

Return to the Forest Visual Guide



Visual Story



Return to the Forest is a 90-minute gently immersive show with dance and puppetry. It has been created by Theatre-Rites and South African choreographer Gregory Maqoma.

As audiences enter the theatre they will arrive first in a Museum space, before travelling to a second space which represents a Forest.



This visual story will help prepare you for your visit and to help you become familiar with the surroundings. Please use these notes as little or as much as you need to.

We hope you have a lovely time and enjoy the show.

This pack includes the following information

- **About the Venue**
- **What to Expect**
- **Meet the Cast**
- **The Objects on Display in the Museum**
- **The Puppets and Masks in the Show**
- **A more detailed breakdown of the production**

About the Venue



Return to the Forest is being performed at Sadler's Wells East, Stratford, London, E20 2AR.



This is the first entrance you'll see walking from Stratford Westfields.

You'll enter through these glass doors which open out to our Café, The Well.



This is The Well. You can relax here before, during and after the show and buy snacks and drinks at the bar.

You can also refill your water bottle at our water station, we have cups you can borrow too.



You might also like to enter through these glass doors. This entrance is what you'll see if you walk from West Ham Stadium.

There is a ramp to this entrance.



You will enter our Foyer and see our Welcome Desk.

This is where you may come to buy or collect your tickets for the show, and where our team can answer any questions you might have.

You can also buy some merchandise from our shop.



To the right of the Welcome Desk is our restaurant and bar, The Park.

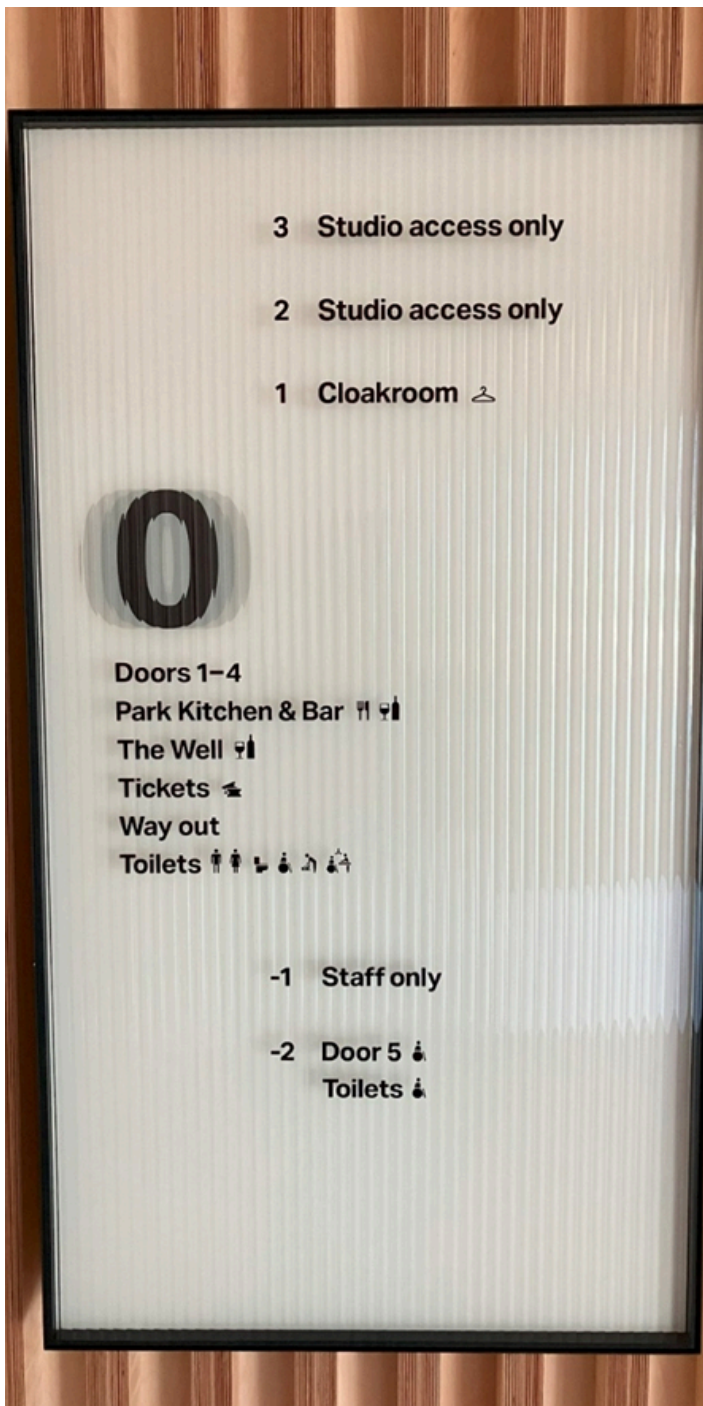
You can buy a snack, drink or sit down for a meal before, during or after the show. There will be child-friendly options available.

