

Great Expectations

BY CHARLES DICKENS
ADAPTED BY TANIKA GUPTA
DIRECTED BY POOJA GHAI

**Resources,
Content Warnings
&
Self Care Pack**



Resource Pack - Great Expectations

This document has been designed to support audiences attending performances of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, adapted by Tanika Gupta, directed by Pooja Ghai
8 SEPTEMBER - 7 OCTOBER 2023

We've created this document for those who would be comfortable with more information and give you a little insight into the show. We hope the information and resources in this document will help audiences experiencing the show, and support planning for anyone who may be concerned about their visit.

Contents

1. Content Warnings
2. About the show
3. Meet The Cast
4. Actor Exchange
5. Rehearsal Snaps
6. Trailer Time
7. Lets Set The Scene
8. Career In The Spotlight - Directing
9. Costume Inspirations
10. Writer & Director Interview
11. Mental Health & Wellbeing Guide
12. Graduate Return! - Shaban Dar
13. Royal Exchange Bingo
14. What's Coming Up?



Show Information

Content Warnings

- For ages 12+
- Death/grief, parent loss/orphaning, domestic violence, violence against children, blood, shouting, cannon fire, gunshots and firearms, knives, racism, racial slurs/discrimination, family separation, forced migration, poverty/food scarcity/hunger, moderate threat and peril, military scenes, mention of death penalty and hanging, repeated mention and discussion of adoption, pyrotechnics/real flames, substance abuse, repeated discussion of addiction, depictions of drugs and alcohol

Running Time

3 Hours 5 minutes with interval.

Travel Recommendations

Trams

If your school or college is near a tram stop you can get your students to us for just £1 each and £2 per teacher. A great way to save money on coaches and also give students the life experience of how a lot of our audiences use public transport to access our theatre. More information [here](#).

Fares and passes for young people | Transport for Greater Manchester (tfgm.com)

Coaches

For all information about coach drops offs and parking please click [here](#).

A bit about the show

This adaptation of a classic by Tanika Gupta is just pure genius. You'll get to see the familiar Dickens framework, but it comes with a twist.

"All my life they looked down on me, always cursing and abusing. But you, you will be different!"

Bengal, 1899. Rumours that the British Empire plans to partition Bengal spread and uncertainty is never far away. For one Indian boy destiny is found on the banks of the River Padma before the Goddess Lakshmi. Here a promise is made. Born out of terror or kindness the choice Pipli makes that night will shape his life forever.

Pooja Ghai directs Tanika Gupta's adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Pipli moves from his home in Rajshahi to the bustling streets of Calcutta. With an open heart he navigates unforgiving darkness and unsettling friendships in his search for a better future. For Pipli, dharma – the right way of living – is never far away.



Art direction: Alfred Mulroy. Photography: Felicity McCabe

Who Are Tamasha?

Tamasha is a dedicated home for both emerging and established Global Majority artists. A powerhouse of new writing, talent development and digital innovation, we platform and invest in stories that celebrate our rich shared histories and cultures. Proudly both artist and audience driven, we're disrupting, dismantling, and inspiring through bold and imaginative storytelling, providing a place to explore our lived experiences and unique perspectives.

We support theatre makers in gaining the skills, knowledge and creative community to create innovative, new work. Our Developing Artists Programme includes masterclasses, showcases, training programmes and networking opportunities, informed by and responsive to the evolving demands of the creative industries.

We collaborate with partners to commission and produce an artistic programme interweaving live and digital productions, such as audio dramas, walking adventures, magazine-style podcasts and annual touring productions. All staged within and beyond traditional spaces.

Productions over the company's history have included *East is East* by Ayub Khan Din, *Blood* by Emteaz Hussain, *Made In India* by Satinder Chohan, *Approaching Empty* by Ishy Din, *Does My Bomb Look Big In This?* by Nyla Levy, *I Wanna Be Yours* by Zia Ahmed, *10 Nights* by Shahid Iqbal Khan, *Hakawatis* by Hannah Khalil and *STARS: An Afrofuturist Space Odyssey* by Mojisola Adebayo

Find Out
More

<https://tamasha.org.uk/>



TAMASHA



Team Tamasha



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Valerie Synmoie

Artistic Director
Pooja Ghai

Assistant Producer
Harris Albar

Digital Producer
Tuyet Van Huynh

Regional Associate
Gitika Buttoo

Regional Associate
Beth Kapila

Finance Manager
Mandeep Gill

Press Consultant
Nancy Poole

Marketing
Rema Chandran



Board

Deepa Patel (Chair)

Shawab Iqbal (Vice Chair)

Hannah Miller, Anne Torreggiani, Eileen Bellot, Victoria Rudolp

Meet The Cast

7.



Pipli
Esh Alladi



Estella
Cecilia Appiah



Herbert Pocket / Soldier
Giles Cooper



Wahab / Soldier
Shaban Dar



Compeyson / Matthew Pocket
Reginald Edwards



Jagers
Stephen Fewell



Malik
Andrew French



Jagu
Asif Khan



Krishna / Meneka
Shanaya Rafaat



Miss Havisham
Catherine Russell



Panda / Public Speaker
Nav Sidhu



Bilquis
Humera Syed

Creative Team

Writer

Tanika Gupta

Director

Pooja Ghai

Designer

Rosa Maggiora

Lighting Designer

Joshua Carr

Composer and Sound Designer

Arun Ghosh

Fight and Intimacy Director

RC-Annie –

Rachel Bown-Williams
of RC-Annie Ltd.

Movement Director

Neil Bettles

Dialect Coach

Gurkiran Kaur

Birkbeck Assistant Director

Amara Heyland

Casting Director

Hannah Miller CDG



Scan Me

Check out our meet the cast Instagram Reel

Actor Exchange

Get to know some of our incredible Great Expectations cast members, with Esh & Cecilia having a chat about the show.

What is it about this adaptation that appealed to you?

Scan Me



Tanika Gupta's adaptation of GREAT EXPECTATIONS is bold in its approach, but it leaves the essence of Dickens' original novel intact, not least the key relationship between Miss Havisham (played by Catherine Russell) and Pip (here renamed Pipli', and played by Esh Alladi). During rehearsals, Catherine and Esh shared their thoughts to Andy Murry about being involved in this new Royal Exchange production.

