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KINGSTON 14

Press Reviews

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Goldie's gangland kingpin is quiet force in gutsy show

FIRST NIGHT

KINGSTON 14

Theatre Royal Stratford East

★★★★☆

HENRY HITCHINGS

GOLDIE makes his theatre debut in Roy Williams's new play, a Jamaican crime drama with a strong political undercurrent.

Breathlessly described in the show's promotional material as "a multi-talented shape shifter" and "a total original", the drum'n'bass pioneer and former EastEnders cast member plays gangland kingpin Joker – a role that requires him to exude snarling menace but not actually say much.

That sets him apart from everyone else in this abrasively talkative piece. When a rich tourist is murdered in a Kingston hotel, Joker is the prime suspect. His dominance stems from his ability to keep quiet while all around him babble. The police, led by Trevor Laird's jaded Sarge, seem addicted to chaos and exuberant gunplay. But they grow anxious when a British officer (Derek Elroy) flies in and exposes some unsavoury truths, leaving no one more compromised than Marcus, an old-timer lent a surly dignity by Brian Bovell.

Director Clint Dyer injects a fierce energy, yet there's also plenty of amusement. This derives partly from the charisma of the characters' patois and partly from the comparative



Menacing:
Goldie as Joker
in the Jamaican
crime drama

tameness of the surtitles on two screens flanking the stage. Williams's script is racy, wry, occasionally hard to believe, yet often painfully real.

True, there are easy laughs about muddling up ganja and oregano, but there's also a desire to engage with the grimmer side of life.

The second half is packed with surprising disclosures and although the plot buckles under the weight of multiple themes a couple of times, there are mordant reflections on the social and political problems of modern Jamaica – the optimism that accompanied independence in the Sixties is contrasted with the tensions and poverty of the present day.

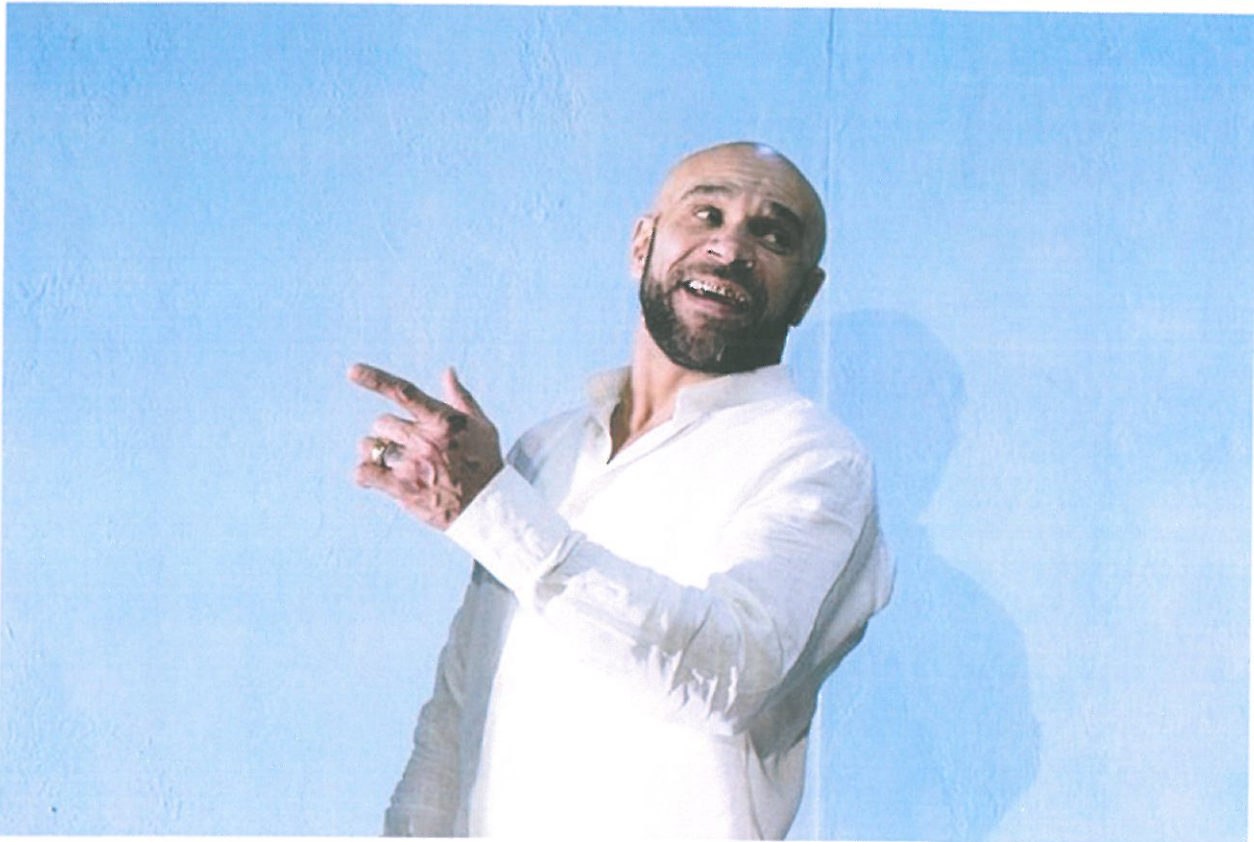
Kingston 14 has guts, wit and vigorous performances from its all-male cast. Its story about police corruption and simmering resentments is pretty familiar, but Williams writes with uncompromising conviction.

■ *Until April 26 (020 8534 0310, stratfordeast.com)*

More reviews Pages 50 & 51



Kingston 14, Royal Stratford East, E15



Dominic Maxwell

Published at 12:01AM, April 5 2014

★★★★☆

Anyone missing their ration of morally compromised coppers now that *Line of Duty* has ended should make their way pronto to see this play about a corrupt Jamaican police unit. Not that Roy Williams's comedy drama is clenched as tight as Jed Mercurio's television series. Indeed, its opening scene, a Tarantinoesque mix of violence and cine-literate one-liners, is flat-out hilarious. Yet both shows offer a resonant idea of a modern world in which everything is there to be bought and sold.

