

Tangle Theatre Company supported by Mayflower Studios, presents

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

JULIUS CAESAR

DISCOVERY PACK: ABOUT JULIUS CAESAR



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A person with dreadlocks, wearing a red jacket and a patterned shirt, is looking upwards. The scene is dimly lit with a strong red light source, creating a dramatic and intense atmosphere. The background shows some structural elements, possibly in a tunnel or a large indoor space.

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SECTION ONE **INTRODUCTION**

ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack is part of a series designed to help you find out more about our latest production, a new adaptation of William Shakespeare's JULIUS CAESAR.

The pack includes information on how the play was adapted, a scene breakdown, character descriptions and an interview with the adaptor.

There are also activities you can do yourself at home, at school or with friends.

Whilst the plays of the Renaissance by writers such as Shakespeare are over 400 years old, the way in which they are written still has power and relevance across the globe today.

Theatre has a world-wide language. Our production, with a cast of just five performers, show how Shakespeare's plays can be created and presented in a vast range of languages and styles. The messages of these much-loved works is universal to all of us, whatever our culture or background.

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INTRODUCTION TO JULIUS CAESAR

Julius Caesar has become a tyrant.

Cassius sees the threat. Brutus is torn by loyalty.

Together, they conspire to kill Caesar. When Cassius and Brutus murder Caesar in full public view on the Ides of March, they think they have heralded a new political age.

Instead, chaos erupts, and civil war begins.

Who will seize power? Will this bring conflict or stability?

Will the new ruler also fall to corruption?

Tangle's fast-moving production drives through the political chaos, power struggles and friendship betrayals at the heart of Shakespeare's greatest thriller.

Adapted and directed by Anna Coombs with John Pfumojena's original music performed live on stage, this high-energy production brings African-inspired storytelling into the heart of ancient Rome.

JULIUS CAESAR was first published seven years after Shakespeare's death, in 1623. It was first performed, 24 years earlier, in 1599. The story tells of how Brutus joins a conspiracy, led by Cassius, to assassinate Julius Caesar in order to prevent him becoming a tyrant. Caesar's right-hand man, Mark Antony, stirs up public hostility against the conspirators. At the end of the play, Rome is yet again embroiled in a dramatic civil war.

The unedited script of JULIUS CAESAR accommodates a cast of over 40 characters.

Tangle's version condenses the cast list to just 8, including the character of Soothsayer, who influences the action throughout. This version is adapted for performance by an ensemble of 5.

When Shakespeare originally wrote his plays, the modern notion of 'scenes' and 'acts' didn't exist. Shakespeare simply produced words and speeches apportioned to the different characters. These were quickly distributed amongst the players for learning and rehearsal. Rehearsals would usually begin before the whole of the play was completely written! Actors were usually given their 'lines' only, having to intuit the words said by others before and after. It must have been an electrifying way to rehearse – you'd really have to be on the ball to remember who was whom.

This version of JULIUS CAESAR is presented in three acts, reflecting the fast pace and high speed at which the story unfolds. Each act is divided into 'scenes' which take place in different locations and at different times.

Act One takes place in Rome on the 'Lupercal', a pastoral festival which is on 15th February. Lupercal's purpose was to promote fertility, ward off evil spirits and purify the city. Animal

sacrifices and sports usually formed a key part of the celebrations.

Act Two takes place in Rome on 'The Ides of March', which is 15th March. The Roman calendar was based on lunar cycles; 'Ides' simply refers to the first full moon of a given month. A full moon would usually fall between the 13th and 15th day of that month.

Act Three takes place in Philippi, Macedonia. This is a Greek city near to the island of Thassos, over 1,200 kilometres from Rome. It is the setting for the final battle between the two factions.

Whilst there are periods of time in between each Act, we like to think of the story playing out over a much shorter period. The sense that each event happens quickly, often spontaneously, and on top of that previous only adds to the excitement!



ACTIVITY

- Look up the Feast of Lupercal. Write a short description that encourages people to attend.
- Design a poster advertising LUPERCAL events and activities.
- What is an 'adaptation'?
- Calculate the geographic distance between Rome and Phillipi. How many borders do you need to cross to get from one location to the other? How would you plan a modern day journey using public transport?
- Research the first ever performance of JULIUS CAESAR. Who produced the play, and where was it presented?
- The Ides of March is usually at the midpoint of a calendar month, co-inciding with the full moon. What can you find out about lunar cycles? Describe what you discover.

