.

Subway: 2, 3, 4, 5, Q, B to Atlantic Avenue-Barclays Center (2, 3, 4, 5 to Nevins St for Harvey Theater)
D, N, R to Pacific Street; G to Fulton Street; C to Lafayette Avenue
Train: Long Island Railroad to Atlantic Terminal-Barclays Center
Bus: B25, B26, B41, B45, B52, B63, B67 all stop within three blocks of BAM
Car: Commercial parking lots are located adjacent to BAM

For ticket and BAMbus information, call BAM Ticket Services at 718.636.4100, or visit BAM.org.

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