

British Theatre Guide

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Brixton Stories

Biyi Bandele
Tricycle, Kilburn
(2001)

Biyi Bandele's adaptation of his own novel, *The Street*, first saw the light of day in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Other Eden* series. These plays were specifically commissioned from contemporary writers as a reaction to Shakespeare's history season.

The current production of *Brixton Stories* at the Tricycle Theatre is a much-deserved revival of what is clearly one of the more successful plays in the series, along with *Luminosity* by Nick Stafford.

This play is a two-hander and it derives much of its successful depiction of life in Brixton from two excellent performances by Jude Akuwudike and Diane Parish. Both of them play a multitude of different parts and, in particular, Diane Parish shows a great talent for creating characters from a few physical movements and some superbly imitated accents.

Bandele is a Magic Realist who, following that tradition, is clearly a great lover of a language. He has a real poetic sense and is able to conjure up images with the use of a few carefully chosen words. This, together with a highly developed sense of humour, is his great strength. To give a brief example, one of his characters refers to a sequence of sirens and gunshots. To locals, this is known as the Brixton National Anthem.

The play follows the last day of the life of Ossie Jones. He is a cultivated lawyer who lives in Brixton with his daughter, Nehushta. His life has not been the same since the loss of his wife, Kate, giving birth to their only child. As a result of this, he is rather too partial to drink.

Bandele paints a picture of life in contemporary Brixton by showing characters that the father and daughter encounter on a stroll through town. He then gives play to greater flights of fancy as we see Ossie's dream life. As well as relatively normal encounters, he becomes a dream murderer and as a result, meets a serial killer, Triple Johnny, whose three life sentences give a new meaning to that term.

Other interesting characters include a pair of Peckham bred, French Reservoir Dogs who strangely enter into a metaphysical discussion on expressing their emotions and a second, battling pair, a declaiming evangelist and a beer-swilling Northern barracker.

Some of the scenes that Bandele uses to conjure up his own personal image of Brixton are delightfully surreal. Both his lengthy sequence in Ossie's Land of Dreams and perhaps the highlight of the play, a vendor of words who could as easily have come from a novel by Salman Rushdie or Ben Okri, lend the play a real richness. Throughout however, as with all of the best surrealists, Bandele retains an inner logic that makes a strange kind of sense.

This generally enjoyable play, which is helping to celebrate Black History Month, benefits from excellent production qualities. The direction of Roxanna Silbert and the light and sound provided by

Simon Kemp and Rebecca Watts respectively enhance life-enhancing performances from Jude Akuwudike and Diane Parish.

It is in the nature of a play of this type that is made up of a large number of relatively short sketches that some will be better than others. While the play is a little patchy, Bandele hits the right note far more often than not.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)