

AT THE OLD VIC

**Large Print
Programme**

BAGDAD CAFE

17 Jul–28 Aug 2021

BAGDAD CAFE

by **Percy & Eleonore Adlon**

'Calling You' by **Bob Telson**

Adapted by **Emma Rice**

Cast

Nandi Bhebhe

Le Gateau Chocolat

Betrys Jones

Patrycja Kujawska

Nadine Lee

Emlyn Maillard

Sandra Marvin

Kandaka Moore

Renell Shaw

Gareth Snook

Ewan Wardrop

Stage Management

Kate Foster

Robert Perkins

Greg Shimmin

First performance of this production at The Old Vic, 17 July 2021

An Old Vic & Wise Children production

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BAGDAD CAFE

by **Percy & Eleonore Adlon**

'Calling You' by **Bob Telson**

Adapted by **Emma Rice**

Director

Emma Rice

Designer

Lez Brotherston

in cahoots with

Vicki Mortimer

Composer

Ian Ross

Lighting

Malcolm Rippeth

Broadcast Sound & Video

Simon Baker

Choreography

Etta Murfitt

Musical Director

Nadine Lee

Puppetry Director

John Leader

Puppetry Consultant

Sarah Wright

Magic Consultant

Ben Hart

Voice

Joel Trill

Associate Director

Laura Keefe

Assistant Choreographer

Nandi Bhebhe

Assistant Director

Amelia Thornber

'Brenda, Brenda' music by

Bob Telson

'Brenda, Brenda' lyrics by

Lee Breuer

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WELCOME

from **Matthew Warchus**, Artistic Director of The Old Vic

I am very proud to welcome Emma Rice and her company Wise Children back to The Old Vic as we embark on the lively reopening of this wonderful theatre. I can't think of a more joyful way to mark the return of our in-person audiences than with Emma's accessible, inventive, adventurous, celebratory and uplifting storytelling.

I am also delighted to be collaborating with Wise Children on the continuation of our OLD VIC: IN CAMERA series for those who are not able to visit the theatre in person. The IN CAMERA series was a vital lifeline for our theatre during closure, helping us to raise valuable funds, keeping us connected to our audiences, and enabling us to support the freelance community through employment opportunities.

We are so grateful to everyone who bought a ticket, helping us to get to reopening. Our huge gratitude also goes to our Principal Partner RBC and PwC, our £10 Previews ticket scheme supporters, who have stood with us every step of the way.

Welcome back. Our valued Front of House and Box Office teams have worked hard to ensure your visit is as easy, secure and fun as possible and I am so happy that you have chosen to join us for this production and the beginning of this historic Back Together Season.

AN INTERVIEW WITH EMMA RICE

We met with director and adaptor Emma Rice to find out how 'Bagdad Cafe' will be brought to life on stage.

Why choose to direct this particular piece?

The first lockdown was the inspiration for this piece. I wanted to respond to what was happening to us all; the separation, the isolation and the disconnect we all felt to our old lives. I wanted to make a piece that would not only work with social distancing, but also be about social distancing. I wanted to capture the space and silence of lockdown and the loneliness and loss that we all experienced. Most of all, I wanted to make something beautiful, tender and hopeful. I have loved the film 'Bagdad Cafe' for over 30 years. In fact, if you were allowed to take a film to a desert island, this would probably be mine. I used to joke that the film was more me than me but had never considered adapting it for the stage before now. It was almost a revelation when it popped into my dreams. This was THE story to help us come through the pandemic. This deceptively simple tale offers us truth and solace, harnessing the power of friendship, diversity and tolerance.

Above all though, it celebrates things I treasure in life: poetry, music and magic! Since those early dreams, Wise Children and The Old Vic have worked at speed to make this show a reality — and here it is! 'Bagdad Cafe' is newborn and blinking in the light of a new era; an era that I hope will bring greater understanding, stronger community and a new found belief in the common good.

How do you adapt from the film for the stage?

I have adapted the film with a light touch and tried hard not to meddle with what is right in this wonderful world. There is very little text and I have left almost all of it intact. What I needed to create was a form that allowed the space depicted in the film to translate into a proscenium arch theatre. I created a chorus of 'lost travellers' to help us navigate and a world that could flip between scales; one moment in glorious miniature, the next, life size.

What is the process for devising this production?

I have brought together a sensational cast of multi-talented performers. I have worked with all of them before and know and trust them to be generous, creative and kind. After all the uncertainty of last year, I felt a happy and empathetic room was what I needed to breathe life into 'Bagdad Cafe' and each other. Every day we play, we dance, we sing and then we explore. I trust that if the ingredients are right, the theatre cake we make will be delicious! This is the process. Trust the story, trust the team and keep your eyes, heart and soul open to surprise.

Wise Children has made a number of adaptations of books and films. How do you choose what you are going to adapt?

The stories choose me! They enter my dreams and tap at my subconscious. My job is to notice them and capture them when they do. If I trust my instinct and listen carefully to the clues, I find myself telling the stories that matter to me at the right time and in the right place. 'Bagdad Cafe' is the perfect example of when this alchemic and instinctive process

works. It is the right time and the right place for 'Bagdad Cafe'.