Catherine, you have quite a history of appearing at the Exchange.

Catherine Russell: Yes, the first time I was here I was playing Raina in ARMS AND THE MAN [in 1988/89] and I was pregnant. What's strange is, of the three times I've been here, I've always been in a corset - which was fine, apart from being pregnant. They kept having to let it out. By the end of it, Captain Bluntschli had definitely had his way with Raina. I'm delighted to be back here. It's just such a unique space, that's the thing.

Esh, this is your third time here – and you grew up locally, so you started coming as an audience member initially.

Esh Alladi: Absolutely, yeah. I grew up coming to the Royal Exchange and seeing some incredible productions here. One that always sticks in my mind is seeing Andy Serkis playing Iago with Paterson Joseph as Othello [2002]. There was a Q&A with them afterwards, and at that point Andy Serkis had only just done LORD OF THE RINGS, so it was all very exciting. He was extraordinary, and that production I absolutely adored. I'd always sort of wanted to be an actor, but I didn't see any South Asian faces in plays. I loved musicals, and certainly not in musicals did I ever see anybody who looked like me on the stage. I was sort of in prep for medical school when I watched that play, but I just loved theatre so much that I kept doing it. I worked full time as a doctor for a couple of years, and then instead of applying for speciality training in my second year, I applied to drama school, and ended up there for a couple of years. Now I practice as an A&E doctor and as a locum doctor when I'm not acting.

What was your first reaction when you read Tanika Gupta's version of GREAT EXPECTATIONS? 10.

Catherine: Selfishly, when I first read that script, I thought, I want to play that part. I mean, I'm being perfectly honest. My initial response was 'Oh God, wow!'. What's interesting about it is, rather than it reducing Dickens, it's added an extra layer. I'm a huge Dickens fan, but it's made it even more fascinating and intriguing and inclusive and diverse and all of those things. It's an exciting way of looking at it, I think.

As a Dickens fan then, how faithful is this adaptation? Audience members may come with certain expectations...

Catherine: Great expectations of seeing GREAT EXPECTATIONS? But they will see GREAT EXPECTATIONS. I mean, they really will. It's interesting how close to the original Tanika's managed to be, in transposing it. It's got colonialism and the Raj era and that setting. I suppose what the Dickens had is a sort of classism, if you like, and the snobbery around where people are coming from and where they're going. We have that, but we also have imperialism on top of it as well. So people will see GREAT EXPECTATIONS, but with a very interesting twist that I don't think is crowbarred in. You sometimes get that with things, don't you? But I don't think that's the case here.

Esh: What Tanika does so beautifully is retain the heart and the soul of a piece. She does it with her other adaptations as well. But she manages to cast, through her historical and political lens, a whole new light on the story, and it has such relevance and importance to today. I mean, just look around at our political leaders. Look at the rhetoric that, for example, Priti Patel and Suella Braverman have brought out regarding immigrants and migrant populations. You think, what got lost on the way here? How have you lost your empathy towards these populations? And it really is resonant to Pipli's journey in this, because he's so desperate to make something of his life, because he's so uncomfortable and dissatisfied where he is. He doesn't realise what he has, the importance of his cultural identity and what's been taken from him through colonialism. It's a really complex play. I mean, it's a complex enough book as it is, but Tanika has somehow managed to find even more depth in it, and made it even more nuanced and interesting

The script has since been revised, but there was an earlier production of Tanika's adaptation of GREAT EXPECTATIONS by English Touring Theatre back in 2011. Pooja Ghai, then working as an actor, appeared as Mrs Gargery and Molly, and now she's directing the Royal Exchange production.

Esh: I didn't see that first production, but I was aware of it. This is my third time now working with Pooja, and probably my fifth or sixth time working with Tanika. Through working with them, I heard so much about that production, because it's one of the first times Pooja and Tanika met. They used to talk about how Pooja's directing journey began through GREAT EXPECTATIONS. Because she was an actor, Pooja understands actors so well. I don't think I'd be betraying any confidence in saying that Pooja didn't enjoy that other production. It's almost been unfinished business for her, so when the opportunity came to do it again, she absolutely jumped at the chance. Then when she asked me to do it, obviously I dove right in. Tanika has updated her adaptation, so this is really a brand new version of it

11
'Iconic' is a much overused word, but these really are iconic characters. Often it's the case that, when taking on a role, actors will steer clear of other interpretations, but is it even possible to come to characters like Pip and Miss Havisham without preconceptions?

Catherine: The temptation is always to not look at other interpretations, because the fear is that you will imitate, copy, take something that somebody else has done, and even if you consciously try not to do that, somehow it will seep in. However, I'm a big research bunny and will research anything and everything. I'm perfectly happy to steal something from somebody else if they've done something I like. I didn't go through and watch everything, but what I did was, I watched tiny little clips of other people's Miss Havershams. The thing that struck me that I didn't want to do, that all of them did do, was they all had a certain elegance about her. If you read what Dickens wrote about her, there's nothing attractive about this woman at all, certainly physically. They've all given her a certain poise, but Dickens describes her as sort of bent. I'm wanting to embrace that - the crumpled, the destroyed, the dark hole within her which is both spiritual and physical. My favourite quote about Miss Havisham, which I think is fantastic, is 'the vanity of sorrow, which had become a master mania'. I think that is the key to her.

Esh: I mean, it's almost impossible to avoid other interpretations. I've grown up with a few. It's hard to not see all those Miss Havishams and Pips!

Can that help you to get a purchase on the character, though – even if just to decide what not to do?

Esh: Yeah, I think this is the thing. It's a glorious menu. You can pick and choose from all of those things. I'm a bit of a sponge in that sense. I use anything and everything around me to try and find what fits. Obviously that's what rehearsal helps us with. You throw everything at it, and then you decide what works and you keep turning the focus knob until it becomes clearer and clearer. But even on the day, something might happen! You never know, somebody might just come out with something new, because actors are wonderful. They bring out such different energies when they play. It's really fun, ultimately, and very different to my other work.

In terms of your medical work, though, how would we understand and treat Miss Havisham in the modern world? If you were presented with her in your capacity as a GP, where would you even start?

