

Welcome to this audio introduction to **846 Live**, a co-production with Theatre Royal Stratford East and the Royal Docks Team in response to the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020.

This brutal murder ignited a global surge of anger and pain. From the Windrush scandal to the Grenfell Tower tragedy, racist oppression is very much alive in the UK.

In June 2020, Theatre Royal Stratford East worked with a group of Black and Asian writers, led by Roy Williams, to respond artistically to George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter Movement, creating an audio play 846 – a collection of standalone short pieces exploring racial inequality and oppression. The stories, all unique, span a breadth of themes and emotions, from tragic to angry, to frightening and even funny. Together they form a powerful tapestry of voices.

**846 Live** draws on those stories, bringing together a selection of the plays to form an arresting outdoor performance.

Please note that some of the plays contain strong language and may contain upsetting themes around murder, racism and racial violence that some audience members may find upsetting. **Recommended age guidance 14+**

The show is 30 minutes long and runs without a break.

The setting for *846 Live* is an urban, concrete, basketball court surrounded by a green wire fence. It is located beside the local community centre, the Royal Docks Learning & Activity Centre, the external wall of which is spray-painted with Hip-Hop graffiti. The audience is seated on benches which are arranged on 3 sides of the basketball court. The performance space in between is approximately 6 metres wide and 8 deep. It's laid out as though for a bloc party, with speaker-like boxes piled high and laid around like a deconstructed sound system, the boxes resembling empty plinths. At the back of the space, set against the hoop end of the court, is a small platform stage with a table complete with DJ decks. The music is mixed live courtesy of DJ Xana.

Behind the DJ, the back caged-wall of the court is covered with Black Lives Matter protest placards. As well as Black Lives matter, the slogans on the placards include: “I can’t breath”; “Silence breeds violence” and “Our skin is not a weapon”. One of the placards displays the image of a clenched “black power” fist.

In addition to the DJ, there are 7 performers, 4 men and 3 women, all are Black. Together they represent a community, initially welcoming the audience, albeit with a degree of wariness, then presenting four short stories, each written by a different writer.

The performance begins with **IC3** by Nathaniel Martello-White, in which we hear a recording of a phone call made to the police by an unseen, middle-aged, white American woman. As we listen to her voice, a character known simply as “the man” sits alone on a central plinth. The man is played by actor and dancer, Ira Mandela Siobhan. He is Black mixed race, in his 30’s, tall, with muscular physique. His hair is cropped short and he has a stubby beard. He wears a white t-shirt with a black bomber jacket with orange lining, teamed with black jogging bottoms and white trainers with black detailing. The man does very little, mostly just the actions and gestures that are being relayed in the phone call. From time to time, though, he springs into dance, sometimes treading a nimble jazz step, sometimes becoming more frenetic, with more jagged swoops of the arms, or ripples through his body, but then soft, fluid waves. When moving, he seems more connected to joy, celebration and defiance than violence, making the juxtaposition between the woman’s fear and his movements jarring – if he presents any threat to her, he is oblivious to it.

In **SUCK. YOUR. MUM.** by Nathan Powell, the same man tells us the reason for his mood, addressing us directly with his confession.

**SAY THEIR NAMES**, by Sumerah Srivastav is performed by a character known simply as “the hot-headed protestor”. Played by Michael Elcock, the protestor is in his late 20’s, with short-cut hair shaved at the sides and back. He’s dressed all in black: lightweight cotton hoodie; utility vest; combat style trousers and lace up boots. He stands alone, sometimes atop a plinth, addressing us through a megaphone, as he presents a devastating roll-call of the names of Black British and British Asian people who have had their lives stolen by the very people meant to ‘serve and

protect' them. At the end of the roll-call, all raise a clenched fist in the black power salute.

**MY PART**, by Selina Thompson is performed by the whole community. One by one they stand atop a plinth, or step forward to a microphone on a stand, from where they tell us, and one another, about their role in the Black Lives Matter movement. A bell is rung towards the end of each person's speech.

The characters are known simply as their roles. In order of address they are:

The "Thoughtful Academic" played by Tonderai Munyevu. He's in his early 50's, tall and broad. He wears a colourful patterned shirt, with a colourful bow tie. Over the top is a dark green, beige and navy Argyle cashmere mix vest. Mid-blue chinos team with light-grey suede brogues

The "Exhausted Artist" is played by Cherrelle Skeete. She's in her late 20's, with fudge-brown skin and twists in her hair. She stands poised, as though she has fire in her belly, wearing an orange turtle neck jumper, with black floral waistcoat, mid-blue denim Mom jeans and black lace up ankle boots

We next meet the same "Hot -Headed Protestor", who addressed us in Say Their Names, still speaking through his megaphone.

Next up is the "Experienced Activist", played by Judith Jacob, taking her place with determined intention. She's in her late 50's, her brown, slightly bumpy skin retaining its youthfulness, her black locks reaching down to her upper mid back. She paces about, dressed practically and comfortably – a dark-grey, long cardigan over a light denim shirt, with charcoal-grey jeggings matched with black, lace-up ankle boots. An African print shawl is pulled over her shoulders, coloured turquoise, navy blue, red and white.

The "Amused Elder", is played by Leo Wringer. Although Leo is younger, in his 50's, the Amused Elder is an octogenarian, Jamaican with dark skin. He doesn't have much hair, what there is is curly and grey, topped with a black leather-look flat cap. He has a grey almost full beard. He dresses smartly, but casually - navy blue, light brown and white patterned short sleeved shirt, with a white under vest and brown linen jacket, charcoal grey trousers with brown leather-look lace up shoes. He

shuffles about slowly with the aid of a walking stick. He enjoys a cup of hot tea and blows to cool the liquid before sipping. Before speaking he stirs his tea with a metal teaspoon - his favourite mug has an image of the Jamaican flag.

Last up is a “Long-Term Campaigning Mum”, is played by Doreene Blackstock. She’s in her mid 50’s, with short, curly-afro hair, greying at the edges. She wears a floral blouse, coloured pale pink, dark purple and orange, with dark denim jeggings and white, lace-up plimsolls. Over the top she wears a rust-coloured rain mac. Pinned to the mac is a navy-blue ribbon representing the United Family and Friends Campaign. She takes the microphone in hand and paces, her demeanour determined, focused and strong.

The final piece is titled **Hell You Talmbout**. The community establishes a beat and a rhythm, stamping the floor, banging the plinths, clapping hands and punching fists in the air, beginning a ritual, in which the “names of our own” are called into the space.

At the end of the show the placards attached to the back of the court are removed to reveal a portrait...of George Floyd.

846 Live

Is directed by Matthew Xia.