Williams's characters are heightened: are there any policemen quite as Jamaican as these macho jokers? Then again, are there any Englishmen quite as English as Derek Elroy's James, a priggish policeman sent to Kingston to investigate the death of an English businessman?

The musician turned actor Goldie makes his stage debut
Donald Cooper

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James aside, the patois comes so thick and fast that Clint Dyer's production is flanked by anglicised surtitles on screens.

Williams uses the bustling banter and dirty jokes of this macho mob as a Trojan horse for a gnarlier look at post-colonial life. The centre of power here is not Trevor Laird's witty, pragmatic Sarge but an incarcerated local kingpin, Joker. He's played by the musician turned actor Goldie in an effective stage debut. Splaying himself over a chair in interrogation, prowling the raised cell he's kept in on Ultz's simple, striking set, he speaks little but has a taut physicality that underpins a growing sense of menace.

Williams roots the knockabout of Act One and the sadness of Act Two in a search for identity. With nods to the British experience — the London riots, *The X Factor* — he ensures we can't take this solely as a dig at Caribbean laxity. And it's fascinating to see a black British man being depicted as a symbol of well-meaning colonial blinkeredness.

Box office: 020-8534 0310, to April 26

Theatre

Heartbreak hostel...

Poor lives make for rich drama at the Shed, while Goldie is a laid-back lead at Stratford East

Star ratings (out of 5)

Home ****

Kingston 14 ****

Arcadia ****

Susannah Clapp



Home

Shed, London SE1; until 30 April

Kingston 14

Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London E15; until 26 April

Arcadia

Tobacco Factory, Bristol; until 3 May

Some of the most striking episodes in Nadia Fall's remarkable play **Home** have no words. The champion beatboxer Grace Savage, who plays

a heavily pregnant and homeless young woman, provides an insistent rhythmic commentary to the action in explosive grunts and gutturals, spits and hisses that are both wry and angry. Meanwhile Ashley McGuire, as the manager of a hostel for young people, with a degree in "psycho-social" and a lifelong ambition to work with offenders, is phlegmatic and unassumingly dedicated: facing the audience, she raises a collusive eyebrow. Still, there is plenty of eloquence: when a young Eritrean woman talks about fleeing her country, or an angry teenager erupts as he remembers a friend stabbed to death in the glitzy Stratford Westfield.

Home, which returns to the Shed after a successful run last year, is a play with a mission: to show the lives of young homeless men and women in an east London hostel. It now has another point: following spending cuts, services have been curtailed and staff have lost



their jobs; the place is threatened with closure. You can see the difference this will make both from the success stories – the sheer joy of a boy who finally has keys to his own place – and in the desolation of another ending, a boy who heard voices and who does not survive. There is now funding only for “high-risk” youth; they are all high-risk, says the ex-manager.

Fall uses real-life interviews as her words; the cast act with marvellous naturalness. Ruth Sutcliffe’s wrap-around design tucks the audience into the play before they are seated; going into the auditorium you pass pamphlets about chlamydia, notices about Banned Visitors – and a window. From within, you look through that window at the back of the stage: as spectators troop in they are observed as if they are incoming residents.

Home weaves together fragmentary lives with music. It is not only a necessary social document but an inspiring piece of theatre. In joining together for a chorus, the cast make their case for this home.

Kingston 14 is urgent, explosive and wholly intelligible only with surtitles. At least that is so for some of the audience some of the time. At Stratford East I had to read the dialogue of the opening scene, while around me a group of students who often use Jamaican patois when writing their own plays were bouncing off the jokes and snarling at the violence of the language. Within minutes, playwright Roy Williams has strongly made the point that the English left Jamaica divided and tangled.

“Joker is a criminal but you’re crooked,” says one cop to another. Gang power and police corruption are at the centre of the action, seen through the eyes of an English policeman who has a Jamaican father. Williams has drawn on his own background as the son of parents who came to England from Jamaica in the 1950s and did not return to the island after independence.

Director Clint Dyer brings to clamorous life a plot that includes a terrible

death, kneejerk homophobia, some unnerving gun-wagging moments and a clever running joke about film buffs. Long shadows run behind the actors; scenes begin with amplified clanging of metal doors and the sizzle of fluorescent lights. Ultz’s design sets the whole play in

an unyielding place of metal fencing and institutional paintwork; at one point a cop and a criminal are held opposite each other penned up in cages.

It’s a powerful, not a perfect play. Tension drops damagingly in the last half hour, when sentiment creeps in. Yet it gives us lives and language scarcely ever seen on the stage – until the work of those students gets widely produced. It is forcefully delivered by a terrific, all-male (that’s the least new thing) cast. The big draw among them is Goldie, who sashays compellingly through his part as Joker the gang leader, so relaxed that when he stretches back on a hard cell chair he makes it look like soft furnishing.

Arcadia is a departure in genre but not in quality for Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory. Up to now the most modern play the theatre has produced has been by Chekhov. With Tom Stoppard’s play, artistic director Andrew Hilton dips a toe into the 20th century. Yet keeps another in the 19th century. The scientific comedy intersperses scenes from 1809 and 1993. It shows England moving from Enlightenment rationalism to Romantic excess – the grounds of a country house are being landscaped from classical order with carefully planned ruins, while a teenage



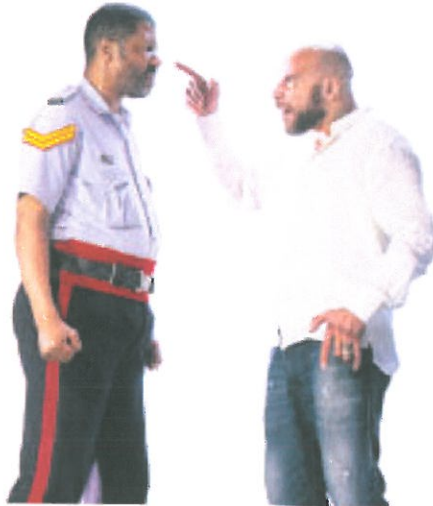
scientific prodigy (hurrah it's a girl) glides from equations to embraces.