Esh: Oh my goodness! I mean, she's desperately unhappy. She's obviously gone through this incredibly traumatic event. She's stopped all the clocks, she's created - as Pooja says, which I love - this mausoleum to her despair and her loss. I mean, if anyone's in need of therapy, it's that woman! She's obviously self medicating as well, so there is that. It's what you might refer to as intractable depression. You could even go as far as ECT, maybe, for the poor lady. I think having your heart broken can push you into all sorts of places. It's one of those natural shocks, isn't it? There's no telling where you could go. Heartbreak, grief, these things, they affect the whole of you, body and soul. I mean, look, I don't think you can justify someone's actions based on that, but you can certainly understand.

It can be tempting to lean into these things too much just now, but there is something to be said about Miss Havisham as a character in her own private lockdown.

12.

Catherine: Oh God, yes! And not only is it like lockdown. People have been talking about the downsides of working from home. There's an artist's interpretation of what they think we're going to look like in the future like if we continue to work from home [that is, a hunchbacked figure with bulging eyes and clawed hands]. So that was another bit of inspiration for me, thinking 'OK, so it's not that I'm necessarily playing some sort of ancient crone, but if you never go outside, that's what it does to you'.

This production takes a sprawling, complex novel, adds a whole lot of extra nuance by changing the context, and presents the result on stage – indeed, in the round. 'Ambitious' might be a useful word here. Is the prospect of that more thrilling or terrifying?

Catherine: That would be both! Yes, thrilling and terrifying. And of course the round, it poses challenges – interestingly, particularly for Miss Havisham, because she usually spends a lot of time sitting down. Of course, the other thing about working here at the Exchange, which is terrifying, is that there are no wings. Normally, you could go down early. You could stand and get the atmosphere, because the sound in the wings and the sound on the stage are almost the same. You can hear the audience, and then you just sort of walk on stage. It's just a very tiny sort of see-through veil between here. Here, when you're outside the space, it's echoey, echoey, echoey. It doesn't feel like a theatre at all. And then somebody else opens a door for you and you're like, swoosh! - sucked into the womb that is the Royal Exchange - which is frightening and thrilling. Both words.

Esh: Doing this production is pretty terrifying, but I do feel we can do it. I love the round. I think it makes actors better. I always feel that. I love that space. It has that wonderful duality of feeling epic and intimate at the same time, which is so perfect for this play, and this book, because it is epic and intimate exactly at the same time. And the design is stunning, so we're given this beautiful world to inhabit as well.

And Esh, however professional you're being, is there still a part of you that remembers coming to see shows here in your youth, and thinks 'I can't believe I'm actually on this stage!'

Esh: Oh my God, are you serious? Yes! When I saw the poster at a bus stop with my face on it, I was like 'oh my god, this is insane!'. This is my home-town. I can't tell you how amazing that feels, symbolically. When I did previous two plays here, I felt like just being in the theatre was dreamy enough. But to be able to play this kind of role where I'm in the whole thing, at the centre of the story, with my name and my face out there... I don't know. I wish I'd been able to see a brown face in this adaptation as a kid.

Maybe there will be young people in the audience who will be inspired by that.

Esh: Yeah, I hope so. If we can just even convert one person, that makes the whole thing worthwhile, it really does.

Rehearsal Snaps



Abey Lam



Abey Lam



Abey Lam

Trailer Time



Scan Me

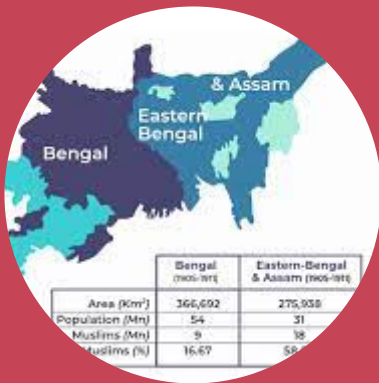


See our official trailer here to get a feel of the show



This adaptation of Great Expectations is set in Bengal, India between 1899 and 1911. So to set the scene of the play let me tell you a few things that were going on at the time.

- Lord Curzon succeeded Lord Elgin as Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905. At the age of 39, he became India's youngest Viceroy. He was one of the most contentious and influential people to hold that position.
- In 1899, the monsoon rains failed in central India. Drought parched crops over an area of at least 1,230,000 square kilometers (474,906 square miles), impacting almost 60 million people. Food crops and livestock died as the drought stretched into a second year, and soon people began to starve. The Indian Famine of 1899-1900 killed millions of people - perhaps as many as 9 million in all.
- Bengal has always been an important centre for British India. The-partition of Bengal took place in 1905. This event is a part of the modern history of India. Bengal was also the capital for British India. This fact attracted the freedom fighters to Bengal in order to start activation.
- The Bengal before partition was 5 times bigger than the present-day Bengal. Bengal used to comprise Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Bangladesh and Odisha. The colloquial language was a mix of Bengali, Odiya, Hindi, Bangladeshi etc.



- The first Partition of Bengal (1905) was a territorial reorganization of the Bengal Presidency implemented by the authorities of the British Raj. The reorganization separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas.
- On 20th July 1905, Bengal was divided into three parts.
- British gave two reasons for the partition of Bengal but none of them can be considered as a solid reason behind such a big change. But the actual reasons were quite different.
- The real reason for Bengal's partition was a desire to weaken the state, which had been the epicentre of Indian nationalism at the beginning of the 20th century. Bengal, which had 78 million people, was divided because it had become challenging to govern

Career In The Spotlight - Directing^{16.}



In our last resource pack, our theatre career in the spotlight was costume with our Costume Lead Tracy Dunk and Costume Supervisor Anna-Beth Fernley who discussed their creative process and some costume highlights. This time Gitika Buttoo sits down with GREAT EXPECTATIONS Director and Tamasha Artist Director Pooja Ghai to discuss the history, themes and context of the adaptation.

