

Tangle Theatre Company supported by Mayflower Studios, presents

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

JULIUS CAESAR

DISCOVERY PACK: ABOUT TANGLE



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TANGLE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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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.

It includes information about Tangle, our values, including ('ubuntu') and some information about our aesthetic and creative style. There is also information describing Tangle in performance.

Throughout the pack you will find information to read, and activities you can do yourself at home, at school or with friends.

Founded in 2009, Tangle has become a leading force for championing African and Caribbean artistic excellence across our home region of South West England and beyond. We hope this pack provides a useful starting point to learn more about what we do.

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ABOUT TANGLE

“Tangle’s work to champion African and Caribbean arts is ground-breaking and an essential resource locally and nationally. The company’s impact goes beyond what we see on stage. Tangle affects change by nurturing and celebrating the talents of African and Caribbean artists at every career level, engendering a collaborative and creative environment for theatre makers to come together and support each other, proactively working across the cultural ecology to improve racial representation. This makes theatre truly inclusive.”

Yinka Shonibare CBE (RA), Patron

Tangle is a touring theatre company championing African and Caribbean artistic excellence. Since founding in 2009 we have changed the landscape for African and Caribbean arts and artists in our home region of South West England and nationally.

A bridge for engagement between an exciting spectrum of heritages, cultures and experiences, we produce ‘theatre that makes a difference’, offering a vital access point for diverse and isolated communities to come together.

Collaborating with African and Caribbean artists, especially those based in the South West, we create

a combination of new work and radical reinventions of classic texts that gives a louder microphone to the talents and voices of African and Caribbean theatre artists in our home region and beyond.

Our visually stunning theatre productions are performed in a dynamic style, combining Western and Southern African theatre styles and approaches. We’ve produced 7 touring productions, from the TMA Award-winning EVERYMAN in 2009 to the sell-out DOCTOR FAUSTUS in 2018, VOLPONE in 2020 and RICHARD THE SECOND in 2022. Our touring theatre productions focus on rejuvenating classic texts with a distinct aesthetic.

TANGLE'S COMPANY VALUES

Tangle's company values reflect the need for generous and positive two-way conversations between the Tangle artists that deliver, and the people that enjoy our work. We welcome artists, audiences and participants of all backgrounds and heritages to enjoy the work, and to open up new conversations and fresh possibilities for cross cultural collaboration.

Our values are:

Generosity – reaching out to all people, regardless of ability, background and knowledge, and having a listening ear for all, so that, regardless of attitude, people of all kinds can grow understanding of, and appreciation for multi-racial theatre.

Connectivity – ensuring that we communicate rigorously, so that our networks in South West England are in effective dialogue at all times, and in a strong position to measure the effect and impact of our work. This will help us better present our case for social and cultural change in future.

Brilliance – ensuring that all our activities are of the highest quality, inspiring audiences of all ages and stages.

Respect –for each other, for our communities and our stakeholders; for everybody who is involved in a Tangle project regardless of their experience, knowledge, 'learnt views' or ideas.

Ubuntu – a Nguni Bantu term literally meaning 'I am, because we are'. The principle of 'ubuntu' is 'how can one of us be happy if all the other ones are sad?' For Tangle, Ubuntu implies that we are interdependent, that we are stronger together, that we are all equal, and that we work as a strong team to generate success.

Tangle's workforce is a blend of cultures and races working together to affect change. Our values help us to make space for a range of perspectives, rooted in the African and Caribbean experience.

EXPLORE UBUNTU

Ubuntu is one of Tangle's core values, encouraging complicity, equality, and kindness to each other.

- Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term meaning 'humanity' or 'human kindness'.
- Ubuntu in the Xhosa culture means: 'I am because we are'.
- In the Shona language, which is mainly spoken in Zimbabwe, ubuntu is unhu.
- The Zulu way of describing 'ubuntu' is also common in Shona: munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu.
- In Southern Africa, Ubuntu is defined as a humanist philosophy, ethic or ideology.

Here are some other definitions of Ubuntu.

- Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee: 'I am what I am, because of who we all are.'
- Poet John Donne: 'No man is an island, entire of himself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main'.
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu: 'A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, and knows that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.'
- Nelson Mandela: 'A traveller through a country would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food and attend him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but it will have various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to be able to improve?'

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

PSHE

- Using a dictionary, look up the word Respect – what does it mean?
- Write a sentence about something you respect – why do you respect it?
- It could be a noun e.g. a person or an attitude
- Prompt "I respect my mum as she works hard to look after us"

PSHE

- What can you find out about 'Ubuntu'?
- Make up your own definition of Ubuntu.
- What is Nguni Bantu culture? What can you find out about it?
- How many Bantu languages can you list?
- Where are Shona, Zulu and Xhosa spoken? What other languages are spoken in that part of the world?
- See what you can find out about Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and other advocates of Ubuntu.

TANGLE'S PERFORMANCE AESTHETIC

Tangle's touring productions have a distinct aesthetic. This has evolved over time and aims for the performance to connect fully visually and physically with our audiences. Actors are close enough to touch them. The work is immediate and powerful to watch, with an incredible dynamism established in the relationship between the actors and their audience.

