



West End Theatre To Hold Performances For Black Only Audiences

Description

USA: A playwright has defended performances solely for black only audiences at a West End show because he believes it allows black people 'to feel safe in a place where they often do not feel safe.'

'Slave Play, starring Kit Harington of 'Game of Thrones' fame, will be showing at the Noël Coward theatre in London's West End from 29 June to 21 September.

On the evenings of 17 July and 17 September however, the theatre will be open to an 'all-Black identifying audience' to allow black audiences to watch the play 'free from the white gaze'. The move has been slammed by critics as 'simplistic and racist'

The Mail Online reports: Playwright Jeremy O Harris said he was 'so excited' to put on nights in the West End where tickets were only sold to people who identified as black.

He said 'It is a necessity to radically invite them in with initiatives that say 'you're invited'. Specifically you.'

Speaking to BBC Sounds yesterday, he said: 'One of the things we have to remember is that people have to be radically invited into a space to know that they belong there and in most places in the west, poor people and black people have been told that they do not belong inside the theatre.'

'For me, as someone who wants and yearns for black and brown people to be in the theatre, who comes from a working class environment, who wants people who do not make six figures to feel like theatre is a place for them, it is a necessity to radically invite them in with initiatives that say 'you're invited'. Specifically you.'

Asked if it didn't make him uncomfortable that in turn, it was telling white people they weren't allowed in the space, he responded: 'There are a litany of places in our country that are generally

only inhabited by white people, and nobody is questioning that, and nobody is saying that by inviting black audiences here you are uninvited.

‘The idea of a Black Out night is to say this is a night that we are specifically inviting black people to fill up the space, to feel safe with a lot of other black people in a place where they often do not feel safe.’

Asked if the theatre felt different that way, he said: ‘100%. Let’s not act that we do not know that culturally white audiences and black audiences respond to things differently.’

He spoke of history in black [American audiences](#) where a ‘call and response’ was common, for example, agreeing that it can be a ‘noisier experience.’

‘White audiences in the West have decided to stay quiet and respond with politeness to anything they see in front of them,’ he said, though he said it wasn’t always that way in the past.

O Harris spoke about how for Slave Play, they would have over 200 tickets a week that would cost just £1 in a bid to be accessible to those from poorer backgrounds.

[He said he had](#) never seen a Broadway play until a year before he went to Broadway as it was not financially feasible for him when he was younger.

One senior Tory MP, who did not want to be named, raised questions over the decision to bar white people from the show, telling MailOnline:

‘I understand the subject matter of the show may have particular resonance for some but would simply question the legality of this?’

‘In other circles it would be illegal and racial discrimination. I don’t understand why this isn’t.’

BY Niamh Harris

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