A man and a woman are shown in a close-up, looking down at a glowing, spherical object. The man, in the foreground, has a beard and is looking intently at the object. The woman, behind him, is also looking at it with a focused expression. The scene is dimly lit with a strong blue/purple hue, suggesting a futuristic or scientific setting. The glowing orb is the primary light source, casting a warm glow on their faces and hands.

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SECTION TWO

JULIUS CAESAR

Scene Breakdown

Act One, Day One: Feast of Lupercal

Act One, Scene One: Feast of Lupercal

'Beware the Ides of March...'

Julius Caesar holds a victory parade on the Feast of Lupercal, attended by his friends, Brutus, Cassius and Mark Antony. A Soothsayer appears from the crowd and urges Caesar to 'beware the Ides of March'. Caesar, departing with Mark Antony, is dismissive of the warning ('he is a dreamer, let us leave him').

Cassius and Brutus are left in private. Whilst they are talking, cheers from the crowd are heard. Caesar is presented with a kingly crown by Mark Antony. Caesar refuses the crown three times and then faints, indicating that he would rather cut his own throat than be King. But is this really the case?

Cassius admits to Brutus that he is unhappy with Caesar's growing power and the veiled threat that he will 'crown' himself, thereby achieving supreme power. Whilst he has witnessed Caesar at his weakest points physically (near drowning and fever), Cassius cannot accept that Caesar has a 'god like' status, and is impervious to physical weakness as a true King should be. Cassius reiterates that no one person should be in sole rule of Rome.

Caesar and Mark Antony return. Caesar indicates that he is suspicious, or 'fearful' of Cassius ('yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look: he thinks too much. Such men are dangerous').

Cassius arranges to share supper with Brutus later that evening, where he intends to tempt Brutus into joining a conspiracy to murder Caesar.

Act One, Scene Two: Brutus' House

'It must be by his death...'

Brutus privately debates the rights and wrongs of killing Caesar. He has no personal reason for wishing Caesar dead, but he fears what Caesar may become, if the situation is left unchecked.

Brutus decides that it is better that Caesar is killed now, before he attains complete power. He then discovers a letter, which urges him to 'Speak, strike, redress!' After much moral debate, Brutus decides to join the murder conspiracy.

Cassius arrives, and together they join hands and swear 'a resolution' to kill Caesar. Brutus asks if anyone else should be killed as well. Cassius thinks that it would be too dangerous to keep Mark Antony alive. Brutus thinks this will be too extreme ('Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius, to cut the head off and then hack the limbs...') as Mark Antony is Caesar's right-hand man ('let us be sacrificers, but not butchers'). Brutus urges Cassius to remember that there is little harm Mark Antony can do to them.

The clock strikes three, and the two friends part and agree to meet later that morning. Brutus' wife, Portia, appears asking why he has not come to bed. She suspects there is a conspiracy. After some persuading, Brutus agrees to tell her of the plot.

Act Two, Day Two: The Ideas of March

Act Two, Scene One: Caesar's House

It is the early morning of 15 March (The Ides of March). Caesar ignores the Soothsayer's warnings and his wife, Calpurnia's premonitions. He decides to go to the Senate House.

Brutus arrives, planning to escort Caesar to the Senate House. Caesar discloses his fears to Brutus, who persuades him to attend. Cassius and Mark Antony arrive. Caesar offers them all some wine before departing for the Senate House. Mark Antony suspects that something is amiss. Brutus also has some private misgivings about what he has agreed to do.

Act Two, Scene Two: The Senate House

'I am as constant as the northern star...'

Caesar is accompanied by Brutus and Cassius to the Senate House. He is presented with various petitions to read. Cassius has some misgivings about the assassination plan, which he discloses privately to Brutus. They attempt to persuade Caesar to repeal the banishment of Publius Cimber, but Caesar refuses.

Caesar is attacked by Cassius and Brutus and stabbed many times. Signs and sounds of panic ricochet through the crowds as they watch this public act of open murder. Cassius wants to shout the news of their deed through the streets, but Brutus prevents him from glorifying his actions.

Mark Antony arrives, and negotiates cleverly with Cassius and Brutus, after discovering the dead body of his friend, Caesar. He confronts Cassius and Brutus, saying that if they intend to kill him too, there is no time like the present!

