

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Moon on a Rainbow Shawl

Errol John

Talawa Theatre Company in association with the National Theatre

Watford Palace Theatre

4–8 March 2014

This is a restaging by Talawa of the production which their artistic director Michael Buffong created for [the National Theatre in 2012](#), when it was played in traverse in the Cottesloe.

Back in 1957 *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* won actor Errol John first prize in a competition set up by the *Observer* newspaper to find new plays and was produced the following year at the Royal Court Theatre.

It is set just after the Second World War, when Trinidadians who had served in the British forces were returning home, in a rundown part of Port of Spain where the Adams family shares a yard with trolley-bus driver Ephraim and prostitute Mavis.

Charlie Adams was once a well-known cricketer, a top fast bowler but, disgusted by the way he was treated by the white cricket management gave up those chances and now largely relies on his hard-working wife Sophia, superbly played by Martina Laird who brings gentleness and passion to the role, while Jude Akuwudike captures that mixture of pride and fecklessness that is her husband.

The Adams have a new baby, being looked after when the play starts by its clever schoolgirl sister Esther (Tahirah Sharif, who gives her intelligence and a romantic hopefulness). They are soon joined by neighbour Ephraim with whom her elder sister Rosa is in love.

Who wouldn't fall for Alisha Bailey's warm and lovely Rosa? But Ephraim is set on taking off for Britain and making a new life for himself. He doesn't include Rosa in his plans, though that doesn't stop him making her pregnant. Okezie Morro makes him a guy you can't help liking who tries to hide the guilt he feels at his selfish determination that nothing shall deflect him.

This is no tropical paradise but a tough and gritty existence where Rosa's café-owner boss (Burt Caesar) is propositioning her and other neighbour Mavis (Bethan Mary James) is pretending to her besotted, big-shot admirer Prince that she's not selling herself to US soldiers and sailors.

John's script provides a powerful picture of the problems that beset these Trinidadians, but it is the reality of the writing of his characters that makes them so fascinating and Buffong's direction creates a real sense of a community. There is a warmth to these people, whatever their shortcomings, and the whole company plays with sincerity and commitment.

John, who himself had only recently emigrated from the Caribbean to Britain presents a bleak picture for their future but the play has a vibrant life and comic moments as well as poetry and pathos. This is a fine revival that should not be missed and Martina Laird's Sophia Adams stands as a tribute to those many splendid West Indian women who somehow hold their families together.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)