

# British Theatre Guide

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## ear for eye

debbie tucker green

Royal Court Theatre Downstairs

25 October–24 November 2018

In creating *ear for eye*, writer/director debbie tucker green clearly intended to make some seriously trenchant points about racial politics.

While she undoubtedly succeeds up to a point, by swathing her ideas in mystique and obfuscation, it may be diminished to a degree for the majority of viewers. Even so, this is a powerful play that has the ability to hit you right between the eyes with its uncomfortable message.

A two-hour running time is divided into three parts of uneven lengths. The first takes up something like 75 minutes and features a series of disjointed conversations drawn from both sides of the Atlantic.

The linking theme is the difficulties faced by black men and women when they are indicted under the legal systems of their respective countries.

This part of the evening is the most difficult to fathom, since short monologues or discussions are presented without any kind of back-story, making it tricky to tune in and understand the predicaments faced by people accused of unidentified crimes.

Even so, there are some lovely, poetic speeches and the anguish shown by a series of people who do not believe that the system is going to treat them fairly is constantly visible.

The second part, which appears to be completely independent of the first although the underlying issues are similar, features a dialogue between an American man and woman respectively played by Demetri Goritsas and Lashana Lynch.

The former is a passive-aggressive apologist for a pair of youngsters who have perpetrated one of America's favourite pastimes, the high school massacre. In this case, despite the fact that they appear to be proud racists, the self-important but anonymous man repeatedly defends their position using dubious psychological theory and quoting a stream of somewhat questionable experts.

In return, when she can get a word in edgeways, his less strident but equally passionate opponent tries to make what appear to be a series of valid points that are likely to ring true with the kind of audience that frequents the Royal Court.

The third part switches to film and features a series of very short statements made firstly by a group of Americans and then an equivalent set of English counterparts.

In both cases, they read out extracts from the laws of either individual States of the Union or Jamaica, as the case may be. While the rights given to slaveowners in the British Empire a century and a half ago are clearly inhumane, they belong to the distant past.

The American equivalents are not so different and shockingly come up with periodic datelines that are often little more than half a century ago.

Bringing all of these three elements together, the likelihood is that debbie tucker green wants to coerce audience members into concluding that much of what goes on in the civilised world, specifically English-speaking countries on either side of the Atlantic, may not be so far from the inhumane behaviour of the past as we would all like to think. Despite the lack of clarity at times, she will probably succeed in achieving that goal.

**Reviewer:** [Philip Fisher](#)