Gitika is a Queer British South Asian Director from Yorkshire, currently based in Manchester. She directs theatre and radio nationally and has just finished her tenure as Staff Director at The National Theatre. She has recently been appointed Regional Associate of Tamasha and has been the full-time Artistic Associate of Birmingham Opera Company and Associate Director of LUNG Theatre Company. Gitika was picked to be one of Headlong Theatre's Origins Directors and has recently won Best Online Audio Production at the Off West End Awards (2023) and her work on Tanika Gupta's play, LOVE N STUFF was nominated for Best Stage Production at the Asian Media Awards (2022). Her most recent credits include ROAD by Jim Cartwright (Oldham Coliseum); THE FATHER & THE ASSASSIN by Anupama Chandrasekhar (The National Theatre); LOVE N STUFF by Tanika Gupta (Oldham Coliseum, Watford Palace & Sheffield Theatres) and THE JUNGLE BOOK (Storyhouse Theatre, Chester)

I'm sitting with Pooja Ghai on a dreary wet morning at the Royal Exchange in Manchester. Reading Gupta's adaptation transports me to a 1899 Bengal with themes and characters set in a rich historical context. They've been whirling around in my head non-stop for 72 hours. I am keen to find out more about the relationship between Tanika Gupta and this Dickens classic and how Ghai's vision for this play marry up with the world in which this retelling takes place.

I love timeless classics that can resonate across generations, capturing the essence of the human experience. One such literary masterpiece is Charles Dickens' GREAT EXPECTATIONS. Originally published in 1861, this play has been admired for its portrayal of social class, ambition, and personal growth; "a rags to riches to rags story" as Ghai summarises. In the hands of Tanika Gupta, a multi award-winning British playwright, this well-known Victorian play has undergone a transformative adaptation that revitalizes its themes for contemporary audiences. Gupta's adaptation breathes new life into Dickens' narrative, shedding light on colonial issues caused by the British such as; human rights violations, economic instability, and rivalries between faiths. The aftermath of Empire still bleeds into the Britain I live in now

Before delving into the details of Tanika Gupta's adaptation, it's essential to understand the playwright herself. Tanika Gupta is a British-Indian playwright celebrated for her engaging narratives that often explore cultural identity, migration, and social change. Her unique perspective as a woman of Indian descent living in Britain provides her with a rich palette to reimagine classic stories. I have been lucky enough to direct some of Tanika's work myself and have had the joys of getting familiar with her beautifully rounded and relatable words and characters.

Gupta's adaptation of *GREAT EXPECTATIONS* tells the tale through a multicultural lens, injecting new dimensions into Dickens' themes of social mobility and self-discovery. One of the most notable changes is the shift in the protagonist's background. Pip, the working-class orphan in Dickens' original, becomes Pipli, a young Indian man navigating the complexities of British ruling India. This change not only underscores the struggle that colonial systems had on the South Asian diaspora but also highlights how these structures and the constant need and desire to live up to the 'British way' still resonates amongst British South Asians today. The themes of class struggle and ambition remain central in the story, but they are juxtaposed against the backdrop of a British ruling India. Gupta skilfully weaves in issues like identity, racism, and cultural integration, making the story resonate with contemporary audiences grappling with similar challenges. This adaptation acts as a bridge between the Victorian era and the present day. Director, Ghai mentions in our interview "How easy Dickens transcribes itself to a colonial setting ... as a director I get to dig deep into the characters ... look at this story through the lens of Bengal's partition which was a precursor to the partition everyone is familiar with that took place in 1947." She went on to tell me how "myself and Tanika have just recently made *THE EMPRESS* together at the RSC which explores themes of colony in Victorian Britain ... it's great to be able to interrogate how India was affected during this time period." She also highlights "how language and many other tactics from Empire were used in order to cause division and rule".

Gupta's adaptation enriches the character dynamics, imbuing them with a depth that reflects the complexities of modern life. Ghai went on to talk about characters in the play like Malik that represent the Siddhi community who are East African by descent most of whom arrived to the Indian sub-continent through the Arab slave trade, others arrived as merchants and sailors etc. She went on to say how "there is a celebrating of collective histories between African and Indian communities ... the play highlights that there was a clear difference in treatment between white people, brown people and black people ... it touches on the theme of colourism" which is still a very real and pertinent problem that exists on the streets of Manchester and wider Britain right now!



 Abey Lam



One of the things I wanted to ask Ghai about was how she imagines telling this story in the round at the Royal Exchange. We spoke about some of the challenges and opportunities that have arisen as this piece is being rehearsed. She said “The flow of the piece is very filmic; it is vast and moves very quickly. I am working very closely with the creative team to achieve this. Early conversations with our wonderful designer Rosa Maggiora focused on how we make this 360-degree space feel reflective of Bengal at the turn of the century ... the earth and the water were important features for me. It is all about flow and we have used circular pieces of set that help shift us around the world quickly... FLOW is the answer.” She went on to tell me about her collaboration with the lighting designer (Joshua Carr) and sound designer (Arun Ghosh). “We are working to create a vortex happening around Pipli the main character ... things happen to him and around him, this is what I want the audience to feel when they watch the piece.”

Director Ghai was in the original production of this adaptation in 2011 as an actor in the company at The Palace Theatre in Watford. She played the role of Krishna, and it was then she tells me that “I got a real sense of Dickens”. Now, over a decade later as Director working on a fresh adaptation of the story she invites audiences to look at this show from a different lens, one told through Empire. “I feel audiences are yearning for fresh perspectives. It’s a story about family, love, friendship and allyship. It should be relatable for everyone.”

This adaptation is a testament to the timelessness of classic literature and its capacity to evolve with the changing times. In a world marked by constant change, Gupta’s writing reminds us of how important it is to reflect on our past and learn from it. My conversation with Ghai went on to emphasise the importance of why this play needs to be running now. “The rise of nationalism worldwide is a scary thing and we live in unprecedented times ... fascism is growing globally, we are losing secular societies and becoming more binary!” This is such a rich and dense story, one that becomes ever more relevant as the years pass.

Ghai finished off our conversation by underlining the importance of stories like this one. GREAT EXPECTATIONS is the first co-production between the Royal Exchange Theatre and Tamasha – a significant joining of synergies between a global majority led theatre company and a national producing house such as the Exchange.” Tamasha’s perspective on global majority led work has been a focus of its energies since the company began. Under Pooja’s recent leadership she has been interrogating racist structures that still exist within the theatre industry today and looking to work towards decolonising theatre. They have recently gained funding for a three year program of work to start conversations with theatres across the UK with the aim to improve the landscape for global majority creatives. Through enabling them to share more diverse stories, the hope is to support global majority audiences to experience more stories like the one you are watching today.