There is another water station with cups here.



All our front of house spaces are connected by The Dance Floor. You might see people dancing here and you could hear music.

It might be busy and a bit noisy before and after the show.



On the ground floor, marked 0, we have a range of toilets:

A female toilet with cubicles and baby change facilities. A male toilet with urinals, cubicles and baby change facilities. Two accessible, all gender toilets – one with baby change facilities. One changing place toilet which has an accessible toilet, adjustable changing and shower table, electric hoist and adjustable sink. Please bring your own sling if you wish to use the hoist.



Members of our front of house team will operate the lift if you need step free access the auditorium via level -2, our chill-out space on level 2 or our cloakroom on level 1.



The chill-out space will be in a place called The Legendary Twins Studio. It will have bean bags and a live stream of the performance on a large TV screen, so you can experience the show in a different way. The lights will be dimmed, and it will be quiet.

You can exit and re-enter the auditorium as many times as you need. The chill-out space will be open from 13:30 for matinee performances and from 18:00 for evening performances until the show ends.



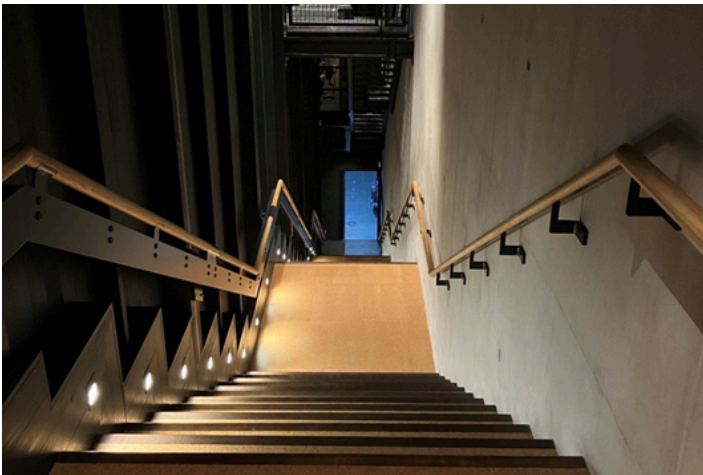
On level 1 we have a cloakroom where you are welcome to leave your bags and belongings for a small fee.



The auditorium doors are either side of The Well Café on level 0.



Your tickets will be checked by a front of house member at the entrance to the auditorium.



These are one set of stairs you might take to enter the auditorium.



These are the other set of stairs you might take to enter the auditorium.

This is an immersive performance where the audience will, at times, be standing, sitting or moving between spaces. For those who are able to, there will space to sit on the floor and there will also be seating blocks available. The performance will include some gentle participation for those who wish to be involved. There will be Audience Guides to take care of you, but we ask all our audience members to be considerate of each other as you move through the space.

We hope you enjoy the show!

What to Expect:



Who is it for?

For anybody aged 8 plus



Length of Show

approximately 90 minutes



Moving through the space

During the performance the audience will move between different spaces. This will happen three times. There are guides there to help you.



Seating

In both performance areas there will be space to sit on the floor, or you can choose to sit on a seat. The guides are there to help everybody find somewhere to sit.



Music is played throughout the performance. Sometimes the music might get louder and sometimes it might get quieter. The mood of the music changes to reflect what is happening.



You are Welcome to:

Move around – just not on the areas where the performers are dancing.

Make noise

leave at any time



Guides

There will be five guides in the space wearing black jackets with the word GUIDE printed on the back.

Meet the Cast:

There are 5 performers in the show. They tell a story by dancing and by using puppetry. Xolisile also uses his voice to create musical sounds without words.



Xolisile Bongwana
Dancer



Natnael Dawit
Dancer



Mayowa Ogunnaike
Dancer



Simon Palmer
Dancer and Puppeteer



Teele Uustani
Puppeteer

The Objects on Display in the Museum

There are five different objects that appear on plinths in the museum.

When you enter the space, you will be able to walk around and look at these objects



An Ishoba

An Ancestral Stick with a beaded handle and a hair extension, from South Africa



A Mask with colourful details

inspired by the Gelede masks of Nigeria



Part of an Ancient Map

A circular part of an ancient map showing the Amazon in South America.



A Carved Calabash

A calabash is also known as a gourd. This carved cala is from South America



A Knotted Rope String in a Bell Jar

Inspired by Chinese silk thread knots

Puppets and Masks in the Show

There are several different puppet characters in the show



Surveillance Camera Beast

with a CCTV camera head and coat made out of wires. At one point in the show this puppet walks through some of the audience.