A century later the same house is the site of a debate between an advocate of science (his research is based on grouse) and a proponent of poetry (he is called Nightingale but sometimes goes by the name of Peacock). It's also the occasion of dodgy historical reconstruction by a historian and a bloated-with-self-esteem academic. This may be the only play to put a gazebo alongside an algorithm. It features (in the shape of Stoppard's most favoured animal) a tortoise called Lightning.

Sped along with a battery of jokes, the real dramatic ingenuity is to make the structure of the play part of its argument. To talk about the irreversibility of consequences and to show it. To declare that "sooner or later we are all going to end up at room temperature" and to question this in fiery action. This is a play whose influence can still be seen – most recently in Nick Payne's *Constellations*. Yet Andrew Hilton's production brings out something more surprising. The staging is in the round and close to the audience; arguments become intimate as the lighting softens to a mellow glow. The members of the cast are mostly familiar to regular attenders at this theatre, which has created an informal company. The benefits are enormous. We see a warmth that quickens the heart of the action.

Goldie sashays through his part as Joker. He makes a hard cell chair look like soft furnishing

Brian Bovell (left) and Goldie in Roy Williams's 'explosive' *Kingston 14*.
Tristram Kenton





'A play with a mission': Ashley McGuire (standing) and Grace Savage in *Nadia Fall's Home* at the Shed, London. Photograph by Tristram Kenton

THREE MORE TO SEE

Circusfest 2014

Roundhouse, London NW1; until 27 April

Shows include *The Insect Circus*, La Meute, who demonstrate the art of Russian swing (matinee today), and *Capilotractées*, in which Finnish artists revive the forgotten art of hair-hanging.

Let the Right One In

Apollo, London W1; until 27 Sept

The first show of the year at the restored theatre is one of last year's best. John Tiffany's production for the National Theatre of Scotland makes vampires look visionary.

The Roaring Girl

Swan, Stratford-on-Avon; until 30 Sept

The first in the RSC's new season of Jacobethan plays, with whopping parts for women. Lisa Dillon stars as the cross-dressing Moll Cutpurse in Dekker and Middleton's seldom-seen city comedy.



April 6, 2014 9:01 pm

Kingston 14, Theatre Royal Stratford East, London – review

By Sarah Hemming

In Roy Williams' new drama, a simple murder case becomes a nightmare of corruption and compromise

A aficionados of Scandinavian television crime thrillers, such as *The Killing* and *The Bridge*, are used to keeping one eye on the knotty plot and the other on the subtitles. However, it is a novelty to find yourself doing something similar in the theatre for a play by a British playwright. But Roy Williams' fizzing new cop-shop drama, set in Kingston, Jamaica, is written in such a strong Jamaican dialect that the entire play is translated on surtitles throughout. Indeed the only English character, James (Derek Elroy) – a black Metropolitan Police officer sent over to assist on a case – has trouble following the plot. Unfortunately for him, he doesn't have the benefit of simultaneous translation.

Linguistic misunderstandings are not the only barrier for James. A nice open-and-shut case – victim murdered; suspect in custody – turns into a nightmare of corruption and compromise. It soon looks as though the messy links between police, politicians and criminals will end up with prize gangster, Joker (played with glinting, taciturn menace by drum and bass icon Goldie) being allowed to walk free. The situation builds to a crisis, where the choice is to act within the rules, and risk a lot of casualties, or turn a blind eye and save lives.



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IN THEATRE & DANCE

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New stage dramas tackle online privacy

Eldorado, Arcola Theatre, London – review

Williams spins a very good yarn and the play is peppered with comic misunderstandings and outrageously rude gags (which land perfectly, despite flying in through translation). But behind it is a sorrowful depiction of the mire of endemic corruption and the near impossibility of moral probity. And the bigger question, for Williams, is how did this happen? He draws in the histories, personal and national, that have led the characters and the country to this point. This is not always successful: he has to twist the plot to get in some points and several speeches about Jamaican history sit awkwardly in the dialogue. But still, this is a gripping and sympathetic portrayal of a country toiling to find its future and of men struggling to find a role.

Director Clint Dyer brings a driving energy to the production, savouring both the comic chaos of an early brawl and the intimate despair of a whispered conversation between a police officer (Charles Venn) and a scared young gangster (Gamba Cole). A fine cast skilfully surf the changing moods in the play, with Brian Bovell as a compromised police officer and Trevor Laird as his world-weary superior particularly touching.



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Kingston 14 (Theatre Royal, Stratford East)