In my opinion, Gupta's adaptation holds a mirror to contemporary society, prompting audiences to reflect on issues such as discrimination, post colonial India and a post Empire Britain. Gupta invites viewers to engage with the story on a more personal level. This approach transforms a familiar tale into a platform for discussions about cultural pluralism, social justice, and the journey to knowing our countries past and drawing links to how South Asia and Britain's histories are inextricably linked. I was drawn to Tanika Gupta's adaptation for this exact reason – it demonstrates to audiences that this is not just an "Indian" problem but one that must all confront and acknowledge.

Sit back, relax and enjoy the show – I know I will! Gitika Buttoo



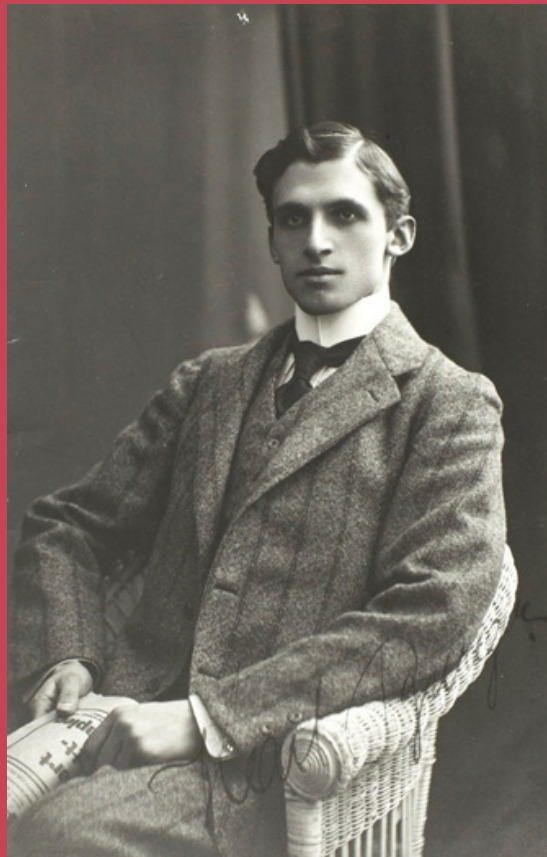
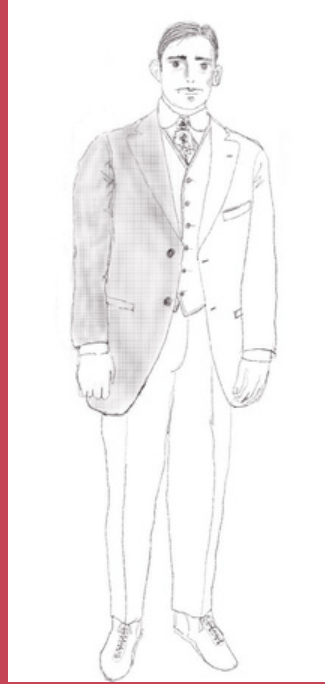
 Abey Lam



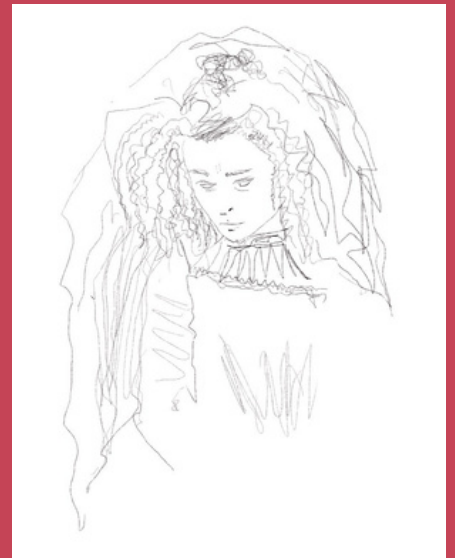
Costume Inspirations

Costume design is an integral part of our process. Below are the initial costume designs and inspirations by Rosa's Maggiora. These get sent to our costume department before being made into what you see on stage today.

Pipli



MISS HAVISHAM



BILQUIS



KRISHNA





SOLDIERS UNIFORMS



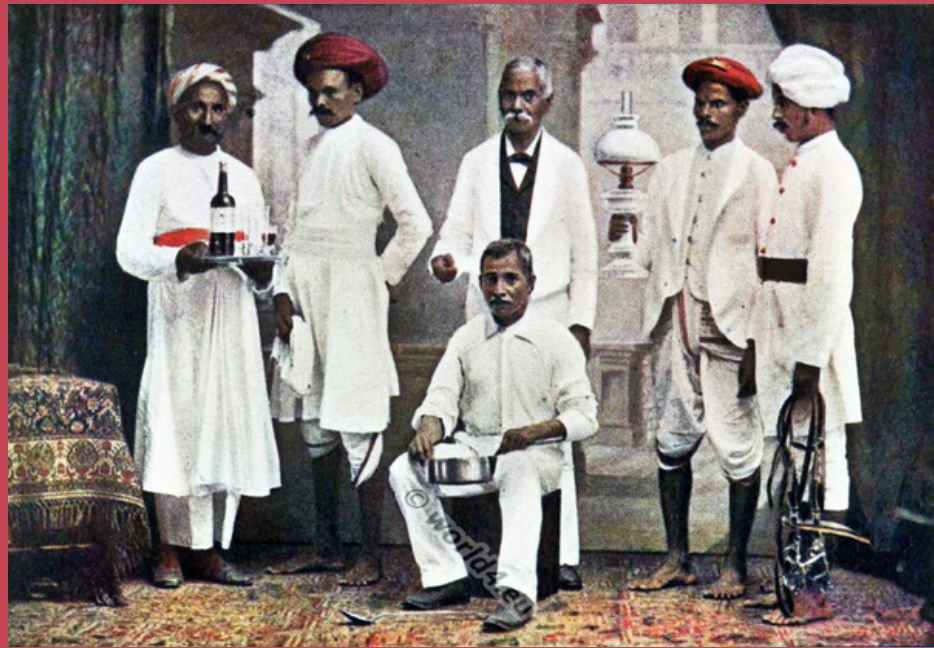
Native lancer and equipment, Secunderabad, 1905.