Can you explain a bit about the importance of music in the production?

All my work is shot through with music. I cannot imagine life without music, let alone making a piece of theatre without it. And the music in 'Bagdad Cafe' is sublime. Bob Telson's 'Calling You' is one of the most soulful and hauntingly beautiful songs I have heard and sums up what I feel about this extraordinary time. I feel we are calling each other back, calling each other to arms and calling each other to come together as a community. This is why I wanted to create a 'Bagdad Cafe' community choir. I wanted to give everyone the chance to be part of the show, part of the re-opening of The Old Vic and part of our precious community. This community is not exclusive; it is diverse and welcoming, generous and joyful and I want as many people as possible to feel part of it. The show will close with the faces of people from across London, the country and the world, all singing together and celebrating the wonder of shared humanity.

What elements of this show are you most excited about?

I am excited about the cast, the music, the dance and the comical and emotional power they will all undoubtedly bring to Waterloo! I am also excited by the puppets that are being made by the legendary Lyndie Wright and the magic! I cannot wait to see the tricks we have all been working on, sprinkling fairy dust on the cast, crew and audience alike.

What will be the most challenging aspect of this production?

The most challenging aspect will be creating the illusion of space in such a traditional auditorium... but I am not worried. For every problem we encounter, this most beautiful of theatres will offer many more solutions. Where better on the planet is there to celebrate the joy of coming together and the magical possibilities of theatre?

After a year of lockdown and separation, what has this been like for everyone involved in the production?

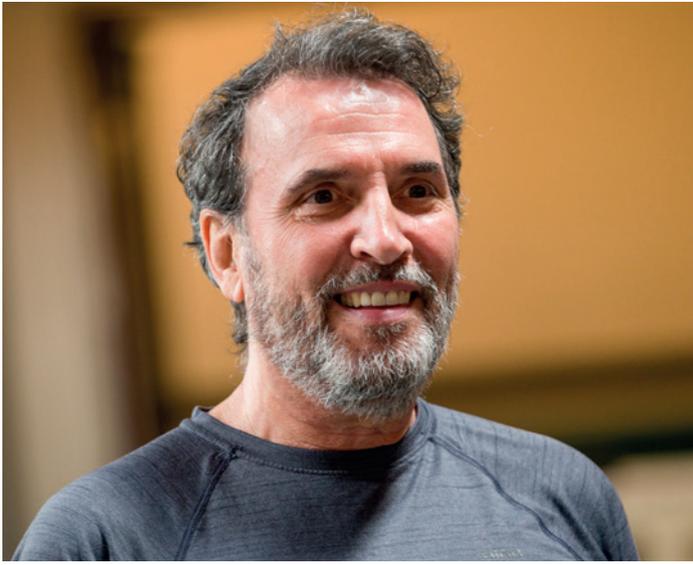
We are relishing and appreciating every note we sing, game we play and scene we create! Mindful of the damaging effects lockdown has had on many of us in the arts, we have approached rehearsals with gentle fun, ease and understanding. And it has been blooming wonderful! I will never take my community for granted again. I love and respect them more than ever and every laugh we have and harmony we make fills my heart with gratitude and joy.

What have you missed most about theatre?

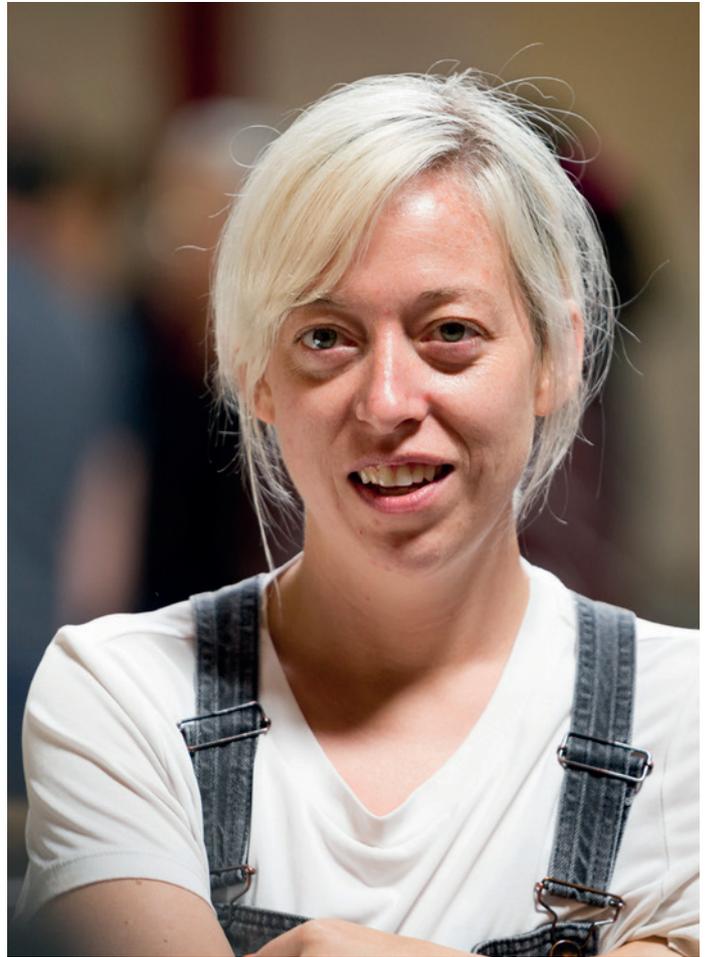
All of the above.