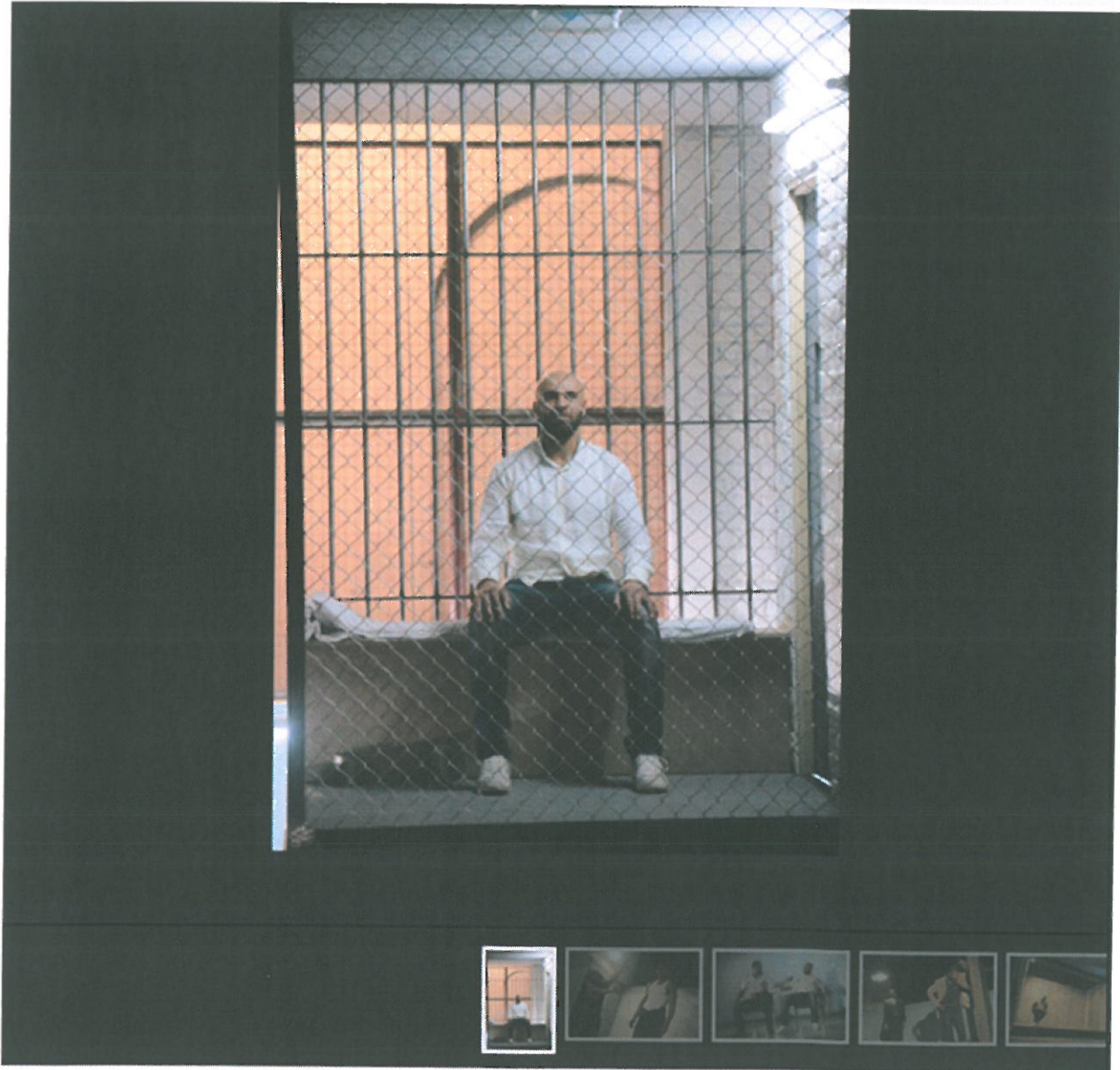
Roy Williams' new play centring on police corruption in Jamaica is "vivid, colloquial and raucous"

By Michael Coveney • 4 Apr 2014 • London

WOS Rating: ★★★★★☆

Average Reader Rating: ★★★★★☆

Reader Reviews: [Write a review](#)



Roy Williams began his playwriting career at Stratford East and he returns "home" with this vivid, colloquial and raucous update on the police and criminal classes in downtown Kingston; that's Kingston, Jamaica, not Kingston, Surrey.

The show marks the stage debut, too, of golden-toothed Goldie who, despite a programme biography describing him as "music pioneer, contemporary/graffiti artist, drum & bass icon, DJ, actor and producer", doesn't pull rank in a very good cast but takes his place as a suspect and gang leader, mostly confined to a police cell.

A British tourist has been murdered, and Clint Dyer's hilarious all-male production opens with an incomprehensible rumble of threats, violence, imprecations and gun waving – and that's inside the police station; God knows what's happening on the streets outside.

Soon afterwards, two of the policemen are kidnapped and the play then swings between the station and the hideaway on Ultz's sleek and functional design, as brother turns on brother, blame comes round to the front door of the law, and a well-meaning British policeman with Jamaican roots, sent over by the Met to help on the investigation, finds himself under fire and cultural enquiry.

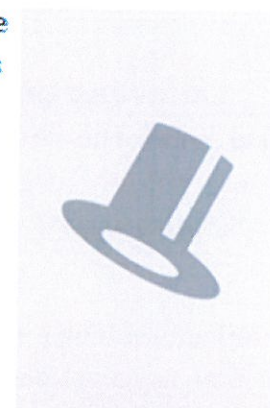
Two screens on either side of the stage carry surtitles in English which serve a double function: as a humorous editorial commentary on the "corrupted" English street slang and Jamaican patois being spoken on the stage, and as a helpful "translation" for the theatre's non Anglo-Caribbean patrons; Williams's world must seem as exotically foreign to them as the Russians singing *Prince Igor* at the Coliseum do to a British audience.

Dyer's cast includes two notable stalwarts of British black theatre over the past two decades: Trevor Laird as the station sergeant and Brian Bovell as one of the comedy policemen.

And there are powerful support performances, too, from Charles Venn and Ashley Chinn, while Derek Elroy, who has lately appeared in *One Man, Two Guvnors* at the Haymarket, makes a great impression as the conflicted James, awkward in his suit and wilting as he's somehow held responsible for *The X Factor* on British television.

A lot of the play is a comic dissection of alpha male status in a self-regarding male culture, which might make it controversial in some quarters. But when the danger signals flash, Williams releases the tension with some great put-down or feat of one-upmanship; and there are two filthy narrative jokes along the English, Jamaican and Bajan Creole demarcation lines that are greeted with a crack of laughter you could probably hear on the other side of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Kingston 14 runs at Theatre Royal, Stratford East until 26 April 2014