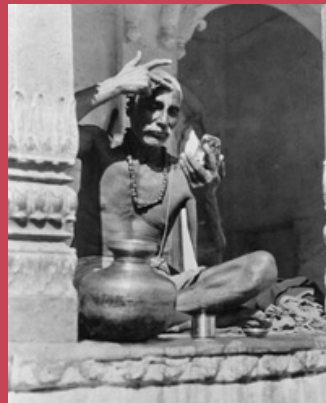
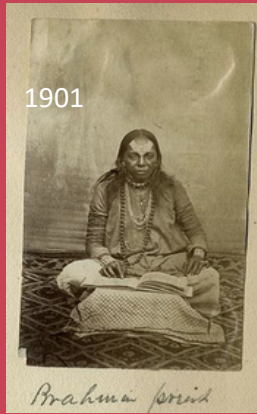
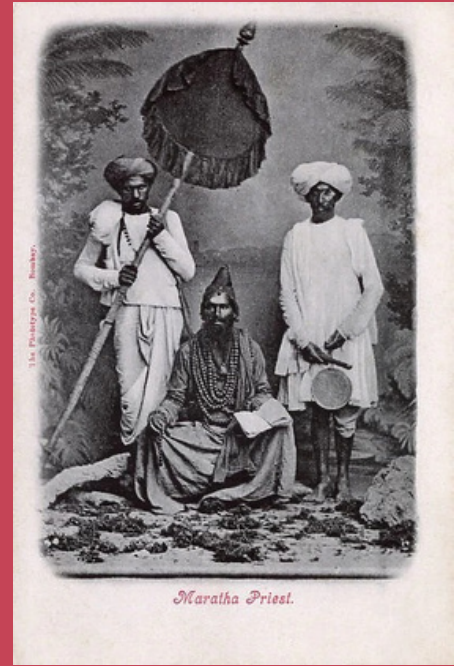
Sikh Infantry.

7076. Photo. Johnston & Hoffmann.

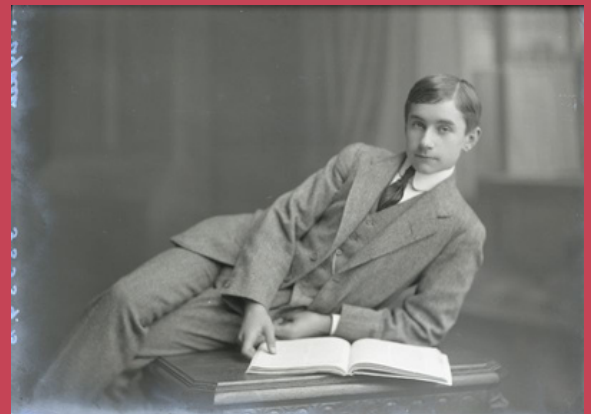
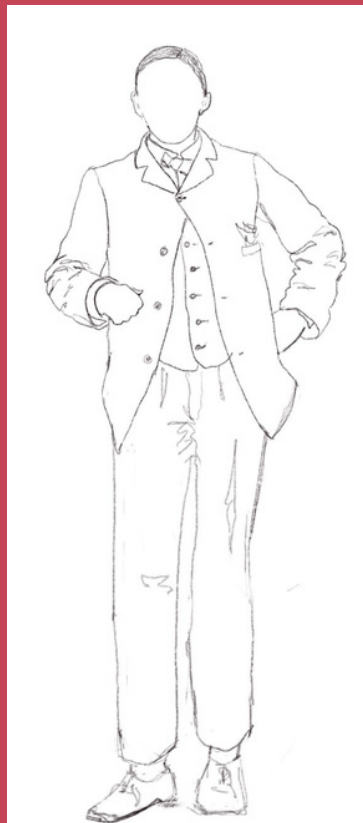
WAITERS-CALCUTTA



PANDA



HERBERT POCKET



Exclusive Writer & Director Interview

“Tanika Gupta (playwright) and Pooja Ghai (Artistic Director of Tamasha) – the creative duo behind Royal Exchange Theatre and Tamasha’s co-production of *Great Expectations* – speak to James Prestridge.

Tanika, what is your connection to Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*?

TG: I always loved the novel from an early age. The rags to riches and back to rags story is very dramatic. Like everyone else, I marvel at Dickens’ ability to tell such great stories, his humour, his characters and indeed his social conscience. *Great Expectations* was one of my late father’s favourite novels and he once acted in a BBC world drama production of it in Bengali. He played Magwitch and always talked about how Magwitch was a rogue with a conscience, forced into the penal system, brutalised and demonised and how easily he could be a contemporary character.

Your adaptation is set against a colonial backdrop of 1903 Bengal, India. What inspired your adaptation?

TG: Inspiration came from the original book! I have always been fascinated by Indian/British history, particularly from the time that Dickens was writing in the nineteenth century. I wanted to set the adaptation in India at the time of the first partition of Bengal in 1905 which galvanised Bengali and Indians to fight for independence. Miss Havisham in my adaptation represents colonial Britain – the dying embers of it – her inability to ‘let go’ of the memory of the lover who jilted her so cruelly, her arrogance, her manipulation of Estella and Pipli and her vulnerability are all an allegory for British rule. But we still feel empathy for her and she does change!

What themes did you want to explore through this adaptation?

TG: Race, class, caste, colourism, India nationalism, colonialism, ideas of white supremacy. Pooja Ghai is the artistic director.

What has your collaboration been like?

TG: Pooja is the artistic director of Tamasha and the director of this production. We have collaborated on a number of productions -most recently at the RSC on my play ‘The Empress’ -and we work well together! As a director from the global majority, she implicitly understands my point of view and the creative vision is further supported by the designer Rosa Maggiora who works her magic with the set and costume designs.

What type of conversations do you hope the play sparks?

TG: I hope it will appeal to lovers of Dickens and the original book. The story is still the same, the characters are all the same and it will be a very theatrical experience. Britain and India have had a long relationship both combative, exploitative and mutually affectionate. The diverse cast of this production should leave people thinking about our history together, our friendships and the universality of the story of Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

Pooja, I understand you previously acted in a production of *Great Expectations*. What is your connection to this story?

PG: It's come full circle in a way....I played Mrs Gargary in Tanika Gupta's adaptation in 2011 and it was both amazing and eye opening to be in a production that brought a colonial lens on the story and didn't shy away from the darker side of this history. Tanika transported Dickens' classic to Calcutta and opened up a world of parallels between British and Indian cultures and a much-needed insight into our complex relationship. To be given the opportunity to direct this new adaptation in 2023, set during the 1905 partition of Bengal feels incredibly pertinent. The motive behind Lord Curzon's 1905 partition of Bengal was divide and rule. Bengal was partitioned on religious lines. Muslim and Hindu. East and West Bengal. This led to a wave in nationalism and the rise of the Swadeshi movement. What was happening then has parallels to what is going on now in so many countries around the world.