Spirit of the Map

A small old man puppet with a realistic head.



Mother Earth

With the Gelede mask head similar to the mask in the museum and a coat made out of raffia



Half Body Root Puppet

A torso, head and arms covered in fabric that is attached to the body of the performer Teele.



Big Mama (Earth)

A giant masquerade puppet with a mask similar to the Gelede mask from the museum.



Masquerade Masks and Costume

At the end of the show 5 people will appear wearing masks and masquerade costumes.



Owl Masquerade Mask

the person wearing this mask will wear a long costume



Water Masquerade Mask

the person wearing this mask will wear a long costume



Deer Masquerade Mask

the person wearing this mask will wear a long costume



Grasshopper Masquerade Mask

the person wearing this mask will wear a long costume



Mushroom Masquerade Mask

the person wearing this mask will wear a long costume

If you would like more detailed information about what happens during the performance, you will find it on the following pages.

About Return to the Forest



At the start of the show, you will enter a space that feels like a museum. There will be 5 guides in black jackets and 5 plinths with precious objects on display. You can walk around and look at these objects like you would in a museum.



You will hear a voice or see a signal telling you that the exhibition is closing. The Guides will help you find a seat to watch the performance. You may choose to sit on the floor or on a bench.



The guides will pull red laser strings over the performance area to protect the objects.

There will be a surveillance camera watching all the objects in the museum.



5 visitors remain (our cast) in the museum. They are there to steal the objects. Through dance and movement they undertake a heist, but Teele accidentally sets off an alarm. There are red flashing lights. The cast escape through the black curtain.



The large black curtain in the space will lift slightly on 2 sides and the guides will usher the audience through to a different space where you can sit on the floor behind the white line or in the seats behind.



The performers arrive in this new space exhausted from running. The Ishoba seems to have power over each of them and they pass it around expressing its power through dance. Suddenly the Surveillance Camera from the Museum appears.



The cast playfully hide their bags by giving them to members of the audience. Teele still has the Ishoba in her hand. Eventually they show the Camera their bags but all the treasures have disappeared except for the Ishoba.



The cast try and distract the camera and one of the dancers makes loud vocal noises and calls. They pull wires out of the cameras head and eventually covering it with an amazing coat. This CCTV beast moves out of the performance area and around the audience.



The lighting changes and suddenly long streams of light appear from above, the dancers move around this forest of light. They start to explore which way they need to travel. They are lost.



Through dance the cast explore which path to take. Suddenly they hear a deep rustling and from the back of the stage a giant shape appears. It is a moving map, that keeps falling over. Eventually an old man (puppet) appears out of the map. The map has a missing piece which the puppet gives to Natnael.



They dance round the audience with the missing map piece and eventually become very tired.

Cocoons appear from above and each performer chooses one to sleep in except for Mayowa. It reminds her of the Gelede mask which she is still searching for.



Mother Earth appears from the mound of cocoons. She dances with the performers but eventually becomes very tired. She is dry and exhausted. She leaves a pile of calabashes for the performers.



You will hear the sound of water gently dripping and each performer takes a calabash. They capture water to replenish Mother Earth.



One by one the performers dive back down into the earth to find Mother Earth.

Xolisile remains playing the calabashes as percussive instruments and making loud vocal calls to summon Mother Earth. He then dives into the ground.



Moving lights appear on the stage and the performers wriggle from under the large curtain. They are wearing leotards with a fabric that looks like roots. Some of the performers have large colourful roots attached to them.



Teele appears with a half body puppet attached to her. You can see a glowing heart inside of the puppet. The performers dance with Teele and the half body puppet.



The performers pull heartstrings from the puppet like the red lasers. They invite audience members to hold them whilst they dance under and over them. They also invite audience members to join them as they weave underneath them. You can join if you'd like to.



The curtain lifts and we see a giant green masquerade puppet with a Gelede mask calling audiences back to museum. You will follow the performers and the guides back to the museum.



The museum now has 5 new objects. Each performer asks a member of the audience to perform a heist with them to release each object. When they raise their object in the air a masquerade appears.



Once all 5 objects have been released the performers and masquerade figures will invite you back to the forest area where they will dance and take a bow.

If you'd like to, you can dance with them.

director **Sue Buckmaster**

co-composers **Frank Moon and Domenico Angarano**

choreographer **Gregory Maqoma**

costume design **Kinnetia Isidore**

set design **Jean Chan**

lighting design **Guy Hoare**

puppetry designers **Naomi Oppenheim, Alison Duddle and Sue Buckmaster**

Return to the Forest is a Theatre-Rites and Factory International co-production, co-commissioned by Sadler's Wells.