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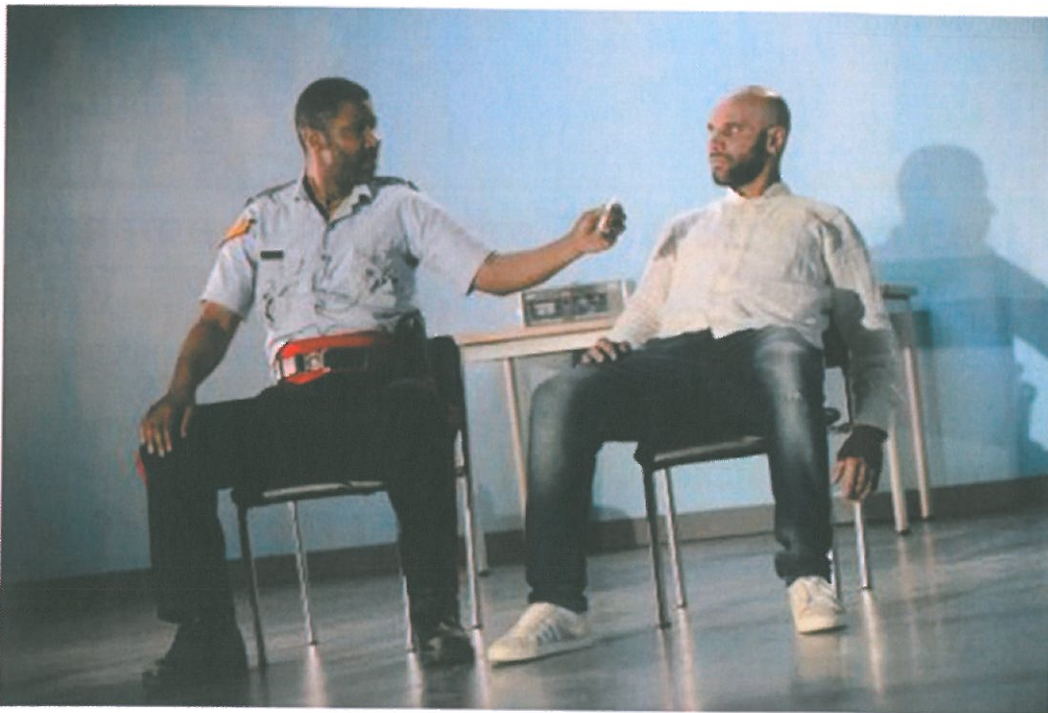
[MORE INFO](#)

Kingston 14 @ Theatre Royal Stratford East

Roy Williams strikes again with an insightful look at police corruption in Kingston, Jamaica

Written by **Davina Hamilton**

07/04/2014 11:58 AM



SOLID PERFORMANCE: Brian Bovell (left) and Goldie

DRUG DEALING, corruption, disdain for the political system – and this is all inside the police force.

Insightful and comedic in equal measure, *Kingston 14* examines the seedy side of Jamaica's policing and political systems, offering an alternative portrayal to the island's more widely known image of sun, sea and sand.

The officers of Denham Police Station in downtown Kingston have cause for celebration after successfully arresting notorious gangster Joker (Goldie). Sinister but often silent, choosing instead to intimidate the officers with laughter or dismissive glares, Joker is held behind bars on suspicion of the murder of a visiting businessman.

In a bid to crack the case, black British officer James (Derek Elroy) is sent over from England and is determined to bring order to what he sees as a backwards and disorganised policing system. His presence only serves to irritate the Jamaican officers, particularly long-serving officer Marcus (Brian Bovell), who tells the 'English' cop: "You don't know dis station and you sure as hell know nutt'n about dis island."

Meanwhile, young officers Carl (Charles Venn) and Neil (Ashley Chin) blur the lines between law and lawlessness, combining police work with their sideline operation as street corner drug dealers.

In short, *Kingston 14* pretty much makes the Jamaican police system look like a shambles. From police boss Sarge (Trevor Laird) instructing his officers to stay safe by announcing, "mind yourself – nuh dead," to the revelation that the superintendent (who we never see) spends much of his time in a "t**y bar," the play doesn't allow audiences to have much faith in the island's legal system.

The production also examines how poor local people have more faith in Robin Hood-style gangsters like Joker – who, through criminality, provide for the community – than they do in the government, which is designed to look after the people.

However, a heated exchange between Sarge and James sees the Jamaican police boss reminding the British officer that the Metropolitan Police isn't without its issues. After announcing to James "we have internet here yuh know bwoy," Sarge proceeds to remind the British officer about the 2011 UK riots, asking: "Did it not all start coz dem policeman shoot up dat black bwoy [Mark Duggan]?"

But in amongst the observations of violence, corruption and criminality, is an abundance of comedic moments. From a hilarious scene where Neil and Carl celebrate the arrest of Joker by demonstrating their best dancehall-style choreography, to Sarge's frequent jokes about Bajans, *Kingston 14* has many moments of sheer hilarity.

The actors' grasp of Jamaican accents and vernacular is also hugely impressive.

Once again, playwright Roy Williams – famed for his plays *Sucker Punch* and *Fallout* – has his finger on the pulse of reality, this time, Jamaican style. Some audiences may cringe at the scenes of vulgarity and sexual explicitness, and patriotic Jamaicans may not take kindly to the production's exposure of the island's political corruption.

But with *Kingston 14*, the superb writer must be commended for opening the eyes of audiences who might think Jamaica is nothing more than reggae and rum punch.

Kingston 14 continues at Theatre Royal Stratford East, Gerry Raffles Square, London E15 until April 26. For more information visit www.stratfordeast.com

THE STAGE REVIEWS

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Kingston 14

Published Monday 7 April 2014 at 10:38 by [Honour Bayes](#)

Roy Williams returns to the theatre where he started his career with a bristling, macho cop drama that attempts to examine the state of Jamaica today. British cop James - a deliciously frustrated Derek Elroy - arrives in Kingston to assist on a murder case. There is already a suspect in custody - Goldie's silent and menacing Joker - but things take a tricky turn when two young officers are kidnapped in exchange for this gangster's release.

Written for the most part in a thick Jamaican patois, obligingly with subtitles, Williams' play relies more on bombast and sheer emotional force than delicate argument. The political monologues that pepper the piece sit awkwardly within this rollicking gangland drama.

But Williams takes a leaf directly out of killer one-liner king Quentin Tarantino, and Kingston 14 is a zingy, if violent, piece of storytelling that gives previously unheard voices space to brawl. Clint Dyer's powerfully visceral staging takes us on one hell of a ride with sharp fight choreography intermingled with moments of psychological aggression.

In super designer Ultz's stylish set of fences and square cages, it's clear that the compromised world of Kingston 14 is a place where cops and criminals sit side by side.