Brutus assures Antony that he will not be

harmful. Brutus says that he will explain their actions once the crowd has been reassured that there is nothing for them to fear. He reassures Antony ('your voice shall be as strong as any man's in the disposing of new dignities') and urges him to be patient.

Antony makes a point of shaking Cassius' and Brutus' bloody hands in public view. Cassius though, has good reason to be worried, even though Brutus appears to reassure Mark Antony that their intentions were honourable.

Mark Antony then praises the dead Caesar and asks for his forgiveness in befriending his killers.

Mark Antony agrees to be friends with Brutus and Cassius, if they can give him good reason why Caesar was so dangerous that he needed to be assassinated. He then asks for permission to move Caesar's body to the main Market Place, and to speak at Caesar's funeral.

Cassius is troubled by this, as he does not know what Antony will say, but Brutus decides to speak first, to assure the crowds of the need for Caesar's death.

Brutus tells Antony not to blame the conspirators in his speech, but to speak well of Caesar.

Antony is left alone with the body of Caesar. He prophesises doom for those who killed him. He says that Caesar's spirit will 'Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war' and that many men will die as a consequence of this action. He also reveals that Octavius, Caesar's heir, is nearby, and approaching the city, but will wait outside until the funeral has taken place.



ACTIVITY

- Look up 'Julius Caesar'.
What can you find out about him? What was he most famous for?
- What is a Senate? What can you find out about modern day senates and senators? Which countries across the globe utilise this governance model?
- Mark Antony appears in another of Shakespeare's plays. Which one is it?
What happens to him in later life?
- Who is Octavius Caesar? What did he go on to do?
- Research some of the most famous lines in JULIUS CAESAR.
What do they mean? Which ones do you like the most, and why?
- What is a 'soothsayer'? What are they famous for doing?

Act Two, Scene Three: Near the Market place

'He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.'

Brutus and Cassius enter with the people of the city. Brutus speaks to them, telling the crowds that he killed Caesar because he loved Rome more than he loved Caesar. He asks them if they would rather be slaves, with Caesar alive, or free men with Caesar dead. Brutus adds that he killed Caesar because of Caesar's out of control ambition to be supreme ruler.

Mark Antony brings in Caesar's body, as Brutus offers the crowds his own life, should they wish it. The people acclaim Brutus as he moves aside to let Mark Antony speak.

Mark Antony begins his address ('Friends, Romans. Countrymen...') to a hostile crowd who are very much in favour of Brutus. He says that he has not come to praise Caesar, and comments that a man's good deeds die with him, but evil-ness lives on afterwards. Antony refers to the statement that Brutus made about Caesar's ambition, and adds that if Caesar was ambitious, it was certainly 'a grievous fault.' Antony then gives some examples of Caesar's positive actions

(he brought many captives back to Rome; he wept when the poor cried; he refused the Kingly crown). Each of these statements is punctuated by reminding the crowd that Brutus has said Caesar was ambitious. Antony reminds the crowd that, as every person had once loved Caesar, they should certainly mourn his death.

Mark Antony's speech is well received. Mark Antony reminds the crowd to remain loyal to the conspirators, Brutus and Cassius, who are honorable men. Mark Antony then asks the crowd to join him at the body of Caesar, where he reveals the stab wounds and reads Caesar's will, which is generous to every person living in the city. Antony further describes the murder. This enrages the people further: the crowd is incensed and determined to bring down Cassius and Brutus, whom they now see as traitors.

Mark Antony privately confirms that Octavius Caesar has arrived in Rome.

Act Two, Scene Three: Caesar's Funeral

'I dreamt to-night that I did feast with
Caesar, And things unlucky charge
my fantasy.'

Cinna, the poet, is confronted by a mob of angry citizens. They question him, asking his name, and then kill him, thinking he was part of the conspiracy plot.

Act Three, Day Three: The Battle at Philippi

Act Three, Scene One

'These many men shall die: their names are pricked...'

Mark Antony and Octavius discuss which of the traitors, associated with Cassius and Brutus, must die. Antony says that as Cassius and Brutus are raising an army, they should prepare their own forces as well.

Act Three, Scene Two

'Remember March, the Ides of March, remember...'

Tension between the two friends grows. Brutus is unhappy with some of Cassius' actions. Cassius says that Brutus has wronged him. Their bickering quickly escalates into a full-scale argument, during which they almost come to blows. Cassius is angry with Brutus for accusing him of corruption; Brutus is angry with Cassius for over-promoting underserving people in their army. Brutus accuses him of being greedy.