The actors perform as an ensemble. Choreography is used to delineate movement when the company perform, which means that the artists can perform in almost any space, without using the traditional principles of 'upstage' and 'downstage' or working within a pre-designed stage set.

Tangle's touring productions follow many traditions of English Renaissance theatre and of the Southern African theatre artform. Actors often present the work in several different languages. Song, sometimes A capella, accompanies each work, as well as sound and instrumental music (both live and pre-recorded). Sometimes the artists sing and speak at the same time. This technique is known as 'sing-speak' and can be enhanced through recorded sound animation.

This sets focus on delineating the 'space of play' rather than a realistic 'kitchen sink' context which affords a strong physical connection between the actors and the audience. This affords a strong physical connection between the actors and the audience. There is no 'fourth wall'. Costumes can be elaborate. As our performing company is small, the actors often have to play several different parts, so changes of costume can help audiences identify with the different characters. We also use large numbers of props, usually visible on stage throughout the performance.

In Renaissance England, there was no electricity, so performances took place in daytime. Sometimes candles were lit as darkness fell. At Tangle, we have followed this tradition to an extent. We use not only traditional modern stage lanterns, but a form of lighting known as 'practical lighting'.



USEFUL INFORMATION 1

Ensemble is defined as a group of things or people acting or taken together as a whole, especially a group of performers who regularly play together.

Choreography is defined as the skill of combining movements into dances to be performed.

A cappella is defined as a melody or song performed by a group of people without any accompaniment or any musical instruments.



USEFUL INFORMATION 2

The intellectual basis of the Renaissance was its own invented version of Humanism, derived from the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy, such as Protagoras', who said that "Man is the measure of all things."

This new thinking became manifested in art, architecture, politics, science and literature. Early examples were the development of perspective in oil paintings, and the recycled knowledge of how to make concrete.

Humanists sought to create communities able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity about what today are known as the humanities: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. Humanism was a pervasive cultural mode and did much to revive the cultural legacy, literary legacy, and moral philosophy of classical antiquity. There were important centres of humanism across Europe.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Music

- After the performance ask the group to discuss the use of music in the performance.
- Where did the style originate, and what does it involve?

Drama

- After the performance get the group to discuss what the word 'ensemble' means.
- What is unique about working in an ensemble?

PE/Dance

- After the performance, discuss what Choreography is.
- Why is it important?
- How does it help to tell the story?
- In groups choreograph your own section of the play
 - how would you do it differently?

RE/PSHE

- Think about humanity and The Renaissance as the birth of humanism.
- What do words like ethics and morals mean in Renaissance terms?

TANGLE IN PERFORMANCE

There are many aspects to planning and creating a theatre production and every company has its own particular approach. Here are some of the steps involved in creating a Tangle production.

Research and Development (R&D)

In the year leading up to a tour, our show director and adaptor, Anna Coombs, works alongside other members of the creative team such as the composer, set and costume designer and lighting designer to conceptualise the style and feel for the production. This work is usually called the R&D period. It is used to explore visual and musical ideas, and also to work with actors to 'test' the adapted script and check that it is coherent, truthful and tells a good story.

Auditions and Casting

Casting the right actors is vital for any theatre production – you need a team of people able and willing to work together and to embrace every aspect of the project. This is especially important with ensemble productions.

The first stage in casting is auditioning actors. Tangle uses a 'workshop' format working with actors in small groups. This helps establish whether they are good team players. It also enables our team to spend more time with each actor, giving them a chance to shine.

We incorporate both text work and music into auditions, so we can get a feel for each actor's personality and style – and they in turn can get a feeling for Tangle's approach. We feel that it is important to have cast members in the room from a show's conception so that we can adapt our performance to showcase each member's unique talents.

Set and Costume Design

Tangle's productions aim to bring the stage action as close to the audience as possible. There is no 'fourth wall', we want our audience to feel as though that they are in the same world as our performers. This means that we have a very specific approach to our design.

Our sets are bold, with elaborate costumes. Any floor or wall coverings emphasise the connection, rather than the divide between the players and the audience.

Sets are scaleable, redacting to suit smaller stages and expanding to suit larger ones meaning that our productions can make the best use of a broad variety of stages and venues.

Composing: music and song

The commissioning of original music and song are central to any Tangle show. We commission a professional artist, in most recent years John Pfumojena, to create original songs, instrumentation and melodies. Development of material is a collaborative process, where John will work with the actors during rehearsals to shape and teach material – an approach that comes from the Zimbabwean oral cultural tradition. Before this, the composer and director will discuss moods, themes and styles, which come to life once rehearsals begin.

Sound Design

All Tangle's productions deploy an extensive 'sound design'. These can range from realistic sound effects (known as 'FX') to more complex compositions or soundscapes that underscore the action during a given scene. The Sound Designer works closely with the Composer to augment elements of live music and song using recorded sound and amplification.