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Production information

Theatre Royal Stratford East, London, April 4-26

Author:	Roy Williams
Director:	Clint Dyer
Producer:	Theatre Royal Stratford East
Cast includes:	Goldie, Derek Elroy, Brian Bovell, Trevor Laird, Charles Venn
Running time:	2hrs 15mins

Production information displayed was believed correct at time of review. Information may change over the run of the show.

British Theatre Guide

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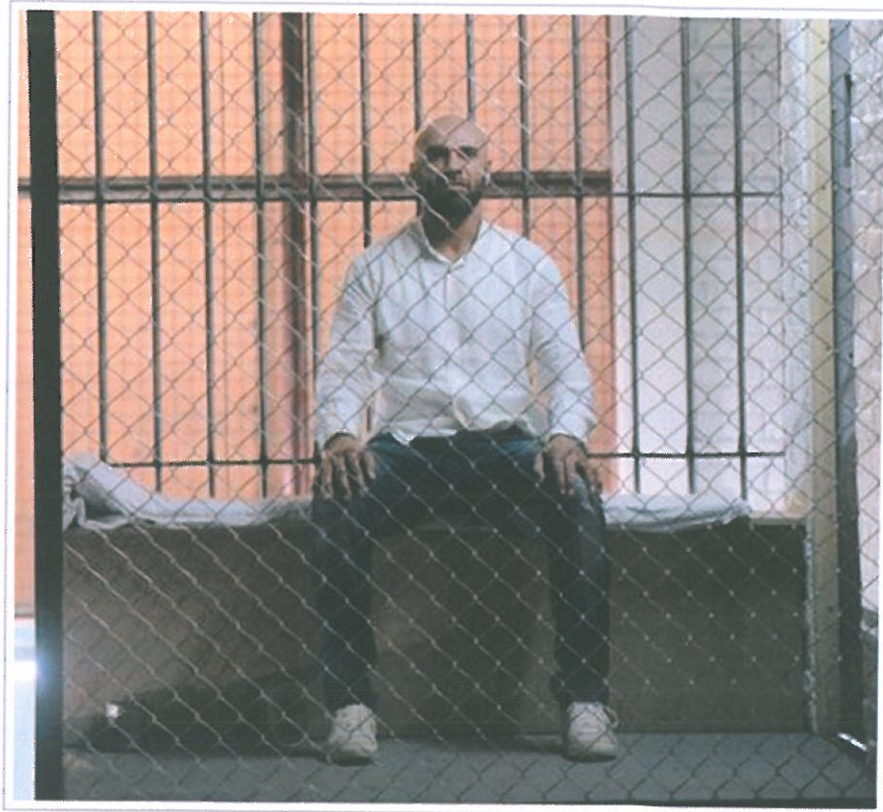
Kingston 14

Roy Williams

Theatre Royal Stratford East

From 28 March 2014 to 26 April 2014

Review by Howard Loxton



Goldie as Joker
Credit: Robert Day

Eighteen years after having his first professional play *The No Boys Cricket Club* staged at the Theatre Royal, Roy Williams is back with a Jamaica-set drama about cops, crooks and corruption given a stimulating production by Clint Dyer.

It kicks off straight into the action with a gun-toting scuffle in which the officers of Kingston's Denham Police Station overcome gang leader Joker, suspected of murdering a visiting British businessman in a local hotel. A detective from London has been sent over to aid the investigation.

James Richards may be black, with a father in Jamaica whom he has never known, but, with his smart suit, English accent and smooth formality, he contrasts sharply with the Kingston policemen: long-serving Marcus drinking on duty, Carl and Neil who have their own street drug racket and their station Sergeant.

While Derek Elroy's Detective Richards gets nowhere trying to interrogate a button-mouthed Joker, played with laid-back charisma by Goldie, Carl and Neil are kidnapped by his henchmen and there is bargaining to be done.

With police and crime drama so dominant on television, some of the plotting may seem somewhat familiar but Williams still keeps things cliffhanging and uses his drama to look at the situation in Jamaica where in poor localities, where violence may be endemic, folk may see a gang leader as doing more to help and protect them than any politicians. Even the island's endemic homophobia becomes part of the plot twist.

Brian Bovell's troubled and compromised Marcus, family loyalty conflicting with duty, looks back to the hope-laden days that came with independence in contrast to the violent world he polices.

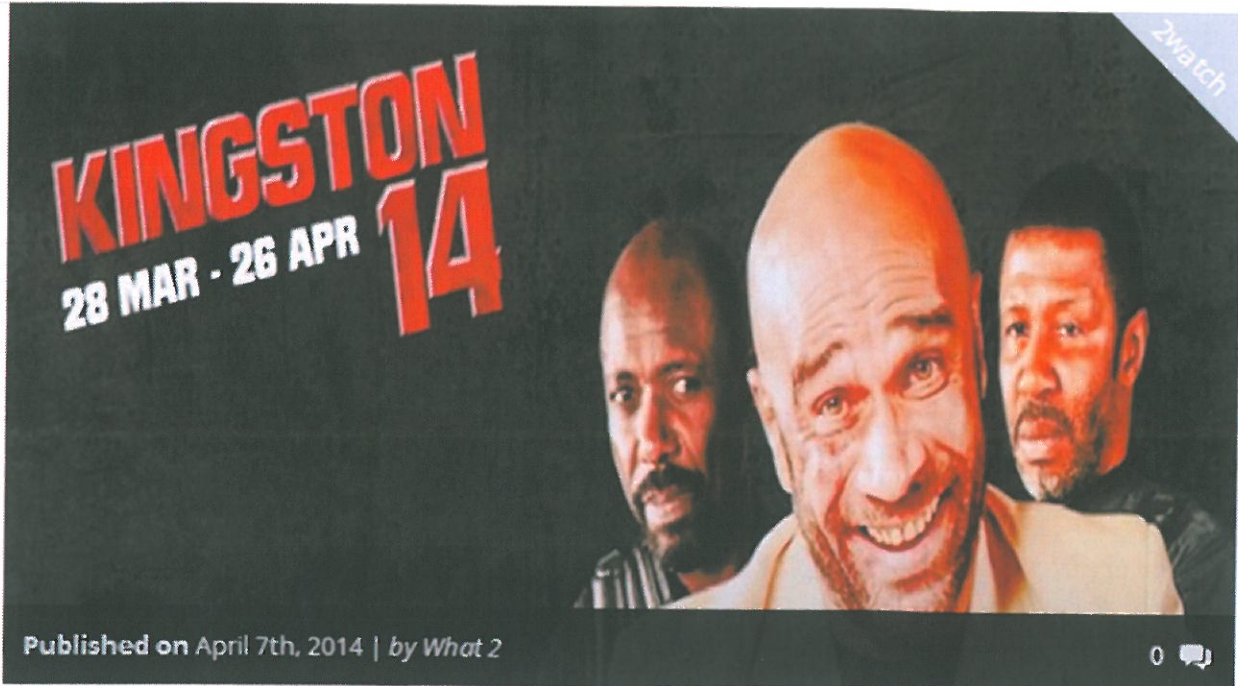
Charles Venn's Carl, unsure whether he'll get his balls blown off in captivity, gains a new sense of purpose and compassion through his encounter with Gamba Cole's young gang member Adrian, providing the play with some of its most moving moments. Ashley Chinn plays Carl's professional partner Neil and in early scenes they become a wonderful, physically inventive double-act.