Brutus reminds Cassius that they killed Caesar for the sake of justice and must not lose sight of this higher cause. Cassius threatens Brutus and the argument escalates. Cassius offers Brutus his dagger, but thankfully this relieves some of the tension and they both calm down, shaking hands and renewing their allyship.

Brutus then reveals that his wife, Portia, has committed suicide ('she swallowed fire.'). Brutus breaks the news that Mark Antony and Octavius have joined forces and are marching towards Philippi. He asks Cassius if they should do the same. Cassius responds: 'I do not think it good.' He believes it will be better to let Mark Antony and Octavius come to them. Eventually, they decide to intercept the armies at Philippi.

They part for the night, and Cassius falls asleep. Brutus is the last person awake. Caesar's ghost enters, telling him that they will meet again at Philippi. Brutus wakes and warns Cassius that they should prepare immediately for battle.

Act Three, Scene Three

'The sun of Rome is set!'

Mark Antony and Octavius have learnt that Brutus and Cassius are bringing their army to Philippi. Mark Antony isn't fooled by this show of bravery. Octavius attempts to establish superiority over Mark Antony by insisting on leading the grander 'right hand side' of the field.

All four meet, and exchange words. Antony rebukes Brutus for killing Caesar. He is critical of their assassination of Caesar, whilst still pretending to be Mark Antony's friend. Cassius reminds Brutus that if he had been allowed to kill Mark Antony too, such insults would never have happened. Octavius swears to avenge Caesar's death, and leaves with Mark Antony.

Cassius tells Brutus of a bad omen he has seen: two eagles fell and were gorged to death by more inferior birds. He also reminds Brutus that it is his Birthday. Cassius and Brutus are nervous, and seem resigned to defeat.

Brutus is hopeful of victory, as Octavius' troops do not seem ready to fight, but Cassius sees his soldiers fleeing from the battlefield. Brutus admits that he has given the order to attack too early. He warns that Mark Antony has already reached their camp and leaves to find out more. It has all gone horribly wrong.

Cassius realises that there is no hope of victory. He stabs himself.

Brutus finds Cassius' dead body, and grieves for him privately, before returning to prepare for a second battle with Octavius and Antony.

Act Three, Scene Four

'This was the noblest Roman of them all...'

The battle continues. Mark Antony and Octavius fight on. Brutus knows that he has lost the day. He stops on a hill to rest. He has seen the ghost of Caesar again and knows that it is time to die. His final words are that he has killed himself more willingly than he has killed Caesar. Brutus kills himself.

Mark Antony and Octavius arrive to find Brutus' dead body. Antony comments that Brutus was 'the noblest Roman of them all'; he only killed Caesar out of a sense of common good, whereas Cassius killed Caesar out of envy. Antony praises Brutus for his virtue.

Octavius says that Brutus will be given the funeral of a noble soldier. He then takes power – the new Caesar. Will the same cycle of despotism and tyranny begin again?



ACTIVITY

- Research state funerals. How is Caesar's funeral different to those of contemporary times?
- Cinna is a community poet, writing verse in response to current events. Try writing a poem about one of the events in JULIUS CAESAR.
- Design a costume for one of the characters. What style and colours would you choose and why?
- Look up Mark Antony's famous speech, 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen.' Paraphrase it into modern English. Try speaking the words aloud.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

JULIUS CAESAR

Julius Caesar is a powerful Roman political and military leader. He has strong ambitions to rule Rome with extreme authority. He's the sort of person who likes to put on a show – a superstar and a drama queen! It can be hard to tell the difference between the 'public' Caesar and his real persona. He is a natural showman, but in private, he also demonstrates moments of vulnerability and self-doubt. He claims to be constant and steady, but is he as constant as he says he is?

CALPURNIA

Calpurnia is Caesar's wife. Just before his assassination at the Capitol, she has a violent dream that seems to predict his death. She begs Caesar to stay at home. Whilst it seems at first that he will heed her warning, he eventually ignores her. If the premonition had come from someone other than his wife, would Caesar have listened?

MARK ANTONY

Mark Antony is a good friend of Caesar. He launches himself into a position of power during the course of the play. One of his strengths is to speak persuasively, which makes him a tremendous politician. His famous speech 'Friends, Romans, Countrymen...' is a carefully

crafted eulogy that is designed to turn the public against Brutus and Cassius and launch Mark Antony into power. The success of Antony's speech suggests that effective leadership goes hand in hand with rhetoric because, after Antony finishes talking, all hell breaks loose and civil war ensues, which is exactly what he intended.