What did you find compelling about playwright Tanika Gupta's reimagining of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*?

PG: Tanika shines a light on Britain and India's history and their complex relationship with each other. She skilfully embraces the more challenging perspectives – the impact of imperial power over generations for both cultures. Dickens' story lends itself this exploration and Tanika's adaptation invites us into a period of history many know little or nothing about; it explores themes of nationalism, colourism, colonialism, race, power and class. More stories like these need to be on our national stages.

As artistic director, what did you hope to bring to this adaptation?

PG: I am artistic director of Tamasha, and director of this production. We are proud to be co-producing this new adaptation with the Royal Exchange Theatre and I am so thankful that Roy Alexander Weise and Bryony Shanahan saw the importance of producing this play at this time. I hope the play generates conversation, invites people to broaden their lens on our colonial histories and the complex relationship between Britain and India. The story celebrates the resilience of individuals that are subjugated through colonial structures and highlights the value of allyship and friendship, Love and family. It doesn't shy away from the darker side of the colonial coin – but asks us to delve deeper into this side of history to better understand why we are where we are today.

The story set against a colonial backdrop of 1903 Bengal, India. How have you found the challenge of bring this period and setting alive in the play?

PG: Directing any play in the round throws up a different set of challenges, you have to think slightly more out of the box and create a more abstract world that encapsulates all the locations the play takes us to. From a little village on the riverbanks of the River Padma, the winding corridors of Havisham's colonial mansion and the bustling streets of the City of Calcutta, the challenge was to create an integrated space that transports us to these locations/worlds/settings, and I think we have cracked it!

Rosa Maggiora, who Tanika and I have worked with before, most recently on *The Empress* at the RSC, is doing the set and costume design for *Great Expectations*. It is a set encapsulating the elemental forces in Tanika's adaptation: the water, the land, the grandeur, the craft, the heat and red dust of India. We cannot wait to share it with an audience.

What can audiences expect from the show?

PG: A fresh new perspective on a well-known story. It is witty and brave, bringing to life well-loved characters in a whole new light. The brilliant cast of actors is diverse – celebrating the diversity of the UK, our history, allyship, friendship and love.

What do you hope audiences take away from the show?

PG: I hope the play makes people think about the power our collective voice has, and how Britain and India share a long and complex history. There's so much more that connects us, than divides us, and this a story that celebrates both resilience, friendship and love when so much of the world feels like it is against you.

This article was from Close Up Culture <https://closeupculture.com/>



Self-Care Guide: Great Expectations

As the show explores themes race, colonialism and identity we wanted to share some potential support.

Kids Of Colour



“A platform for young people of colour to explore 'race', identity and culture”

We create spaces to challenge the racism that affects young people and their communities; building collective resistance and solidarity.

We work across the communities of Greater Manchester, and are led by a small, part-time team.

Through our work, we:

- Hold space where young people’s identities and experiences are seen, heard and validated
- Center joy and celebration of our identities, cultures and histories
- Create opportunities for young people and our communities to connect, build relationships of friendship and peer support
- Support and encourage solidarity across our communities’ identity intersections
- Ensure young people and families feel that they are being fought for through our campaigning and advocacy
- Challenge racism within our communities and society; including the education sector, youth sector and policing
- Hold a belief in building a movement of collective anti-racist resistance. Our work is reflective and hopeful. It is grounded in care, a drive for change and a belief in and love for young people

<https://kidsofcolour.com/>



Read more



Race Equality Panel

The Greater Manchester Equality Panels have been established to advise, support and challenge Greater Manchester's political leaders and policy-makers to tackle the discrimination and disadvantage that cause injustice and inequality in society, and champion Greater Manchester as an inclusive city-region. They do this by working together with the GMCA and partners to:

- Provide insight into Greater Manchester's diverse communities, enabling political leaders and public bodies to listen and engage in a more targeted and effective way
- Communicate key messages to our communities as trusted sources
- Codesign policies, programmes and strategies to ensure they work effectively for communities
- Support an asset-based approach, highlighting new opportunities (and challenges) for positive collaboration that build on the resources and strengths within our communities

The Race Equality Panel is one of seven equality panels established and funded by the GMCA. Other equality panels include:

READ MORE



<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/equalities/race-equality-panel/>



Self Care Suggestions

If you're concerned about attending the show, there are a few things we'd suggest that might help.

Before the show

Read the content warnings before deciding to see the show.

Sit with a friend

The show can tackle some tough themes so maybe sit with a friend or someone you trust.

After the performance

If you've found something in the show triggering we'd suggest talk to someone you trust or one of the organisations we've listed above. You can also talk to a member of our staff who will be able to signpost you organisations around the area

Another Graduate Return!



Shaban Dar who is one of our Young Company graduates returns home to grace our stage again. He sat down with our Schools Coordinator Tom for a chat.

Can you tell us a bit about your characters in the show?

So I play 3 characters in the show, my main character I play is called Wahab who is a Clark at a magistrates court in Calcutta. He is part of this new breed of young Indian males who have been educated in the proper English way and will be translating between the local Indian community and the English government. He is basically the go to guy in the play for information. I also play 2 ensemble characters in Solider and Tailor. As the solider I am part of the fight choreography, the 2 main characters did their big fight scene first and then slowly added our movements around it, then added in the scene and the lines. Through that we actually found we were going to be cutting a lot of their words as they are speaking more than fighting. I don't have a huge job in the scene as I have a gun, but I have to be aware where I am pointing the gun, we don't want it pointing at a member audience and scaring maybe 1 of the elderly members of our audience. We have to cheat a lot of it in where it is pointing, but a lot of it is very technical really.

The show is such a well known classic, as an actor do you feel any pressures when taking on such a big text?

Yeah defiantly, but I will be honest I hadn't read the original story and I said that in my audition. They even said the original is more of a guideline, treat this as a new piece of text, as we were playing around with all characters, as where it is set and culturally how does that effect your character, the politics of the area and being an Indian in 1905 and where you would fit in within the hierarchy. So I personally haven't read the actual story, I have more focused on this version and this versions characters instead, that's what is really guiding my interpretation and character choices. There is defiantly a little pressure as everyone knows it, but I would really advise everyone to come with an open mind, give this new interpretation a go and see it through Tanika's lense.