Trevor Laird does some unrecognisable doubling playing both station Sergeant and the lad whom his junior officers use as their drug runner, while Tyson Oba as Joker's gang boss in his absence reveals a murdering ruthlessness behind his good-looking façade.

There is strong playing from everyone, generating excitement and drama, but at the same time *Kingston 14* is often killingly funny, including two of the best jokes I have heard in years, though not ones for innocent ears.

Part of the production's success comes from its Uitz's stark setting with its bare walls, steel girders and wire meshes emphasising exposure, the Joker's cell visible above through much of the action and at one point seen, together with the place across town where Carl is incarcerated at the same time as arguments over what to do are taking place elsewhere in the station.

For anyone who may have problems with the Jamaican accents and the occasional local vocabulary, there are surtitle transcriptions with any necessary translations clearly visible, but it is a measure of the effectiveness of the production that it holds dramatically even if you do have to consult them, as a companion totally unused to them assured me, though you really won't want to take your eyes off these performers.



Kingston 14 – Stratford East Theatre – Review

The Creative writer Roy Williams is back at it again, with another great piece of theatre... Kingston 14.

Kingston 14 hit the stage last week and the [What2 team](#) had the chance to check it out. With a very diverse and vibrant atmosphere, we knew we were in for a treat.

Kingston 14 instantly starts with a massive scene introducing their main characters in action. The play stars artist/ musician Goldie, who plays the Jamaican villain, although some may see him as the good guy. The play focuses on Jamaica's corrupt police system and how they get themselves out of certain situations. The audience get the chance to explore how the cops work under pressure and what they will do to come out alive.

Kingston 14 will have you at the edge of your seats, taking in the sounds of the Jamaican accent and their culture. With references from Jamaica's history and past event, we were constantly learning and became immersed in the culture/ lifestyle. The Jamaican police force have a unsolved murder mystery to sort out, and are for certain they have their main suspect Joker (played by Goldie), little do they know that the UK's met police have sent over one of the black British officers to help them out. With stories not tallying up and alcohol constantly being drunk, the UK officer figures that this case isn't going to be a easy one.



Kingston 14 explores corruption, homophobia, politics, loyalty and scenes of violence. The characters do not hold their tongue when expressing their feelings, especially when they are under pressure. Although this is a very hard hitting piece, Roy Williams strategically adds pieces of humour with many references to american movies, making it easier for his audience to relate and digest.

If you are wanting to watch a piece of theatre that will not only give you a insight of the police force but will fill you up with knowledge and truth, go check out Kingston 14.

Tickets are under **£18** and can be booked on the Stratford east [website](#)

Kingston 14 is showing until the 26th April 2014 at Stratford East Theatre.

Story	★★★★☆
Acting	★★★★☆
Atmosphere	★★★★☆
Price	★★★★★
Summary:	4.3 ★★★★☆

First night A pulverising study of Jamaican police corruption

Michael Billington

Kingston 14

Theatre Royal, Stratford East

★★★☆☆

Roy Williams, who has written many fine plays, including *Fallout* and *Sucker Punch*, has returned to the theatre where he started his career in 1996.

His new work is a pulverising piece about Jamaican corruption and stars the musician, artist and actor Goldie. He plays a crime boss who dominates the play while scarcely speaking a word; whatever else, *Kingston 14* certainly proves that silence is Goldie.

At the heart of the play lies the unsolved murder of a visiting businessman in a Kingston hotel. A gang leader known as the Joker (Goldie) is a prime suspect and is arrested.

But a black British police officer is called in, to the fury of the locals, and stumbles across some unpleasant home truths. It appears that the Joker has a hold over Marcus, a veteran policeman, and is capable of organising from his cell the abduction of two young officers in exchange for his freedom. It is possible that he may not even be guilty of the murder.

Corruption is clearly the theme, but Williams extends it to examine the state of Jamaica today. Marcus represents the older generation, who thought independence in 1962 would bring a new sense of identity but now finds the island of Bob Marley and the cricketer George Headley is in hock to the United States.

However, his younger colleagues blur the distinction between cops and criminals by operating their own street drug-trade. And the visiting detective - born in Britain to Jamaican parents - shows scant interest in exploring his own troubled roots.

Much as I admire Williams's desire to write a state-of-Jamaica play, I feel he is confined by his chosen form. The resentment of the local police towards the outsider is a stock-in-trade of TV cop-shows. Williams also has to bend his plot to work in issues such as Jamaican

homophobia. He makes the point that a gang boss like the Joker does more for the poor than most politicians, but it

would be good to meet a character who wasn't either a cop or a robber.