BRUTUS

Marcus Brutus is widely respected in the community. A friend of Caesar, the conspiracy plot forces him to examine his conscience closely. He loves and respects Caesar in some ways, but he is also an idealist – he believes that a Republic is the best way to govern. It is this, and his love of Rome as a community, that allows him to be drawn into the conspiracy plot. It is telling that Mark Antony comments that Brutus is the only assassin who did not kill Caesar because of envy and personal grievance.

Brutus places an extreme amount of trust in his friend, Cassius. He also believes his flattery! It is Brutus who restrains Cassius from killing Mark Antony, Caesar's closest aide, as well. This is a fatal mistake. Brutus demonstrates both compassion and courage in hearing of the death of his wife, Portia, and in his own suicide.

CASSIUS

Caius Cassius is the ringleader of the conspirators and a complex character. At the start of the play he comes across as embittered and mean, consumed by jealousy of Caesar, and deeply envious of Caesar's growing popularity. He deeply resents the adulation Caesar receives from the public. He also loathes the way that Caesar acts like a 'God.' Cassius is responsible for manipulating his friend, Brutus, into the conspiracy. He does, however, have a sympathetic side: he consoles Brutus over the death of his wife and is a loyal friend, capable of demonstrating a full range of emotions. Cassius' death is tragic, as it occurs because of his own hot-headedness.

PORTIA

Portia, Brutus' wife, is loyal, caring and passionate. Often her passion over-rides her reason – there are many incidents in the play that demonstrate this. She is deeply in love with Brutus and will go to any lengths to protect him. It is her love that ultimately kills her – unable to contemplate life without him, she swallows hot coals.

CINNA THE POET

Cinna is a local community poet. He is walking innocently through the streets, wanting to attend Caesar's funeral, when a mob of citizens mistake him for Cinna, one of the Senators and a suspected conspirator. His lynching and death at the hands of this mob is a tragic example of community power and emancipation gone badly wrong.

OCTAVIUS CAESAR

The great-nephew of Caesar, Octavius is heir to Caesar's wealth, regarding himself as a successor to power in Rome. He is not as good a soldier as Mark Antony but insists on taking control of their army – this says a lot about his character! Once he has decided, he will not be dissuaded. There are hints of the character, Augustus Caesar, that he will eventually become.

SOOTHSAYER

Soothsayer, also a musician, controls the play's action and incorporates the crowds and citizens. A Soothsayer is somebody who can foresee the future. In our production, the Soothsayer appears in the opening scene, warning Caesar to 'beware the Ides of March.' This ominous premonition is brushed off by Caesar, but it indicates a foreboding. Soothsayer also manifests as the 'crowd' – itself a community force that guide many of the outcomes of the play.



ACTIVITY

- Draw a picture of your favourite character. What is distinctive about them?
- Write a description of your favourite character. What do you find most interesting about them?

A person with a surprised expression is looking up at a stage set. In the background, there is a blue sign with the word 'BONARIO' in white, a large illuminated 'O' with light bulbs, and a vertical light fixture with red and orange stripes. The person is holding a black frame or screen in front of them.

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SECTION THREE

TANGLE IN PERFORMANCE

ADAPTING JULIUS CAESAR: INTERVIEW WITH ANNA COOMBS

Anna is Artistic Director and CEO of Tangle. Her directing credits for the company include Esther O'Toole's *THE CROSSING*, co-produced with Nottingham Playhouse and Theatre 503, Cont Mhlanga's *WORKSHOP NEGATIVE* in a English premiere, and her own adaptations of Christopher Marlowe's *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*, Ben Jonson's *VOLPONE* and William Shakespeare's *RICHARD THE SECOND*.

From 2013-18 Anna curated and directed the chamber ensemble, Tangle Company, commissioning numerous actors, composers and writers, many from South West England. Other directing credits include Marlowe's *THE JEW OF MALTA*, Nick Darke's *NEVER SAY RABBIT IN A BOAT*, Rostand's *CYRANO DE BERGERAC* (Bridewell Theatre) and Shiona Morton's *BACKSLIDER* (Ustinov, Bath). From 2001 – 10 she was Head of Projects at Hall for Cornwall, developing and commissioning the work of over 100 local writers, actors and theatre makers. She has also worked as a theatre director at Dublin's Abbey Theatre, The New Vic, Stoke on Trent (where she was the first female associate director), The Marlowe, Canterbury, The National Theatre, Soho Theatre, at ENO (with

the late Jonathan Miller) and in London's West End for Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group, Thelma Holt CBE and Bill Kenwright Limited.

