

Alfred Fagon Award Speech 2019

Welcome to the Dorfman Theatre, we are delighted to be hosting the Alfred Fagon Award 2019 at the National Theatre.

I'm Emily McLaughlin, the Head of New Work. Firstly, I wanted to say how saddened we have all been at the National Theatre by the recent death of Mustapha Matura. He was a great writer and a lovely man who I got to know during my time at the Royal Court, and also here when we held a very vibrant Studio workshop of *Playboy of the West Indies*. Many people in this room must feel his loss keenly and I know you will have some more words about Mustapha shortly.

Before that, I've been asked to talk briefly about NT's creative case for diversity with regard to writers. Currently in rehearsals we have Inua Ellam's Lyttelton theatre production of *Three Sisters*, set during the Biafran War. Clint Dyer and Roy Williams will shortly start rehearsals with Rafe Spall on their play *Death of England*. Next year Nadia Fall will bring her show *Welcome to Iran* to the Dorfman and we have much more work in the pipeline.

As many of you know the NT has a target commitment that writers of colour will make up 20% of the programmed work by living writers by 2021. So I just wanted to take a moment to unpack what the target for writers means on the ground for myself and the artistic team led by Rufus and including Nina Steiger, Stewart Pringle, and our new Senior Reader, Dipo Baruwa-Etti. There is a target but of course we work with specific artists, not numbers, reading, commissioning, and developing their work.

Between us as an artistic team, we meet scores of writers, cover hundreds of shows, read approximately 1,500 plays a year, have 55 writers under commission, and consider many proposals each year. We bring in approximately 25 writers a year on six week writing attachments.

Across all these areas of activity and more, the target boosts our confidence. It boosts our confidence to cut through it when necessary, to challenge where that may be needed, to advocate where we would have advocated anyway, but from an undeniably strengthened position. The target increases the momentum behind change to bring more black writers' work to the National Theatre's stages.

And change leads to change. One thing that has inspired me recently is the progressive conversation taking place between the *Death of England* company, between Clint Dyer, Roy Williams, Rafe Spall, Sadeysa Greenaway Bailey, Ultz, Sian Berry and the rest of that creative team. To me that room feels like what the future should be more about and as we know, the more black-led rooms there are in theatre, the better for all of us.

The Alfred Fagon Award has always been and continues to be a very significant force for championing and recognising black British writers. I've heard the short list is very strong this year and I'd like to congratulate all the writers and say respect to the judges faced with such a difficult decision.

Thank you.