What the piece does have in Clint Dyer's production is a surging in-yer-face power. The decision has been made to use surtitles to allow us to keep pace with Williams's dense-textured dialogue, but this doesn't deflect from the visceral nature of the performance, which is characterised by slamming doors and guns pointed at everything, from heads to genitalia.

Brian Bovell as the severely compromised Marcus, Trevor Laird as his suffering superior, Derek Elroy as the visiting fireman and Charles Venn as a captive cop all give strong performances, and Goldie, largely confined to his cell, shows a dominating taciturnity.

Kingston 14 is a compelling play, even if it sometimes seems torn between the demands of the policier and political drama.

Until 26 April. Box Office: 020 8534 0310





Brian Bovell as the compromised veteran policeman Marcus and Goldie as the silent gang boss Joker in *Kingston 14* Photograph: Tristram Kenton



Kingston 14, Theatre Royal Stratford East, review

Goldie makes a menacing stage debut in this flawed but macho and enjoyable production

★★★★★



Brian Bovell as Marcus and Goldie as Joker in Kingston 14, performed at the Theatre Royal Photo: Alastair Mur



By **Dominic Cavendish**

2:16PM BST 05 Apr 2014

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Roy Williams's latest play shouldn't really work at all. Set in downtown Kingston, Jamaica, its dialogue is conducted mainly in patois – posing such a potential challenge to audiences that director Clint Dyer has seen fit to provide subtitles on TV monitors. That's very helpful if you need a heads-up on lines like "Mash up mi yard and act de rass clart fool!" but also quite distracting and liable, when there are jokes or plot twists, to give the game away just ahead of the actors.

If you wanted to be picky about other aspects of the piece, it wouldn't be hard either. The main storyline, in which a British cop of Jamaican descent flies in to help investigate a murder case only to encounter lackadaisical incompetence, animosity and corruption, feels generic. Tonally, the work is uneven – there are knowing flourishes of Tarantino-esque violence in which humour takes the upper-hand but there are also lurches into more sombre moods, when the cost of the chaos, and well-meaning intervention, is counted. At times, the plot also gets too knotty for its own good – and the show doesn't have a single female character, which might rank as criminal in some eyes.

Yet there's something about its rumbustious macho energy, fast-talking authenticity and noble intentions that carries the evening. The first half is particularly enjoyable, with Derek Elroy's earnest, professionally-minded James struggling to make any headway amid much juvenile police-station badinage and thinly veiled contempt.

In one memorably awkward scene, he tries to record an interview with the prime suspect, a taciturn gangster called Joker (played with a convincing air of coiled, indomitable menace by music pioneer and screen star Goldie, making his stage debut) but has to fight to get the attending officer, Brian Bovell's deeply compromised Marcus, to give his name on tape.

As one policeman later says, "It was either diss or be in a gang". Williams probes the blurred lines between those on the street and those on the beat, shifting between lament and defiant celebration as he ponders the future of the country.

Set designer Ultz's austere police-station is good at conjuring pent-up tension, less so at suggesting the world outside, notwithstanding the way its compactness visually emphasises the caged Joker's all-pervasive power base. Maybe the script would benefit from a big-budget small-screen treatment but, flawed as it is, it amply answers the Theatre Royal's brief for a night of populist, slang-rich "flavas".

Until April 26. Tickets: 020 8534 0310; stratfordeast.com

THEATRE

Laughter turns to fears in this tense cop show

Kingston 14
Theatre Royal Stratford East, London

REVIEW BY HOLLY WILLIAMS



Roy Williams's spirited, raging drama investigates police corruption in Jamaica. Returning to the theatre that staged his first play, *No Boys Cricket Club*, in 1996, he also returns to his roots, exploring the country his parents emigrated from.

A white businessman is murdered in Kingston. James, a black British police officer, is sent to investigate. A culture clash ensues: the uptight James is a sharp (suited) contrast to the lively, limber Jamaican officers. They appear to make progress when they arrest the Joker: a notorious criminal, but one also loved for looking after "his people". But the law's grip slackens after two of the force are kidnapped by the Joker's men. Should the officers do a quiet prisoner swap and hope no one gets hurt, or alert higher authorities and risk starting a riot?

While the first half may be full of cocked guns, it pursues laughs at the expense of a sense of peril. This is redressed brutally in a second half that gets nasty. *Kingston 14* benefits from flash casting: the DJ and film actor Goldie makes his stage debut as the Joker. In the designer Ultz's canny set, he's seen prowling and glowering in his cell above the action. He doesn't say much but has a menacing presence.

There are fine performances in Clint Dyer's production – Brian Bovell stands out as Marcus, a conflicted officer who isn't as hapless as he appears. The flown-in British cop James doesn't always convince, however, with Derek Elroy playing soft. Maybe we're too used to all those tough TV detectives: this one seems underpowered.

James is bewildered by the situation: everyone is either a crook, or crooked. That's how the system works: functionally dysfunctional. The meddling Englishman can't comprehend it, and disastrously disturbs the balance as a result. Yet endemic corruption is also presented as a bleak, frustratingly intractable problem within Jamaican society, and it fuels the impotent rage that simmers in all the country's young men, be they police or gang members.

The play is delivered in dialect so thick and fast that screens provide translated subtitles. But to judge by the raucous laughter and whoops of recognition, the material lands. This occasionally feels uneasy. Lines you might have expected a wince at – homophobic references or matter-of-fact accounts of police brutality – prompt big laughs.

The first half is full of cocked guns; in the second half things get nasty



But *Kingston 14* should be lauded for presenting a culture not exactly over-represented in British theatre. And Williams explores the post-colonial legacy and tension between Britain and Jamaica, suggesting that such tensions underpin both the island's chaotic political situation, and the wariness between the Jamaican police and the visiting Brit. There are sly nods to UK police corruption too – a depressingly perennial accusation.

There's a lot going on here, and while the big ideas don't all flow at the pace of Williams's dialogue, it is a bracing evening.

To 26 April (020 8534 0310)





Cell division: Charles Venn and Goldie in 'Kingston 14' **ROBERT DAY**

Kingston 14