Why did you decide to adapt JULIUS CAESAR? What you like about this play?

I have always loved this play. The pace, and the tension between friends and politicians is electrifying. It has an urgency, and an unpredictability, that makes it a true thriller. If you don't know the story, then you'll be on the edge of your seat (hopefully). It also contains some brilliant speeches and wonderfully dramatic moments: Caesar's seemingly unsuspecting cordiality to the men who are about to kill him, and Mark Antony's infamous 'turning' of the crowd during his funeral exposition.

Tangle's production budgets are small. We look after our artists well, but we don't have the finances to engage large casts. There were various plays considered for this latest production but I had an instinct that JULIUS could be adapted for a small ensemble. It was a lengthy process of discovery, with several script drafts, to see if this really was possible.

How does your adaptation differ from the original version?

Firstly in the number of characters who play out the story. The unedited text has over 40 parts. The majority of Shakespeare's original characters, especially the collection of conspirators (perhaps, most notably, Casca) hit the cutting room floor at an early stage, making the crux of the story an affair between close friends (who are also political colleagues), raising the stakes.

Secondly in the speed and pace of the story as it plays out. I cut the entire first scene! This scene is really just speculation – it would have 'warmed up' Shakespeare's audiences, but for a modern audience, ready and waiting in their seats, it holds the action back. I also cut the scene where Casca reports back on Caesar's 'crowning' – it was probably written to showcase one of the actor's skills in the original company (or to appease an ego by giving lots of lines)! This scene reflects on a past event, but 'reported information' is difficult to present on stage. It slows everything down and can become boring.

As a result of making these bold decisions, this version moves incredibly fast. Have a look at the text extract and compare it with the unedited version. See if you can spot the differences!

This adaptation remains truthful to Shakespeare's own intended language. There are no modernisations, and the plot remains broadly intact - but we get right to the heart of the story very quickly.

Shakespeare was a brilliant writer and personally I think any adaptor who attempts to modernise his exquisite language – or change the intended storyline in order to contemporise it – is misguided and patronising to today's audiences.

How can we better him? Shakespeare had brilliant ideas that should not be tampered with! However, he had no dramaturg. He was writing 'to order' as it were: he would pen a scene, and this would immediately be shared out line by line and rehearsed. Shakespeare wrote at a time when the idea of a 'play' with a 'story' (rather than an established moral tale with archetypal characters as in the Morality Plays) was very new. Dramaturgy was non-existent and there were no editors. So I see myself as an editor and dramaturg really, shaping his great words to suit a smaller cast size.

How does one begin an adaptation? What is your process?

Know you must speak the truth and get to the heart of the matter. Tell the writers' story as honestly as you can. Also respect the writer's instincts and wishes – don't modernise or tweak the original words.

I had a feeling that JULIUS would be performable with a small cast, but it was a challenge to get there. The first thing I did was to sit and read the whole original play in its entirety with John Pfumojena, our Associate Director. I scribbled down ideas and suggestions for cuts as we did so. This reading aloud process was really helpful to get us into the heart of the story. I had an instinct that the funeral scene needed to remain almost intact.

It also helped me see that there were some characters that could be amalgamated into others, and other characters could be cut completely.

We then had two R&D or 'research and development' days spaced a few months apart. These were slow table reads with professional actors. The first one enabled me to see that the adaptation would be achievable with a cast of 4 (with some doubling) but would be much stronger with a cast of 5 (to include Soothsayer). The R&D sessions, with experienced actors who already had a strong knowledge of the text, also helped identify further potential for cuts as well as some additions to bring back (it is easy to cut a crucial piece of information).

It was good to hear the adaptation read aloud at an early stage. This gave it a reality and helped me to see where each individual character's 'voice' (the lines) was authentic, and in some cases, where it wasn't – for example when I had swapped over one character's lines to another character and it didn't quite work.

At a later stage, both our Associate Director John Pfumojena, as well as our Designer, Colin Falconer, looked carefully at the original text and brought back some key lines – good examples are Mark Antony's negotiating with Brutus and Cassius after the murder (adapted from his servant's lines) and the references to storms, and the elements, which are an important visual motif for our show.