How would you describe the production in three words?

Soulful, hopeful and magical.







BACK TOGETHER FOR BAGDAD CAFE

A celebration of friendship by Dzifa Afonu.

We all took the physicality of friendship for granted before lockdown 1.0 in March 2020. The sight of a person with a friendly smile who greets you with open arms, leaning on each other's shoulders and holding hands. Many of us have longed for these physical connections — nothing beats a long hug from a good friend especially in times of hardship. We have had to adapt. Friendship now looks like taking care not to spread the virus, wearing masks, keeping a distance. Friendship looks like video calls and voice notes. Friendship looks like sharing compassionate silences, finding ways to still laugh in times of pain and fear. Friendship looks like socially distanced walks in the park, sharing resources and support, helping each other with shopping and sharing funny memes to keep our spirits up.

We have collectively faced 15 months of restrictions to our previous way of life. We have been through times of fear, times of laughter, times of illness and times of grief, and while we have done it without the physicality of friendship, many of us have still formed deeper bonds with the people we knew before the pandemic. I have been surprised to have even established deep friendships with people I have only met online.

At the heart of the 'Bagdad Cafe' play is the story of friendship. When Brenda and Jasmin meet for the first time they are both at breakdowns, or more like breakthroughs, in their lives. They are at a turning point, lost and not sure how they will move forward with their lives. Their friendship is unexpected, but as it unfolds, we see just how transformative friendship can be, especially when it helps to bring us out of our dark places.

Friendship through adversity can be our greatest resource; it has the power to pull us through. We have all had some challenges to our mental health over the past year, the strain of the collective anxiety and loss has put pressure on us all.

As we start to do more social things, as we start to imagine our new normal, can we breathe new life into what it means to come together? Can we remember the healing power of art and storytelling?

Personally, I cannot wait to be in a theatre, feeling safe and secure sitting with my best friends, watching the curtains going up and being transported into another world. While we are still taking care and keeping to social distancing rules, we have the option of enjoying 'Bagdad Cafe' both online and in person with the people who matter to us — the people we may have come to appreciate even more than before. Our friends and families. Our community.

Dzifa Afonu is a clinical psychologist. They have over 10 years experience working in the NHS and over 20 years of experience working in the charity sector with marginalised people. They are passionate about supporting frontline workers and their mental health. Their approach to their work incorporates and champions decolonial and healing justice values, finding new ways of building community and supporting leadership that step away from grind culture and create opportunities for real freedom.

SO YOU WANT TO BE MAGIC?

11 top tips for apprentice magicians from magician Ben Hart.

01. NEVER REVEAL THE SECRET.

The secrets of magic are always ugly — this is why they are kept secret. If they were beautiful, magicians would share them! Do not deny others their experience of wonder by revealing these gory and unpleasant inner workings. Like style, magic should appear effortless.

02. FORGET MAGICIANS' GUILT.

Knowing a secret or withholding knowledge can make you feel guilty. In the case of magic, the withheld knowledge is a beautifully-wrapped gift for the audience. Turn guilt into pride.

03. EMBRACE THE MYSTERY.

Magic reminds us that it is ok to have mystery in our lives and that there is magic everywhere. Being immersed in fantasy reminds us to water and cultivate our own big dreams.

04. BRAINS ARE BRILLIANT.

Magic works because the viewers' brains are brilliant. The magician exploits the brain's ability to make and trust assumptions about reality. Magic makes the viewer come to the wrong conclusion for the right reasons.

05. ALL MAGIC IS A METAPHOR.

When the magician materialises objects, changes their shape, size, or colour and dematerialises them again, they are playing with powerful stuff — the metaphorical creation, flux and annihilation of the universe. The seemingly trivial nature of some tricks makes this metaphor even more delicious.

06. DON'T RUN UNLESS YOU'RE BEING CHASED.

07. ...

**08. PRACTISE,
PRACTISE, PRACTISE.**

Good magic is attained through naturalness of action. Actions only appear natural when you have done them thousands of times. Only once you are natural can you be truly supernatural...

**09. NEVER REPEAT
A TRICK.**

Multiple viewings of a magic trick might allow an audience to figure it out. A surprise party is magical, but not if the same ruse happens every day. Treat your trick like a rare eclipse, or like a flower that only blooms once a century.

**10. ALWAYS LEAVE THEM
WANTING MORE.**

Magic is rich and takes concentration to watch. Eating a tiny slice of dark chocolate cake can be savoured but a mountain of it will make you vomit. Always do one thing less than you thought you would... (which is why I made tip seven disappear).

**11. THE BIGGEST SECRET
IN MAGIC.**

The real magic is everywhere. It's already right under your nose. It's in your life, it's in your friends and it's in the twinkle in your eye... The real magic IS YOU...