

# British Black And Asian Shakespeareans: Integrating Shakespeare (1966-2018)

Shakespearean plays have been a cornerstone of British culture for centuries. From the timeless classics like Romeo and Juliet to the gripping dramas of Macbeth and Othello, the works of William Shakespeare have captivated audiences throughout history.

However, for many years, the representation of Black and Asian actors in Shakespearean performances in the UK was few and far between. The lack of diversity on stage was a glaring issue that needed to be addressed. In recent decades, however, there has been a significant shift in the industry, with British Black and Asian Shakespeareans actively integrating themselves into the world of Shakespearean theater.

One of the watershed moments was the 1966 performance of "Othello" at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. Directed by Sir Peter Hall, this production marked the first time a Black actor, Paul Robeson, played the lead role in a major Shakespearean play in the UK. Robeson's portrayal of Othello challenged racial prejudices and opened doors for future generations of Black Shakespearean actors.



## British Black and Asian Shakespeareans: Integrating Shakespeare, 1966–2018

by Jami Rogers(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.9 out of 5

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Fast forward to 2018, and we see a significant increase in representation and integration of Black and Asian actors in Shakespearean theater. Actors like Adrian Lester, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and David Harewood have become household names for their powerful performances in Shakespearean plays.

Lester, for instance, has received critical acclaim for his portrayal of Hamlet at the Barbican Theatre in 2000. His ability to bring a fresh perspective to a classic character showcased the talent and versatility of Black actors in the Shakespearean realm.

Similarly, Ejiofor's rendition of "Othello" at the Donmar Warehouse in 2007 showcased the depth and complexity of the character, challenging preconceived notions about representation on stage.

This integration of British Black and Asian Shakespeareans has not only enriched the theater industry but also provoked thought and conversations about race, identity, and artistic expression.

The increase in diversity on stage allows audiences to connect with characters and stories on a deeper level. It helps promote inclusivity and breaks down barriers that have existed for far too long. The integration of Black and Asian actors in Shakespearean plays broadens the horizons of both the performers and the audience, fostering a more inclusive and culturally diverse society.

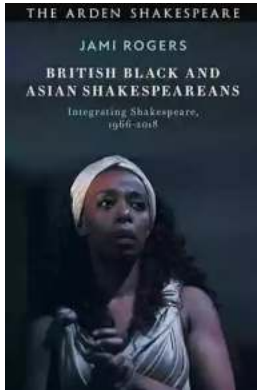
Furthermore, the rise of social media and digital platforms has provided a platform for these talented individuals to showcase their work to a wider audience. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have allowed aspiring actors to gain exposure and attract attention from casting directors and the general public alike.

The power of representation cannot be overlooked. When people see individuals who look like them on stage, it inspires them to pursue their dreams and empowers them to believe in their own abilities. By integrating British Black and Asian Shakespeareans into the world of Shakespearean theater, we are breaking stereotypes, challenging norms, and paving the way for a more inclusive artistic landscape.

However, despite the progress that has been made, there is still work to be done. While the integration of British Black and Asian Shakespeareans has become more visible, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. The industry must continue to support and encourage diverse voices, both on and off the stage, to ensure that representation is not just a trend but a lasting legacy.

, the integration of British Black and Asian Shakespeareans in Shakespearean theater from 1966 to 2018 has been a remarkable journey. From the groundbreaking performance of "Othello" in 1966 to the diverse and dynamic performances of the present day, these actors have challenged stereotypes, ignited important conversations, and enriched the theater industry as a whole. The journey towards inclusivity and diversity is ongoing, but with each new generation of Black and Asian Shakespeareans, we come closer to achieving a stage that truly represents the vibrant tapestry of British society.

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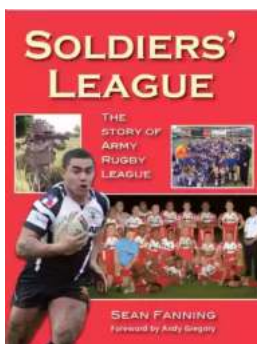


Shakespeare is at the heart of the British theatrical tradition, but the contribution of Ira Aldridge and the Shakespearean performers of African, African-Caribbean, south Asian and east Asian heritage who came after him is not widely known. Telling the story for the first time of how Shakespearean theatre in Britain was integrated from the 1960s to the 21st century, this is a timely and important account of that contribution. Drawing extensively on empirical evidence from the British Black and Asian Shakespeare Performance Database and featuring interviews with nearly forty performers and directors, the book chronicles important productions that led to ground-breaking castings of Black and Asian actors in substantial Shakespearean roles including:

- Zakes Mokae (Cry Freedom) as one of three black witches in William Gaskill's 1966 production of Macbeth at the Royal Court Theatre.
- Norman Beaton as Angelo in Michael Rudman's 1981 production of Measure for Measure at the National Theatre – the first majority Black Shakespearean cast at the theatre.

- Josette Simon as Isabella in Measure for Measure at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1987.
- Adrian Lester in the title role of Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of Henry V.
- Iqbal Khan on his 2012 production of Much Ado About Nothing – the first production with an all south Asian cast at the Royal Shakespeare Company.
- Alfred Enoch and Rakie Ayola as Edgar and Goneril in Talawa Theatre Company's 2016 production of King Lear
- Paapa Essiedu as Hamlet in Simon Godwin's 2016 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

With first-hand accounts from key performers including Joseph Marcell, Adrian Lester, Josette Simon, Lolita Chakrabarti, Noma Dumezweni, Rakie Ayola, David Yip, Ray Fearon, Paterson Joseph, Alfred Enoch, Rudolph Walker and many more, this book is an invaluable history of Black and Asian Shakespeareans that highlights the gains these actors have made and the challenges still faced in pursuing a career in classical theatre.



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