What are the challenges you faced?

The first was the character of Casca. It took me ages to figure out how I could get rid of him! Casca holds a lot of the storytelling and is a key player in the conspiracy. I overcame this problem by considering the 'story' and 'action' that Casca holds and then moving his most important lines to others, notably Cassius. I then had the idea to turn Casca's verbal report of Caesar's false crowning into a live activity on stage. This was a breakthrough moment for me.

Another challenge was the worry about only having 4 performers. This would be 'do-able' but put a lot of pressure on the cast and on our Designer, Colin, in terms of doubling as well as rest time (off stage). I worried that it would make it harder to follow the story if actors were continually changing characters (doubling) and changing costumes but only partially so. The idea of an actor-musician who manifests the Soothsayer and crowds was also crucial to my interpretation and could not really be replicated by four actors as an ensemble.

On New Year's Eve 2024 we received welcome news of a grant from Cockayne Grants for the Arts which gave us the funding we needed for our fifth performer and Soothsayer. It was great news, but I had to go through the whole script from scratch to rebuild it for this larger cast!

Self-doubt is always a challenge. I worry that I have missed something vital in the adaptation. I'm not arrogant enough to say my version is better than the original but it certainly cuts to the chase...



What are the key moments in the adaptation that stand out to you?

Audiences love to ask questions and one of the thrilling things about this adaptation is that unless you know the story, it should be hard to predict what is going to happen next. I would love to be an audience member who is coming to it fresh. I hope we meet lots on tour and can find out what they think!

The scene in Caesar's house when he greets and drinks wine with the men who are about to kill him is exciting. The mix of cordiality, guilt and suspense is irresistible. There is an extraordinary private tension between this group of 'friends'. It's one of the tensest scenes in Shakespeare: all perpetuated by Caesar, who seems unaware that anything is amiss – or is he?

I love the assassination scene because it is played out so cleverly. We see and hear everything that happens as if at close range. The staging needs to convey that the very large crowd can see what happens, but they can't hear the private conversation between the conspirators, Cassius and Brutus. It is tremendous double play.

The funeral scene is a brilliant example of the politics and drama of an incendiary situation. Brutus and Cassius are complacent and convinced they will keep the public on their side, but in the space of just a few seconds, Mark Antony has turned the whole community! It is electrifying. It is telling that Cassius says almost nothing during the course of this scene.

I was very taken by the compressed timeline. JULIUS CAESAR takes place over only three days: The Feast of Lupercal (an ancient Roman festival), The Ides of March (usually 15 March) and the battle at Phillippi. Whilst history tells us that these events happened months, if not years apart, in dramatic terms there is a real immediacy. Decisions are made incredibly quickly. Sometimes badly!

JULIUS CAESAR was written over 400 years ago. How does this adaption relate to contemporary life/issues?

There is an obvious connection with modern political leaders and, particularly, modern dictators. Our leader, Caesar, has a desire for supreme rule (there is also evidence of a lot of publicity and public show). However, I don't contemporise my productions by making intentional comparisons. I prefer the audiences to make up their own minds. I hope they will draw their own conclusions and connections to the parallels with contemporary life.

We are also interested in the relationship between JULIUS CAESAR and what we now know as 'climate change'. This is reflected in the production design as well as in the role of Soothsayer. Almost all the characters in the play neglect the omens and signs that are offered to them: storms, lightning, and supernatural happenings!

Caesar ignores his wife, Calpurnia's foretelling of his murder. Cassius, who has openly defied the portents given by the storm in Act One, later makes this awful discovery: '...the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.' It is only Brutus who takes the appearance – twice – of Caesar's ghost, seriously. Most of our characters fail to heed the warnings given to them, and this has tragic consequences. For me, this is a good reflection on how we, in 2025, are ignoring the threat and long-term consequences of global climate change.

**How will you stage the crowd scenes?
How will you embody the crowd with a
small cast? How is the crowd portrayed
as its own character?**

The crowd and citizens will be played by the Soothsayer who guides the action of the play and influences much of the drama and story. The crowd or community is the driving force behind the journey and fate of the protagonists. Soothsayer also represents the force of the elements, especially the storms. The power of music, movement and spoken word combined makes this characterisation powerful and compelling: the controller of the story, its fates and their consequences.