Lighting Design

As well as stage lanterns, Tangle's productions utilise 'practical' lighting sources. This is illumination produced physically, via light sources that are visible as models within a scene – these can be lamps, light fixtures, television sets, or any other model that emits light. Handheld lamps have sometimes been attached to parts of the staging, which the actors pick up and move around for different effects and atmospheres. We have also used LED strips, sodium lights (commonly found in streetlamps) and fluorescent bars.

Rehearsing

All directors undertake a great deal of planning before rehearsals begin. Each day a 'rehearsal call' is given by the stage manager. Rehearsals can include allowing time for warmups, run throughs, 'line runs' (when the actors work through the lines at speed as a memory aid) and for detailed work on individual scenes. Rehearsal schedules give a sense of structure and focus to the rehearsal process.

This is a dynamic process, as many directors may change elements of a show after they have explored a scene in rehearsals.

Technical Time

Before the first performance, productions have a 2 or 3 day 'technical' period when every aspect of the physical production (sets, props, lighting, sound, music, movement and combat) are tested in an actual theatre space. Sections of the play are repeated many times whilst different sound effects and lighting states, for example, are tested out with the creative team and actors.

Previews

Previews are the first public performances of a production before the official Opening Night. They are often thought of as 'test runs' that give the creative team an opportunity to see how the show works in front of a live audience. While the production is mostly finished by this stage, previews are a vital part of the development process. Performing in front of an audience allows the team to observe how people respond to different moments in the show. This feedback can be incredibly valuable. After each preview performance, the creative team may adjust lighting and sound cues, pacing, scene transitions, or blocking (where actors move on stage). These changes help fine-tune the overall rhythm and impact of the production.

Preview time can also be used to test how visual or technical elements read in the actual theatre space. This can feel very different from the rehearsal room. Additional rehearsals often take place between previews and the Opening Night, to explore new changes, refine performances, and make final decisions on character choices, delivery, or movement. It's a final stretch of creative problem-solving and collaboration before the show officially opens to the public and press.

Touring

After previews and the opening week, Tangle's productions tour across South West England—and sometimes further afield, including London. Touring is a core part of Tangle's mission to bring high-quality theatre to communities that may not always have easy access to it. This means the company performs in a wide range of venues: from traditional theatres to schools, community centres, and arts hubs. Each tour stop is usually just for one or two nights, so the show's design and transportation has to be planned with precision and care.

The Producer plays a key role in making the tour happen. They are responsible for booking the production into suitable venues, coordinating with local venue teams, and planning the travel, accommodation, and schedules for the cast and creative team. They also manage the budget, which includes travel costs, fees, and venue hire. This is where maths and project management come into play: producers must carefully manage money, time, and people across multiple locations.

Geography is also important, as they need to understand distances, travel times, and regional differences in audiences and access, to plan the most efficient and cost-effective tour route.

The Producer works closely with the Production Manager to ensure that the production meets sustainability standards, following frameworks such as the Theatre Green Book.

Production Management

The Production Manager is essential in making the design come to life on stage. Their role is to work closely with the Director and Set and Costume Designer to translate their vision and plans onto the stage. They are responsible for collecting all the technical details for each venue and liaising with their teams to make sure the production fits in the space. They oversee the build of any set, manage the logistics of transporting the set on tour and oversee the production budget (which includes purchasing set/props/costume). In a Tangle production, at the end of the production week they will hand the production over to the Stage Management team to take on tour.

Stage Management

The Stage Manager is another key figure on tour. They are responsible for transporting and setting up the production's technical elements, including the set, lights, and props. They often travel in the tour van and work with the venue's technical team to unload and install the production at each venue. This is called the 'get in'. During the performance they may be responsible for 'cueing' the show, which means telling the Lighting and Sound technicians when to change the lights or the sound effects. They may also cue the show themselves. They will do this from "the book", which is a version of the script that has notes about when there are changes in the lighting, sound or special effects. First, they will tell the technician to "stand by" and then to "Go".

After the performance, the Stage Manager leads the 'get out', making sure everything is packed up and ready to move on to the next location. They also make sure that actors and creatives arrive on time and know their schedule. They help to adapt the show to fit each venue's unique space when they arrive. They will also troubleshoot any technical or logistical issues and keep everyone safe and supported while on the road.

Marketing

Marketing plays a vital role in the success of a touring theatre production. It ensures that audiences across different locations know about the show, feel excited to see it, and are encouraged to book tickets.

Because touring productions visit multiple venues—each with its own local community and audience—marketing must be flexible, creative, and collaborative. Leading up to the production, our marketing manager works closely with other staff to develop promotional assets such as images, posters, trailers, and videos. These assets are designed to capture the mood, themes, and visual style of the production, offering potential audiences a compelling glimpse of what to expect.

Tangle's Marketing Manager also liaises with the Director and other creatives to draw out key themes, motifs, and messages that reflect the production's unique interpretation—in this case, of Shakespeare's JULIUS CAESAR. These might include power, betrayal, political unrest, or leadership, depending on the artistic vision. Understanding these themes helps the marketing team communicate the story in ways that resonate with different audiences.

Ultimately, marketing connects the production with the public. It helps tell the story of the show before the curtain even rises—making sure that wherever the production goes, there's an audience waiting to experience it.



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