You are a local lad who has stayed in his hometown and became a Young Company graduate, how does it feel to be back home on the Royal Exchange stage again and how important is it to get involved in your local theatre?

To answer the last question first, yes it is definitely important to get Involved in your local area, if you're a young person especially, it's something that is more easily accessible, just go try it out, that is exactly what I did. Just being here in the Exchange just feels like home. I have been coming here since college really, even in high school I came a couple of times, but in college I came so often as I was part of the young company, then working with them, all these experiences made me feel like this is a theatre that belongs to the community.

What would you say to anyone wanting to join Young Company and what was your experience like?

Just try it out and do it now! It's the perfect opportunity if you're thinking of going into the creative industry, because there are so many options to explore. One year you can try acting, another year you can try directing, you can really give everything a go and find out what you enjoy the most. It's also great because you literally have people working in the industry who can support you and offer advice, as well as being able to see the work they're creating. It's also just really fun! It enables you to experience a professional working environment whilst learning. It's an opportunity to give theatre a try and see if you like it.

You have worked with the young company as an assistant and facilitator what has been your favourite part?

I still feel I am in the young company now, time has gone so quickly! I love being involved in all the workshops and it's crazy to think that this is now my job. I love getting involved everything, it's been great to still be connected with the Young Company groups. I get to watch the young artists grow and develop their skillset throughout the year, as well as attend their summer show. So if you're thinking about joining the Young Company my advice is - go for it! Because you'll learn, grow and see a massive improvement by the end.

What's your top 3 tips to any up and coming talent that are wanting a career in acting?

Firstly, try new things. Try the young company, try an acting class, try drama school if you need to, whatever you want to do, just go and give it a go! This enables you to have different experiences and by attending a diverse range of classes you get a feel of what type of actor you want to be. You might not want to go down the route of theatre but there's lots of other creative options out there such as; screen work or movement direction, there are so many different realms you can explore.

Then resilience, as we know the industry is tough, mentally try to be in a good place so you don't overdo anything, be happy in your life. If this industry isn't making you happy take a break, you should only do it if makes you happy. Finally balance, is what a lot of older actors tell me now, they wish they went on more holidays, they wish they went to a birthday party or wedding, because acting will always be there, but that event might not be. So find your balance. Training, resilience and balance are my top 3 things.

Shaban Dar (Wahab / Soldier) is a proud Mancunian and was previously a member of the Royal Exchange Young Company. Recent Television credits include: THE BAY (season3, ITV). Theatre credits include: ROAD (Oldham Coliseum); AS YOU LIKE IT (Northern Broadside); LAST QUIZMAS, THE LAST QUIZ NIGHT ON EARTH (Box of Tricks Theatre); I BELIEVE IN UNICORNS (Theatre Alibi); ONE LITTLE WORD (M6 Theatre). Social media: shaban_no1.



**Find out more
about Young
Company here**



Young Company



Sometimes doing activities outside of school time can open up some great new friendships and connections. The Young Company is the Royal Exchange Theatres', award-winning, resident Company of Young People aged 14 – 21. Providing weekly workshops, production opportunities and free tickets to our main house shows. Applications open in summer 2023.

[Young Company](#) | [Get Involved](#) | [Royal Exchange Theatre](#)



Read more

Young Collective



Under 26? Become a Collective Member to unlock discounts and offers at the theatre, access a year-round programme of workshops and projects, and join a growing network of young creatives in Greater Manchester.

[Young Company Collective](#) | [Get Involved](#) | [Royal Exchange Theatre](#)



Read more

Royal Exchange Bingo

Upon your visit, why not play Royal Exchange Bingo and get your students to find all of these items around The Great Hall.



BORIS



PIANO



**SCHOOLS
CORNER**



CONNECT 4

Royal Exchange Bingo



PLAQUE



QUILT EXHIBITION



DOOR 4



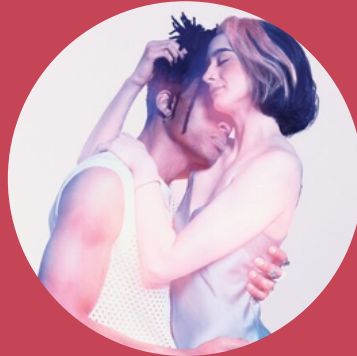
POEM



Print and Play

What's coming up at The Exchange^{37.}

Thank you so much for reading and we hope the resources were useful. Here is what we have coming up over the next few months, we hope to see you again soon.



Romeo & Juliet

By William Shakespeare. Directed by Nicholai La Barrie

In a hostile city two rival families flood the streets with cruel, uncontrollable violence, yet it takes just a single spark to rewire the world forever.

A reckless, impulsive, boundary-crossing instant can send shockwaves through everything you know. You are seduced, soaring high above the hate and the fury – you're dancing to a new refrain and the chemistry is awesome. You're willing to risk it all! It's perfection. Just as quickly it burns out.

Theatre and film director Nicholai La Barrie makes his Royal Exchange Theatre debut with this fiery retelling of Shakespeare's tragic love story. This contemporary version of *Romeo & Juliet* is a love-letter to Manchester, a celebration of youth, love and aspiration. A vision of hope in troubled times.

Fri 20 Oct – Sat 18 Nov 2023



Brief Encounter

By Noël Coward. Adapted for the stage by Emma Rice. Directed by Sarah Frankcom.

In a busy railway station, where everyone is simply passing through, Laura and Alec find each other. Falling passionately and wildly in love in a few stolen moments they live and breathe a lifetime of epic emotions, reawakening everything they buried deep inside. Together they find themselves in a bittersweet, hopelessly romantic, elegantly awkward love affair.

A heart-stopping story of forbidden love that moves to the rhythm of beautiful songs, swaying dance moves, the odd cup of tea and a bath bun. Emma Rice's smash-hit adaptation for stage of Noël Coward's iconic BRIEF ENCOUNTER is directed by former Royal Exchange Artistic Director Sarah Frankcom (WEST SIDE STORY).

This huge beating heart of a musical is perfect for all incurable romantics this Christmas.