**Who is your favourite character,
and why?**

All the characters are attractive to a theatre director, and hopefully to actors as well. They all have very natural human hopes and worries. They are also soldiers and politicians. During the play we see the various sides to each personality. This makes them very exciting to play.

Caesar is a fascinating character. He's a real showman, but there are also moments when he demonstrates genuine fear and vulnerability. The moment when he spontaneously grabs Mark Antony's arm and says 'be near me, so I may remember you' is telling – he is afraid to be alone. During the course of the play, audiences recognise Caesar as a public figure and a showman, but they also see glimpses of his private side, and his innermost anxieties and doubts. This is a compelling mix: the character ricochets from one extreme to another.

**How did you approach casting for
JULIUS CAESAR? What are you looking
for in performers?**

We are looking for brilliant performers with the ability to sing, move fluently and speak these classic lines clearly but in their own authentic style. Actors need to have plenty of opinions. This is the fun of directing: you don't always agree!

We are always interested in working with artists who have an affinity with African theatre practice and a love of the art form. We hold open castings where prospective actors of all genders are asked to prepare a speech, sight read a second speech and workshop them with us. It is often the chemistry between the various performers that matters the most. They need to come into the room with an understanding not just of what the lines mean but an opinion about how they want to say them.

'When Caesar says, 'do this'
– it is performed...'

How does your adaptation use multiple languages? What makes this specific to Tangle?

I don't think this is specific to Tangle: lots of companies perform multi-lingually. Deaf theatre companies often have BSL (British Sign Language) or ISL (International Sign Language) as their leading language on stage. The South African company, Isango Ensemble, effortlessly combine many languages into their productions, including English.

At Tangle, we work with the actors to instinctively find lines that work well in other languages, often their indigenous language. During one of the R&D days we looked at the scene

where Cinna the Poet is lynched. Cinna repeats back the questions he is asked in English, so we found that there is freedom and flexibility for the lynch mob to question Cinna in other languages: the meaning remains clear.

There's also a technique called 'shadowing' when a line is expressed in another language and repeated (before or after) in English, but I am less keen on this approach. It did work well in our production of DOCTOR FAUSTUS: the three actors collectively performed Faustus' first spell by repeating lines several times in different languages: English, Zulu and Shona.



ACTIVITY

- Think about the play's various attitudes toward leadership and what it means to be a legitimate ruler. Does the play ever take sides and/or settle on one attitude or another?
- What do we know about Caesar's motives for refusing the crown?
- Who is the better ruler – Caesar or Octavius? What makes one better or worse than the other?
- Think about the plays you know. Can you find any that could have been written with political motives?
- Design a poster for the production of JULIUS CAESAR using colouring pencils or paints

TEXT EXTRACT FROM ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

This extract is from the opening moments of our adaptation. The entire first scene in the unedited version has been cut. The conversation is compressed into a series of micro-duologues between our principal characters. Other characters have been removed and some lines reapportioned.

CAESAR, MARK ANTONY, BRUTUS, CALPURNIA

Caesar Calpurnia!

Calpurina Here, my lord.

Caesar Calpurnia.
Stand you directly in Mark Antony's way
When he doth run his course.

EXIT CALPURNIA

Caesar Mark Antony!

Antony Caesar, my lord?

Antony Forget not in your speed, Mark Antony,
To touch Calpurnia; for our eldens say,
The barren, touchèd in this holy chase,
Shake off their sterile curse.

ENTER CASSIUS

- Caesar** I shall remember.
When Caesar says 'do this' it is performed
- Soothsayer** Caesar!
- Caesar** Ha! Who calls?
- Antony** Bid every noise be still. Peace, yet again!
- Caesar** Who is it in the press that calls on me?
I hear a tongue, shriller than all the music,
Cry 'Caesar'! Speak. Caesar is tuned to hear.
- Soothsayer** Beware the Ides of March.
- Caesar** What man is that?
- Brutus** A soothsayer bids you beware the Ides of March.
- Caesar** Set him before me. Let me see his face.



ACTIVITY

- Divide up the characters and read through the text extract in a group, at school or with friends. How does it make you feel? What are the most interesting moments?
- Compare Tangle's performance of JULIUS CAESAR to another theatre performance you have seen.
- Where was it performed? Describe the experience.
- Compare and contrast Mark Antony's use of language with Brutus's.
- Find out more about Tangle by checking the website, www.tangletheatre.co.uk



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